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**POETRY OF KNOWLEDGE AND BEING:
THE PARALLEL PATHS OF ALBERTO GIRRI AND RAFAEL CADENAS**

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by

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The purpose of this dissertation is to trace the philosophical inquiries of poets Alberto Girri (Argentina, 1919–1991) and Rafael Cadenas (Venezuela, 1930). For both authors, poetry offers a space for examining the relationship of modern subjectivity with the world by tracing new paths of understanding and consciousness. Neither poet proposes a closed philosophical system nor adheres to any set of pre-formulated postulates. Instead, they traverse various modalities of thought toward what Martin Heidegger has called the “limits of Western metaphysics,” and turn to an eclectic Oriental tradition as a response.

In the first chapter, I propose a tripartite theoretical framework of investigation, considering three conceptions of “Man” in relation to the world and language. I begin by reviewing Michel Foucault’s description of the modern episteme as a diagnostic and descriptive tool for comprehending the basis of modern subjectivity. I continue with an exploration of Martin Heidegger’s analysis of how the question of “what is Being (*Sein*)” has been unattended, and “Man” (*Dasein*) has been overvalued as the knowing subject. I then review intersections in Heidegger’s work with Taoist and Zen principles. Following

Heidegger, Girri and Cadenas turn to a poetics of present-presence, exploring alternative means of conceiving the subject and discovering possible answers in Oriental texts.

In the second chapter, I examine Alberto Girri's first poetic production as a denunciation of Man's existential solitude, radical ignorance, and his failure to achieve through love, innocence, memory and art a means to overcome his contingency and state of orphanhood. The second half of his works is then studied as the reduction of the knowing subject, focusing increasing attention on the ethics of approaching the world through poetry. Rooted in the *here* and *now*, in the negation of the "I," Girri draws on principles adopted from J. Krishnamurti and Taoist and Zen authors which elude the crisis of the subject—at the crux of Western metaphysics—and redefine the human being in relationship to reality.

Rafael Cadenas's literary trajectory is examined in a parallel fashion in the third chapter. His early poetry seeks to recover a lost idyllic state of being and belonging to a "you" or "other," which can be identified as a utopian state or origin. Declaring his failure, the subject undergoes a painful examination in which Man's vital positions in regards to his own being and the world are deemed "false maneuvers." A corrective poetry is adopted to free the self of a subjectivity that adjudicates "that which is," thereby creating a therapeutic space for the abandonment of erroneous notions of self, the quieting of thought, and the opening of a receptive emptiness to "the other." Understanding language as "that which speaks" and as the "house of Being," Cadenas's most recent works, as similarly evidenced in Girri's latter books, suggest new routes for recovering an ethical lucidity of consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

“La crítica tiene una función creadora: inventa una literatura (una perspectiva, un orden) a partir de las obras,” wrote Octavio Paz in 1967 (*Corriente alterna* 41), a task that he himself attempted in his classic study of modern Hispanic poetry, *Los hijos del limo* (1974). The desire to map tendencies, find order and trace patterns that elucidate poetic discourse in the context of modernity is a daunting task that inevitably brings unequal results. If I begin this study of the poetry of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas with Paz, in his dimension as critic, it is due to his prodigious capacity for synthesis, and because Paz opens the door to a set of questions that prepare the stage for the analysis of the place of poetry, its language, purported purpose and epistemological grounding.

In *Los hijos del limo*, Paz presents modern Hispanic poetry within the framework of the Western literary tradition, as the inheritor of German and English Romanticism but born of a series of continuous ruptures with traditional norms. Recognizing the heterogeneous poetic traditions of modern Hispanic poetry, Paz nonetheless signals two structuring principles that constitute the foundations of modern poetics: irony on one hand, and analogy on the other. Irony and its twin, anguish, portend the rupture of identity and the shattering of the “same”; they bring a sense of death, chaos, orphanhood and nothingness, and through them, life and language are inserted into contingency and a non-teleological history, ultimately causing the destruction of myth and “the holy” (“Los hijos del limo” 372). Working to opposite effect, the principle of analogy establishes a system of correspondences or universal rhythms within language and the world, initiates a new sacred myth and an extemporal transcendental space, recovers the original powers

of a language that names, and creates unity through the reconciliation of opposites. Following Paz's division, poetry born of irony explores the realms of the grotesque, irrational, incoherent, fantastic, political and absurd through humor, paradox, disorder, the mixing of genres, prosody, colloquial language, the disintegration of the text and silence. Contrarily, through metaphor, rhythm, synesthesia, the expulsion of anecdote and the use of image to discover the secret relations between objects, poetry as analogy operates a verbal alchemy that incarnates a divine order, brings about the confluence of time and becomes the means for the metamorphosis of the world and man. Paz professes analogy's power of transformation in "Piedra de sol" (1957) when he writes: "Todo se transfigura y es sagrado/ [...] / amar es combatir, si dos se besan/ el mundo cambia, encarnan los deseos" ("La estación violenta" 270-71).

For Paz, the plurality of modern poetry can be located between these two poles that occasionally touch in an author's work, as in the quintessential case of Mallarmé: "acepta la realidad de la nada —el mundo de la alteridad y la ironía no es al fin y al cabo sino la manifestación de la nada—, pero acepta asimismo la realidad de la analogía, la realidad de la obra poética. La poesía como máscara de la nada" ("Los hijos del limo" 399). Latin American poetry provides an ample palette to illustrate the various shades between these two extremes. From *modernismo* to social realism and conversational poetry, passing through the multiple proposals of the historic avant-garde, Paz outlines a history of modern poetry that is born of critique and criticism but whose parallel function is to act as an "other" voice with the "facultad de poner en relación realidades contrarias o disímiles," creating a model of cosmic fraternity ("La otra voz" 591-92). Or as José

Lezama Lima writes, and to whom Paz refers as an example of the act of poetic reconciliation, the Word incarnated in the poem is like “una casa iluminada/ nos prestaba un sencillo vestigio de la eternidad” (Lezama Lima 490).

Paz’s account of Latin American literary history, in which the future of poetics privileges analogy over irony —a conclusion to which he arrives through his personal practice of poetry— is not without its critics. The purpose of my referring to Paz, however, is not to challenge his narration of the course of poetry nor question his binary division of modern poetic fundamentals. Instead, Paz’s literary history allows me to bring to the forefront certain underlying questions that are subsumed in his study. If one claims, as Paz does, that modern poetry —whose initiators are the Romantic poets of the late 18th century— is fundamentally different than that of previous generations, of what existential condition or epistemological arrangement is this poetry born? Paz’s essay is descriptive in that it identifies and explains the features, functions and effects that he understands to characterize modern poetry, but it does not attempt a prescriptive analysis as to the whys and wherefores of its being. It will be important to inquire if the dialectic between criticism and reconciliation that Paz elaborates is but a symptom of language’s modern epistemological and ontological status. We likewise must ask if modern poetry presents a privileged means of knowledge that differs from other modes of reflection. At the same time, we should question the relationship of the speaking subject with poetry and the very status and purported role of the poet today.

Why do such questions appear in the introduction to this dissertation and is it necessary to ask them before introducing the poets to whom this study is dedicated? I

believe that in the case of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas, one must answer with an unequivocal affirmative. Both authors' poetry and essays implicitly and explicitly part from these same interrogatives, opening in the center of their works an intentional space for this manner of questioning. Their respective corpuses are representative manifestations of the doubts and tentative answers that are born of modernity, which defines and structures the very nature of their inquiries and responses.

In order to bring *order* to the question of modernity and poetry's status within it, I turn to Michel Foucault's post-structuralist analysis of the human sciences, *Les mots et les choses* (1966). This now-classic study, one of the most important of Foucault's "archeological" phase, offers a diagnostic of the three periods of human knowledge in the Western tradition, and the manner in which each is coherently structured. His work demonstrates the historic formation of epistemes that are organized and conditioned through the relationship that the human being sustains with what he¹ knows to be reality, as well as his ordering and representing of knowledge through language. The concept of the episteme can be defined, in Foucault's words, as "un ensemble de rapports liant différents types de discours" (Revel 25). It does not compose an overarching theory with pretensions to account for the sum of all knowledge of a given epoch. Rather, this term describes an open field where the many possible ways of ordering and articulating what is known —the so-called discursive domains— enter into play.

An important "construction" for the analysis of the last episteme, as explained in *Les mots et les choses*, is its protagonist Man, and with it, the notion of the modern

subject. In the vein of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Foucault presents modern Man as a historically constituted figure that since the inception of the modern era —at the beginning of the 19th century—became the object of his own knowledge. The subject’s experience of himself became the measure and axis of truth. The inauguration of the modern episteme deposits knowledge and representation in the figure of Man as subject and makes him his own target for study. While Man made possible the preeminence of new fields of knowledge, such as history and philology, he simultaneously discovered that his own existence was unfathomable and impenetrable. Foucault compounds the limits of knowledge and Man’s ignorance in the conceptual figure of the “Other.” The Other is at the heart of Man’s own being: it represents force that animates his search to know and master himself, but it also comprises all that eludes his comprehension.

By conceptualizing Man and the Other, his dark twin, as products of the last epistemological order, Foucault brings to forefront the crisis of the modern subject who is unable to discover the adequate means to establish his knowledge on a positivistic foundation, despite the multiple routes and strategies he employs in pursuit of such a base. Man’s various discourses —from Hegel’s conception of history, to Marxism —that attempt to provide an inviolable foundation for himself as subject and object, inform much of 20th century literature. Nevertheless, Foucault identifies certain literary discourses as the privileged space where the figure of Man is not positioned at the center of knowledge and where it is language that “speaks,” allowing us to glimpse an

¹ I use the masculine pronoun as neutral and inclusive, without regards to gender, unless specified.

alternative form of conceiving and ordering our existence and ways of knowing, in which Man no longer is present.

In his complete works, Foucault never offers or speculates about positivities outside of a purely historical framework; no essences or transcendent answers are to be found in his texts. The possible future disappearance of Man does not signify for Foucault the dawn of an all-embracing truth; this imminent mode of being will be but another historical posture adopted by the human being and his thought. To think “from” another arrangement in which Man is not the subject, opens other possibilities in the configuration of the relationships between knowledge and power. In this way, a space that Foucault denominates *le dehors* or “outside” can be accessed, in which the certitude of the subject, his manner of representation and the enunciations of his stable identity are no longer unquestioned. For Foucault, the opportunity for the alternative experience of thought and being is opened through writing: “les lettres de noblesse d’une anti-positivité de notre savoir sont d’abord littéraires” (Boubeker 30).

Foucault’s analysis of the crisis of the modern subject and the figure of Man, as well as his parallel exploration of the literary “outside,” have an important antecedent in the work and thought of Martin Heidegger, a philosopher who Foucault recognized as fundamental for his own development. The lifelong project of the German thinker, through all the “*Kehre*” or turns that mark his work, can be summarized as the persistent questioning of *Being*. Heidegger considered this to be the most essential and imperative task for all thinking – a matter that he accuses Western philosophy of having skipped over, taken for granted, or assumed to be understood. Unlike Foucault, who shies away

from all pronouncements about essences or *a priori* “truths,” Heidegger constantly seeks paths to reach that which makes itself present and absent in all beings, but does not confine itself to them: Being. In *Sein und Zeit* (1929) Heidegger addresses this basic philosophical problem:

...we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being. Out of this understanding arise both the explicit question of the meaning of Being and the tendency that leads us towards its conception. We do not *know* what ‘Being’ means. But even if we ask, ‘What *is* “Being”?’ we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conceptually what that ‘is’ signifies (Being and Time 25).

For Heidegger, the question of Being is always that of Being in a world of time and space. The being capable of experiencing and revealing the various forms of Being to himself is the human being, *Dasein*. As Foucault later attempts, Heidegger historicizes the distinct ways in which the human being has approached the world and formulated his knowledge about it in discourse. As Joseph J. Kockelmans states,

Being is shown as sending itself towards *Dasein*; it sends itself in different epochs in different ways which consign *Dasein* to its privileged destiny which is to be the ‘shepherd of Being’. [...] The totality of the different ways in which Being sends itself and to which different epochs of thinking correspond, is what we call ‘history’ (76-77).

We should recall that Foucault finds in literature the hopeful glimmers of a future alternative to the order of Man and his construction of knowledge, but declines to pass judgment on the intrinsic value of this contrasting means of organizing thought. Heidegger, on the other hand, strives to make the path of his thinking an aide to *Dasein*, with the assumption that there does exist an *authentic* relationship with Being in

plentitude, and that people of different historical moments have been more or less attuned to Being's call.

As Heidegger writes in the works that follow *Sein und Zeit*, *Dasein* creates an aperture for the clearing and un-covering of Being. This revelation or opening receives the Greek name of *aletheia* meaning the true, sincere and real. Truth, for Heidegger, is not confined to a set of facts, representations or beliefs deemed "correct" (Inwood 13-15). Rather, without the trappings of interpretation and judgment, truth encompasses the world in its entirety —the reality of beings and of Being— through the revealing of itself to *Dasein* in the fulfillment of the movement of *aletheia*. In Heidegger's writings, art, and poetry in particular, plays a fundamental role in the opening of truth and in the realization of the human being's relationship with Being: "Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens to be composed, as a poet composes a poem. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*" (Heidegger "The Origin of the Work of Art" 70).

The knowledge that poetry delivers is an experience of the relationship with Being and beings that *Dasein* generally cannot access in the modern era. Heidegger does not employ the word "episteme" in his accounts of the history of the human being and his relationship with Being. Nevertheless, his description of *Gestell* (enframing) —modern *Dasein*'s "technology" that structures his form of approaching, knowing and controlling his reality (Heidegger "The Question Concerning Technology")— finds its echo in Foucault's posterior diagnostic of the episteme of modern Man. For both philosophers, a

certain strain of literature reveals to the human being an alternative (and, in Heidegger's appreciation, better) mode of conceiving himself, his knowledge and reality.

The second half of the 20th century has been classified, not only by these two philosophers, as a moment of crisis and of transformation in terms of traditional notions of the subject, the demarcations of knowledge, the means of determining these limits, and conceptions of the instrument of human expression, language. Within the long history of Western *cogito*, philosophical thought has at times turned to other forms of knowledge, originating from non-Western traditions. Heidegger (Parkes Heidegger and Asian Thought) as well as Foucault (Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988 618-24) and their contemporaries (Derrida, Barthes, Kristeva, Sontag and others) were familiar with certain elements of Oriental philosophies with which their own thought shared direct and indirect affinities. Critics have perceived and studied parallels in their philosophical proposals and certain branches of the vast and varied corpus of Oriental philosophical and religious writings.

It has been observed that in the case of both Foucault's and Heidegger's works, there are some striking similarities with elements of Zen Buddhist principles (Ch'an Buddhism, in the China), a tradition in which both philosophers were well-versed. For example, Uta Liebmann Schaub discovers in Foucault's works an "Oriental subtext" in which the concepts of *sunyata* (emptiness, the void), "nonpositive affirmation," the disappearance of the subject and "dialogical Man," and a "non-dialectical language of the limit" are influential (Schaub 310-13). Likewise, numerous articles have been dedicated to studying what Elisabeth Feist Hirsch simply calls "Martin Heidegger and the East"

(247) or what the editor of a broad collection of essays refers to as “Martin Heidegger and Asian Thought” (Parkes Heidegger and Asian Thought). Heidegger’s writings have elicited comparisons with very different branches of “Asian thought,” among them Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. The most frequently cited similarities, however, are undoubtedly encountered in Zen Buddhism and Taoism. After reading an essay by D. T. Suzuki, Heidegger is purported to have remarked that “[I] was trying to say exactly what Suzuki had said in his writings on Zen” (Jung 217). Although certain critics question the extent of this claim and underscore the inevitable limits of such comparisons, it is fascinating to observe that many others agree that Zen and Taoist principles express a more radicalized position of many of Heidegger’s claims (Steffney 331-32).

Within the scope of the present study, these lines connecting Foucault, Heidegger and finally elements of Oriental thought are not simply fortuitous. This dissertation seeks to follow the road opened by Foucault and Heidegger in their treatment of poetry as potentially a philosophical activity that gives space to the exploration of certain basic questions about the human being, his relation with reality, knowledge and Being. This experience of literature is thought to generate new possibilities in the manner in which the human being knows himself and his world — an ethical and ontological mode of literature whose presence in the Latin American tradition can be traced back to Sor Juana’s *Sueño*. Returning to the questions that Paz’s *Los hijos del limo* evokes, this dissertation proposes to study the poetry and essays of Alberto Girri (1919 – 1991) and Rafael Cadenas (1930) as belonging to and being born of an epistemological moment in

which the predominant constructions of the modern subject, discourses of knowledge and reality are questioned, and poetry proposes tentative alternatives that find echoes in Heidegger and further answers in Oriental thought. Although such parallels could be drawn for certain phases of the works of other 20th century Latin American authors, Argentine Alberto Girri and Venezuelan Rafael Cadenas are unique in that they have consecrated their life and work to the tireless task of tracing paths of knowledge in their verses.

Individually, Girri and Cadenas have pursued the long and solitary poetic road for analogous reasons. When Vilma Colina asked Girri his opinion about the function of the poet, he explained:

Decir que su objeto es el de realizar a través del poema una indagación de la realidad, una puesta en práctica de un método de conocimiento muy peculiar, distinto del científico pero igualmente atendible. Podría, asimismo, afirmarse que la función del poeta, del poema, es la de intentar darle una existencia permanente a la realidad aparential en la que nos movemos: la tesis de que todo lo dado existe, pero a la vez no existe sino por medio del artista que lo va creando. Pero, fundamentalmente, creo que en última instancia el fin del poema es dar cuenta del compromiso que su autor tiene con la lengua, o sea lo más vital de la comunidad donde ese poema fue escrito. (Notas sobre la experiencia poética 183-84)

Similarly, through the cycle of essays, Cadenas explicates his dedication and constancy to poetry with analogous words. In “Realidad y literatura” Cadenas writes: “Nuestro reino es el fatigado reino de lo sabido. La poesía está llamada a arrancarnos de él y conducirnos a la novedad, que es lo ordinario, pero como si lo viéramos por primera vez. El nombrar poético estaría encargado de acercarnos a la cosa y dejarnos frente a ella como cosa, con su silencio, su extrañeza, su gravedad” (“Realidad y literatura” 524-25).

In the interviews and essays that accompany the poetic works of Girri and Cadenas, time and time again both authors emphasize poetry as a vital means of arriving at a different and essential knowledge of self and the world. If posed with the fundamental question that Rilke suggested his young interlocutor ask himself —“*must I write?*” (Rilke 19)— Girri and Cadenas would answer with a resounding “Yes.” Poetry is their only imperative, although the fruits of their labors may be uncertain. Neither espouses a vision of poetry as objective truth nor as a categorical answer to the questions of the human *being* in the world. With great modesty, attention and care, they offer poems as conjectures, paths to follow and ethical and existential acts. In this manner, they dare to think differently, without the naïveté that poetry possesses a saving grace, but with the belief that a poem offers the attentive reader an aperture to a different and otherwise inexistent experience and knowledge. In their respective essays and interviews, both poets opine that the gravest danger facing the human being is his present existential stance in relationship with the world. They observe that the human being tends to cloak himself in what Foucault would term reduced and dominant “discursive strategies” that inform and condition his definition of and approach to reality —his own being, his language, the people and world that surround him— so that he may dominate it, utilize it and put it to his service. Girri’s and Cadenas’s poetry attempts to re-house the human being within a state of radical ignorance in order to permit him the experience of amazement, mystery and the unfathomable infinitude of what *is*.

If literature (outside of the bestseller phenomenon) is the affair of a small minority, the readers of poetry are, among these few, the scarcest. Poetry is ignored more

every day, treated as a strange and incomprehensible anachronism that requires too much time and attention and yields no facile fruits. Contemporary trends in literary criticism tend to approach poetry principally to illustrate sociological issues of cultural, sexual, national, class and racial identities —all topics worthy of study— but without concentrating on the poetic happening, on how and what language articulates and thus becomes “el lugar en el que lo que es es lo que es” (Cueto "Girri: Un ejercicio de lectura" 150).

In the last prose reflections that he was to write, Girri pokes fun at those of us who dedicate ourselves to the study of poetry: “El tiempo que demasiados críticos gastan en teorías, voluntad de interrelaciones, correspondencias, frenético desmontar lo escrito. Acaso una forma de disimular su invencible pereza de *leer*” (Girri "El motivo es el poema" 138). It is my intention and desire that the present dissertation not fall into the same snare. Although the nature of this type of study inevitably does require a certain will to draw correspondences and interrelationships, it is my intention to draw these lines through readings that fraternally lead to other readings through a common aim of understanding the human being’s *being* in the world and the role that poetry and language play in this relationship.

In honoring Girri’s remarks, this study seeks to draw more attention to and open a greater space for two poets whose works have not received the corresponding critical study, dissemination and readers that they deserve. Although the reference to literary prizes as an indicator or the intrinsic value of a text is often dubious, it is interesting to note that both authors, who shied away from public engagements and self-promotion,

have been decorated with considerable honors and recognitions² and were openly held in high esteem by authors such as Borges and Paz. There are various monographic book-length studies about both poets, among which the most important are those by Sergio Cueto, Muriel Slade Pascoe, María Victoria Suárez, Alberto Villanueva and Luis Alberto Vittor in the case of Girri and those by Ilis Alfonzo Luis, José Balza, Miguel Isava Briceño, Elena Dorante and the collection of critical articles edited by Omar Astorga with respect to Cadenas's works. The contributions of these books are of varying interest, but considered as a whole, they help to contextualize the writing of both authors, understand salient biographical elements informing certain texts, identify recurring themes and motifs in their works and trace the "fases de su creciente," to borrow the metaphor of Saúl Yurkievich (99).

In the most noteworthy examples, the authors of these studies orient the interested reader in an understanding of the poetic trajectory of Girri and Cadenas, demonstrating points of contact between their works and that of U.S. writers including Aldous Huxley, e.e. cummings, Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams, as well as similarities with certain aspects of thought of Ludwig Feuerbach, George Steiner, Gérard

² Muriel Slade Pascoe recalls that Girri was honored with the following accolades among others: "la faja de Honor de la S.A.DE., el Premio 'Leopoldo Lugones', el Premio 'César Mermet', el Premio Municipal de Poesía, el Premio Nacional de Poesía, y premios de la Fundación Argentina para la Poesía, la Fundación Lorenzutti y la Fundación Dupuytren. Ha recibido una Medalla de Oro y ha sido condecorado como Caballero Oficial de la Orden al Mérito por el gobierno de Italia" (11). Girri also received two J. S. Guggenheim Fellowships (1964, 1977) and was awarded the Réne Barón Prize (1982) and the Premio de Poesía de la Fundación Fortabat (1985). For his part, Rafael Cadenas was awarded the "Premio de Ensayo de CONAC" (1984), the Venezuelan "Premio Nacional de Literatura" (1985) for his complete works, the "Premio San Juan de la Cruz" (1991), the "Premio Internacional de Poesía J.A. Pérez Bonalde" (1992), the Venezuelan "Premio de la Fundación Mozarteum" (1993), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1986) and honorary doctoral degrees from the Universidad de los Andes (2001) and the Universidad Central de Venezuela (2005).

Genette, Gilles Deleuze, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, J. Krishnamurti and D. T. Suzuki. Nevertheless, no critic has undertaken the systematic study of either Girri or Cadenas as representative of the modern discourse of exception in which their poetry and thought respond to the contemporary crisis of Man as subject and object of knowledge such as what Foucault describes as the result of the modern episteme, Heidegger attempts to overcome through an attentiveness to Being, and Oriental philosophies seek to transcend altogether.

The most widely held opinion of Girri and Cadenas is that they are two solitary poets, independent of the dominant aesthetics and literary practices of their contemporaries. Chronologically, Alberto Girri coincides with the Argentine “generación del 40”³ whose poetry is characterized by three currents —neo-romanticism, surrealism and imagism (Ara 108). Rafael Cadenas began writing in 1958 in the company of ideologically revolutionary authors denominated the “Tabla Redonda”⁴ group, which published ten numbers of a eponymous magazine (Vera 45-48). In both writers’ early poetry, certain aesthetic overlap exists with other poets of their respective generations, but these similarities soon dissolve. Girri’s first books, *Playa sola* (1946) and *Coronación de la espera* (1947) share with “generación del 40” authors a romantic tone and a turbulent, grandiloquent and verbose first-person poetic voice, but this

³ The authors referred to as composing the “generación del 40” include Vicente Barbiere, Enrique Molina and Olga Orozco.

⁴ “Tabla Redonda” was founded with the purpose to “1. Denunciar con voz revolucionaria la realidad venezolana. 2. Oponerse a las tendencias intelectualistas de algunos grupos literarios. 3. Defender la libertad del creador” Elena Vera, Flor y canto: 25 años de poesía venezolana (1958-1983) (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1985) 43.

characteristic fades in his following books. Similarly, *Una isla* (1958) and *Los cuadernos del destierro* (1960), Cadenas's poetic debuts, partake in a personally subjective and expansive tone in which the first-person poetic voice and persona grow to mythic proportions. However, Cadenas's following works initiate a conscientious process of verbal and subjective reduction that takes him in a different direction than his contemporaries. After this early phase in both authors' trajectories, critics agree in calling Girri and Cadenas exceptions or anomalous individuals who forged their own personal literary path almost as an ascetic practice.

Few readers have articulated the extraordinary parallels that exist between both authors' thought and works. A notable exception is Guillermo Sucre, who reveals their shared parentage under the designation "la metáfora del silencio," together with Roberto Juarroz, Gonzalo Rojas, Cintio Vitier, Juan Sánchez Peláez, Reynaldo Pérez-Só, Eugenio Montejo, Homero Aridjis and Alejandra Pizarnik. Sucre refers to a crisis in language's powers of representation and finds in the aforementioned poets a common effort in poetry to "llegar a una lógica verbal que fuese la transparencia del mundo" (294). I believe that although such groupings are helpful to discern unifying elements across a wide spectrum of poets and works, the coupling of Girri's and Cadenas's works in the pages of this dissertation is particularly justifiable and illuminating. In addition, it is apparent that the criticism written about either poet has taken a descriptive approach to their works; there has yet to be written a study that attempts to elucidate the epistemological and ontological *raison d'être* of this writing and from what fundamental circumstances these works are born.

The central theme of this investigation is to study how the predominant discourses that constitute the modern subject and his way of approaching himself, language and reality are questioned at their foundation, constituting an epistemological crisis to which Girri and Cadenas respond through tireless poetic projects that seek new paths of understanding and consciousness beyond the figure of Man and traditional Western metaphysics. Neither poet proposes a closed philosophical system nor adheres to any set of pre-formulated postulates. Instead, they traverse through various modalities of thought and philosophical inquiry, which I attempt to trace, particularly considering their evolving formulations and/or disbanding of their poetic subjects.

In the first chapter, I propose a tripartite theoretical framework of investigation, considering three conceptions of the human being in relation to the world and language. I begin with Foucault's description of the modern epistemological arrangement of knowledge in which the figure of Man appears. Foucault's historical approach to knowledge systems and discourses serves as a diagnostic of the positivities over which Man was erected and how his very being is a conundrum constructed over fundamental contradictions. It also opens the possibility to alternative forms of knowing and being, as both are understood to be temporally based modes of existence. This reading of Foucault's episteme provides a philosophical basis for understanding the first half of Girri's and Cadenas's poetic production in which a conflated poetic subject articulates a condition of crisis, fallenness, and loss of origin and identity. The manner in which the poetic subjects articulate their experience and knowledge (or often the lack thereof) is also indicative of the discursive practices of Man that Foucault demonstrates to be born

of the modern episteme. The denunciation of a state of contingency and orphanhood as well as the poetic subjects' proposed "solutions" to this crisis that are tried and abandoned within the poems are considered here to be symptomatic of Man's self-conception.

With an understanding of the construction of the modern episteme and the subject and object of its knowledge (Man), I turn briefly to Foucault's discussion about a certain literature that functions as an "outside" to modern episteme, and a possibility for a different type of relation between the human being and his reality. In Girri's and Cadenas's poetry, this philosophical turn is evidenced in a drastic reduction of the first-person poetic subject and his denunciation of his existential condition. Heidegger's return to the question of Being shifts the focus away from Man and privileges works of art, especially poetry as an *opening* for Being to presence. Although neither poet directly espouses Heideggerian philosophy, I believe that their poetry follows a path similar to his in which the human being encounters a non-instrumental way of being here/there and open to Being and the world— *Da-sein* — which leads to an experience of present presence through poetry. Heidegger saw in Zen and Taoist thought a reflection of what he aspired to say through other means, and as Girri and Cadenas themselves refer directly to these same concepts and texts, I conclude the first chapter with a discussion of ideas like *sunyata*, *satori* and the transcending of metaphysical categories.

In chapters two and three, I follow the chronological order of Girri's and Cadenas's texts, dividing each poet's work into two phases. In the second chapter, I begin with Girri, who is 11 years Cadenas's senior, and examine representative poems from the first half of his literary production (1946-1963). I seek to demonstrate how this earlier

poetry is the product of thought informed and shaped by the crisis of the modern episteme and Man, in particular the recurring theme of existential solitude and loss. In this phase of his poetry, Girri attempts to resolve this crisis through solutions born of Man: the recurrence to memory, the quest for love, a return to innocence and origin. As these strategies successively fail, Girri denounces the state of Man and adopts ironic personas and postures that spoof all attempts to establish a transcendent order through Man himself. A schism lies at the foundation of subject, splitting world and word, and Girri's poems are erected as empty mirrors incapable of projecting a solid structure of unity.

As most of his critics note, Girri's poetry evolves through different paths of thinking which take a turn with the publication of *El ojo* (1964). The second half of chapter 2 is dedicated to Girri's middle and later writings, as well as his annotations and accompanying essays. I study the reduction of the knowing subject and the increasing attention to the ethics of approaching the world through poetry. Girri cultivates a poetics of present lucidity in which the *hacedor's* (doer or maker's) language, through contact with the "real," connects with an original intuition that becomes, in the poem, another element of the world. Rooted in the *here* and *now*, and through the negation of the "I," Girri draws on principles adopted from J. Krishnamurti and Taoist and Zen authors which offer alternative solutions to the crisis of the subject in Western metaphysics.

Rafael Cadenas's literary trajectory is examined in a parallel fashion in the third chapter. His early poetry (1958-77) seeks to recuperate a lost idyllic state of being and belonging to a "you" or "other" which can be identified interchangeably as Being, the

world, the beloved or the true self. Stating its failure, the subject undergoes a painful examination in which Man's vital positions in regards to his own self and the world are deemed "false maneuvers." A corrective poetry is assumed to free the self of a subjectivity that adjudicates "that which is." The poem is a therapeutic space for the abandonment of erroneous notions of self, the quieting of thought and the opening of a receptive emptiness to "the other."

In the second part of the third chapter, I study the successive attempts by Cadenas to discover an ethics of being and writing. The marks of aforementioned Oriental texts as well as of Spanish mystic poet San Juan de la Cruz are considered. Different demarcations of "that which is" proposed in Cadenas's essays about language, "reality" and literature are used in analyzing the poetry of corresponding years. Understanding language as "that which speaks" and as the "house of Being," Cadenas's latest works, as Girri's, suggest new routes for recovering an ethical lucidity of consciousness. In his introduction to the complete works of Cadenas printed in the year 2000, José Balza states that despite similarities with certain moments in the poetry of Huidobro, Paz, José Antonio Ramos Sucre and Sánchez Peláez: "No sé de otros autores que hubiesen escogido la 'ruta del instante, la ruta de la atención' como destino" (12-13). It is my hope that the following pages demonstrate that through poetry, Cadenas and Girri participate in a common destiny and their searches stem from the same epistemological moment.

CHAPTER 1: FROM MAN TO BEING

1.1 THE POETIC EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY

The title of this dissertation, *Poetry of Knowledge and Being: The Parallel Paths of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas* makes several claims that should not be taken for granted or left unchallenged. First, it characterizes the poetry of two poets as being epistemological and ontological in essence or as striving to address queries about knowledge and Being. “What knowledge?” one may rightly ask, and likewise question the scope and usage of the word “Being.” What is poetry’s relationship this knowledge and Being? Is poetry a product of, vehicle for or means to knowledge and Being? Implied, as well, is view that the poetic works of both authors form paths, a word that whose varied meanings express important and dissimilar nuances: a path can be a track that has been made evidencing movement; a route along which something moves; a course of action or way of living; a route or sequence followed for a particular end. Should the word “path” be read as signifying a type of progression towards a fixed destination or final goal? Or does “path” mean the movement of path-making itself? Finally, the title reveals the optic of the author by reading Girri’s and Cadenas’s works as parallel expressions. What coordinates are plotted and graphed in each and through each author’s works so that such a claim can be substantiated? Parallel styles? Themes? Guiding questions? Up to what point can one justify the yoking of two authors together under the same banner? I purposefully state these questions at the beginning of this first

chapter so as to serve as a constant sounding board for the ideas proposed throughout this study.

In responding to these interrogatives, I would like to begin with what I consider to be several representative examples of the striking similarities in the tone, theme and voice of both authors at different moments in their respective works, which was the original inspiration for this study. A methodical examination of the works to which I presently refer is offered in the following chapters; what follows here is a quick glance at the type of material at hand. In the early pages of both authors, a confessional, subjective voice denounces the existential problems of time, love, death, solitude and memory. In his fourth book, *El tiempo que destruye* (1950), Girri writes the following verses in “El engañado”:

Ni siquiera la duración del momento
Es cosa que recuerde bien [...]
Un darse cuenta que el salir de sí mismo
Para verse vivir en otro rostro
No es comunión, es desunión [...]
Y al terminar la pugna
Devorada ya la imitación que busca,
Vuelve a estar en el sitio de partida,
Y solo. ("El tiempo que destruye" 105)

Nine years later, Cadenas's second book, a long poem in prose titled, “Los cuadernos del destierro,” addresses the same themes:

Amor sin resonancia, llevo al cinto tu cadáver pero es tarde y cuando suena el teléfono mis nervios ya están desnudos. Si fuese posible compartir todo. Si fuese posible compartir pero como las estaciones llega el olvido, todo se echa a perder, sale rodando, se encabrita, se despoja y sólo quedan los huesos ocultos por humus demente de falsas entonaciones ("Los cuadernos del destierro" 89).

Not long after these respective books were published, both authors begin to undergo a profound literary change as can be evidenced by their verses and para-poetical texts. A repeated questioning of Western constructions of knowledge and subjectivity can be read in statements such as Girri's following reflection:

Es ocioso, también, aclarar que por espíritu de la época significamos la cada vez más aguda situación conflictiva del hombre en nuestro siglo, consigo mismo y con las circunstancias: sociales, económicas, morales, tan cambiantes y dramáticas (Pezzoni "El hacedor en su crítico" 153-54).

Cadenas course of reasoning echoes similar thoughts:

La propia actividad de dominio sobre la naturaleza que realizan los hombres los ha alucinado haciéndolos olvidar el fundamento. [...] No sabían que cuando se olvida el fundamento, la esfera de lo humano se torna ingobernable, pierde sus proporciones, se desmide, se vuelve pesadilla —la que vivimos hoy— ("Anotaciones" 538).

The criticism leveled at Western man and his relationship with knowledge and his world contrasts greatly with the task assigned to poetry and the opportunity it affords for a different type of thinking and a reformulation of the subject. Girri and Cadenas meditate throughout their respective works about literature's status as a means to approach the world, not bound by the vision and discourse structures of Man as subject and object of knowledge. Girri proffers the following image for his poetic projects: "Palabras en su justo lugar. Ni miran ni hacia atrás ni hacia delante. Son puro presente del poema, eso transmiten" ("El motivo es el poema" 275-76). Cadenas offers similar thoughts:

La poesía lo pudiera llevar [al ser humano] al espacio del silencio, donde se quedaría a solas con la realidad, con el pensamiento también callado. Hacia ese silencio apunta la poesía que no está llena de sí misma. La tarea es elíptica: la

obra parte de un espacio y a ese mismo espacio conduce ("Realidad y literatura" 524).

Girri writes, in a characteristic aphorism: "La ausencia del pensamiento no consiste en no pensar en nada, que ya sería un tomar contacto, apegarse a esa nada, sino un pensar en todas las cosas instante a instante, en perpetuo desapego" ("El motivo es el poema" 265) and Cadenas employs the same form in commenting :

El misterio acalla el pensamiento, lo hace bajar la cabeza, lo obliga a admitirlo.
Derrota espléndida la de este rey lleno de aflicciones.
Al abdicar queda lo que existe, lo que se manifiesta. ("Dichos" 658).

This exercise of tandem citations could be repeated almost indefinitely, and a reader may question the greater context of these words and demand a critical reading of their significations. These reservations are certainly legitimate, and it is precisely out of a desire to demonstrate the need for a unifying theoretical framework that I begin in this manner. A study that seeks, among its other goals, to establish points of contact between two poets and to trace their parallel paths in the exploration of their being, world and language, requires a common ground on which to tread. Beyond the coincidences of certain similar vital experiences and the comparable maps we can sketch of readings that inform the course of the writings of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas, what is it that brings both authors to write these analogous words about poetry? What greater conditions can be identified that generate and make possible these questions and answers? How can we claim that this literature is born of Western modernity, at the same time that it seeks to contest its defining tenets through poetry?

1.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL “DIAGNOSIS”

An attempt to answer these questions can be inaugurated by turning to the Michel Foucault’s book, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966), a fundamental piece in post-structuralist theory that articulates a diagnosis of three historical arrangements and articulations of knowledge in the Western world. By recalling Foucault’s examination of the modern period, we can begin to understand the complex space in which Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas inscribe their thoughts and poetry. As two men who belong to what Ángel Rama has called the Latin American “ciudades letradas,” it is a basic assumption of this thesis that both poets should be read as being born of and participating in the western tradition of literature and philosophy despite their questioning of its results and their corresponding turn to Oriental literature and philosophy. As Girri explains in an interview: “Naturalmente, soy un occidental, estoy entonces inserto en una sociedad con determinadas características, y me someto a ellas porque no hacerlo sería un acto de megalomanía del que no me considero capaz” (Torres Fierro 18). Similarly, Cadenas ascribes to a certain line of Western writers, some of whom he has translated such as Cavafys, Lawrence, Pessoa, Nijinski, Segalen and Whitman, and others to whom he makes frequent reference, especially Eliot, Goethe, Heidegger, Hesse, Huxley, Kafka, Keats, Mallarmé, Nietzsche, Pound, Rilke, Salinas, San Juan de la Cruz, Steiner, Tennyson, Valéry and Wordsworth, to name a few. Thus, an overview of the modern Western episteme can assist us to understand the nature of both poets’ lines of questioning and the tentative answers to which the two arrive. If Girri and Cadenas question Western thought and especially its notion of the human subject, it is

from within this same tradition that their questioning is born. It is Michel Foucault who perhaps most clearly has understood how Western modernity and its eventual crisis is structured in discourse and the manner in which certain literature responds to its paradoxes and contradictions.

One of the exegetes of Foucault's works, Frédéric Gros affirms that: "La connaissance des structures devient savoir de ce qui régit nos pensées et nos actes. L'enjeu des recherches n'est plus de retrouver le <<savoir>> qui sous-tend l'archive d'une époque, mais de formuler le <<diagnostic>> de ce qui secrètement nous agit" (195). The diagnosis to which Gros refers, takes the form of an episteme, a concept that corresponds to Foucault's second or archeological phase —from *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961) to *L'Archeéologie du savoir* (1969)— and designates the lateral relationships and regularities that can be discovered between discursive practices, the sciences, epistemological figures and positivities in a given period. The philosophical activity of interrogating the thought's structure in relationship to the contemporary moment belongs to modernity and perhaps began with Kant (Dekens 55-57). Unlike other philosophers who seek to understand and conceptualize the present systematically, Foucault warns in *L'archéologie du savoir* that his use of the concept of the episteme does not have the objective to "reconstituer le système de postulats auquel obéissent toutes les connaissances d'une époque, mais de parcourir un champ indéfini de relations" (Foucault *L'archéologie du savoir* 250). This "undefined field of relationships" can, nevertheless, be sketched by the Foucauldian archeologist because the conditions of enunciation and means of appearance of discourse are limited, and the most recurring

relationships form the most solidified strata of what is considered to be knowledge, at any given time. In this sense, an examination of the modern episteme can provide an overview of the rules of formation of discourse practices and structures of knowledge in which Girri and Cadenas participate and to which they endeavor to respond.

The Foucauldian understanding of the episteme is advantageous for a study like the present one because it analyzes discursive practices as the place where the conditions of knowledge are revealed. Discourse practices can be understood here as an ensemble of anonymous historical rules from a given time and place that define, through social, economic, geographic and linguistic factors, the conditions and practices of enunciation (L'archéologie du savoir 153-54). As discourse is seen to be a discontinuous practice, Foucault refuses, by definition, to adopt a form of positivism or a vantage point of “truth” from which to judge the disparate forms that knowledge has adopted throughout the course of time. Foucault avoids all implicit or explicit judgments about the inherent value of the epistemes he describes, offering, instead, critical readings of the reaches of each episteme, viewed as historic phenomena devoid of essences. Neither do Foucauldian epistemes arrange themselves according to a eschatological vision that procures the perception of a continuous history that draws ever closer to its resolution (De Certeau 350). Rather, Foucault limits himself to articulate two moments of radical discontinuity in which Western culture has reconfigured its manner of conceiving the “order of things” (Les mots, xxii). As he clarifies in the “Preface,”

c'est plutôt une étude qui s'efforce de retrouver à partir de quoi connaissances et théories ont été possibles; selon quel espace d'ordre s'est constitué le savoir; sur fond de quel *a priori* historique et dans l'élément de quelle positivité des idées ont

pu apparaître, des sciences se constituer, des expériences se réfléchir dans des philosophies, des rationalités se former, pour, peut-être, se dénouer et s'évanouir bientôt (Les mots et les choses 13).

This impartial, descriptive method is most appropriate for the present study, as it makes evident the historical *a priori* positivities that our poets grapple with in their works. In addition, it methodologically demonstrates how Girri's and Cadenas's questioning of the modern Western subject and its relationship to the world coincides with Foucault's suggestion that the present manner in which knowledge is structured around Man will also eventually cede its place to other arrangements.

Les mots et les choses spans three periods in Western history and describes three corresponding epistemes: the Renaissance and its system of resemblance; the classical period and the order of representation; the modern period and the rule of Man. This temporal division is not new, but what is surprising is Foucault's demonstration of the radical reconfigurations of each episteme that permit us to glimpse the future disappearance of the figure of Man —axis of modernity— and the dawning of another arrangement for knowledge (398). In order to argue this, Foucault examines the parallel formation of knowledge about life, work and language in the three aforementioned periods. By approaching the configuration of knowledge in this manner, he also delineates the place or posture of the human being with respect to what is considered to be the historic *being* of things, the way in which order is established and identity is constituted in each episteme.

For the purposes of this study, it is relevant to review the places and roles the human being has occupied and his relationship to the configuration of knowledge with a

particular focus on the figure of modern Man and the problematic that his “appearance” implies. Foucault’s observations about the role of language and literature will be of equal importance as a point of departure for the examination of Girri’s and Cadenas’s poetry. The convocation of Foucault’s ideas for this end are justified by the French philosopher’s own words: “Si quelqu’un utilise différemment ce que j’ai écrit, cela ne m’est pas désagréable, et même s’il l’utilise dans un autre contexte pour une autre chose, je suis assez content. En ce sens, je ne pense pas que je suis l’auteur de l’oeuvre et que la pensée et l’intention de l’auteur doivent être respectées” (Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988 620). Besides, as should be recalled, in his most memorable explanations of each episteme’s functions and limitations, Foucault turns to literature —Borges, Cervantes, Sade⁵— as an “outside” space capable of contesting the knowledge therein demarcated. In his book on Foucault and literature, Simon During elucidates this point: “They [certain artists and authors] escape the full force of the episteme which preconditions their moment (and thus they can fulfil a liberating role) at the same time as they show those pressures at work most succinctly and clearly (and thus they have an exemplary role)” (114).

Before turning our gaze to this unique role that literature plays in the modern episteme, we will trace the place the human being occupies in the three epistemes identified in *Les mots et les choses*. The distinction that Foucault makes between the human being and the conceptual figure of Man, born of modernity, is of utmost importance. Man is the figure that sets modernity’s stage, and it is under his shadow that

⁵ For a thorough study of Foucault’s thought in relation to literature —both his own use and analysis of literary texts as well as the subsequent application of his ideas in literary criticism, see: During, Simon.

Girri's and Cadenas's first poetry is composed. By briefly reviewing the wherefores of his previous inexistence, we can better understand the rupture and fundamental shift in knowledge that his appearance signifies. In the first two historic phases that Foucault studies, the human being is allocated a privileged position in the order of things and the configuration of the "known," but he was not the sovereign subject and object of knowledge, as he is in the modern episteme.

The first episteme that Foucault analyzes, starting in the 16th century, belonged to the "order" of similitude, analogy, emulation and sympathies. God, the giver of a sublime and secret order, revealed to the human being knowledge about the visible and invisible through infinite signs, signatures and ciphers imprinted on all things that the human being "read," deciphered and accumulated. Creation's order was thus decoded by interpreting the great text of the universe written by the Creator. These signs, through an infinite spiral of visible similarities among themselves, organized knowledge's form (32) and manifested the power, wisdom and will of God⁶. In a cosmos that folded and unfolded itself through the laws of similitude, the human being embodied one more element ruled by the same principles as the rest of creation. At the same time, however, the human being was doubly privileged; he embodied the locus where all sympathies were conjugated and was the only creature whose role it is to unveil, interpret and utilize the work of God. The entire cosmos —heaven, hell, earth, flora and fauna— could be "read"

Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing. London: Routledge, 1992.

⁶ Foucault identifies four forms of establishing similitude — *convenientia*, *aemulatio*, *analogy* and *sympathy*— that constitute the forms through which man can discover the order of the world. For a detailed description of the way knowledge was structured through these "laws," see the chapter "La prose du monde," and in particular pages 32-40.

by man through analogy and similitude to discover God's perfect order. As Foucault explains:

L'espace des analogies est au fond un espace de rayonnement. De toutes parts, l'homme est concerné par lui; mais de ce même homme, inversement, transmet les ressemblances qu'il reçoit du monde. Il est le grand foyer des proportions, — le centre où les rapports viennent s'appuyer et d'où ils sont réfléchis à nouveau” (Les mots et les choses 38).

The hermeneutic process of reading and interpreting the signs inscribed in and over himself, other things, and contained in the sacred scriptures constituted the human beings labor in knowledge. “Savoir consiste donc à rapporter du langage à du langage. A restituer la grande plaine uniforme des mots et des choses. A tout faire parler. C'est-à-dire à faire naître au-dessus de toutes les marques le discours second du commentaire” (Les mots et les choses 55). The positivistic ground underlying all knowledge was the perfect order of the Creator that the human being, with his imperfect language attempted to articulate. Copious commentaries, glosses and interpretations formed the discourse that corresponded to these conditions of enunciation of knowledge. In the Renaissance episteme, the human being played no role in the *creation* of order. His task was simply to perceive and articulate God's perfect design. “Les choses, rassemblées en une seule grande plaine uniforme, parlent d'elles-mêmes, signant leur similitude, suscitant leur propre commentaire: nul espace pour une figure de l'homme qui n'est nécessaire que comme *lieu d'articulation* entre mots et choses”(Dekens 14).

A major shift happens at the beginning of the 17th century in which other rules established the cartography of knowledge that formed the classical period's episteme. Whereas similitude had before determined the forms through which the discourse of truth

was articulated, now the theoretical determination of objects operated by means of representation. Instead of pursuing similitude among the infinite signs in the universe, representation was grounded in the positivities of identity and difference. Within the system of representation, signs no longer belonged to the same level and order as the things, but rather formed a perfect, neutral and transparent language that *corresponded* exactly to the things that it represented. As the key instrument of knowledge, the sign itself was governed by the laws of its content, because there did not exist any element that mediated between the two (Les mots et les choses 80). Through the analysis and combination of signs, the human being sought to organize the totality of knowledge in an immense table of series, ordered through the measured differences that established the identities and place of each element of knowledge. To say a name, therefore, was to also convoke the thing itself and its place in relationship to all other signs: representation's power was unbounded and it allowed for its infinite and ordered accumulation of knowledge. Representation made possible a totalizing and unified history of all aspects of knowledge in which the human being's life, labor and language simply occupied another integral place in its cosmic account.

In the classical episteme, the positivistic ground that guaranteed order was representation itself that assured the unequivocal identity of things and their place in relationship to all other things capable of being represented.

Les <<choses>> disparaissent de l'horizon épistémologique pour laisser place aux <<mots>>, mais ces mots nouveaux ont un statu de certitude transparente, condition de leur appartenance au <<représenter>> cartésien: un <<représenter>> rectifié, épuré, corrigé. [...] le nouveau langage transparent comporte sa propre

assurance, ne tire sa certitude d'aucun autre niveau que le sien propre (Kremer-Marietti 62-63).

1.3 THE EMERGENCE OF MAN

As representation was self-sufficient, the role of the human being was simply to act as the place of clarification, and not the transcendental source of meaning. The human being constructed an artificial system of language, but this language, by virtue of its own nature, assured the possibility of representation. As a creature capable of using language, the human being simply fulfilled the role of being the place through which representation passed and was transformed into signs. “There was a place for the human knower as a rational animal, high in God’s hierarchy, but *not* for the representer per se; for man as a special different kind of being, man as ordering subject could find no place on the table he organized” (Dreyfus Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, With an Afterword by and an Interview with Michel Foucault 20). In the classical episteme, there was no space to question the existence of the human being himself. Only later, in what Foucault calls the figure of Man does the human being appear as the subject that posits and makes possible representation, disposes of the objects of representation for himself, and questions his own nature as knower.

In the third episteme, that emerges at the end of the 18th century and whose formulation and structure extends to the present day, the conceptual figure of Man is “born” and the identities made possible by the act of representation no longer express the complete order of beings. Girri’s and Cadenas’s poetry is written in the shadow of Man, as is this dissertation itself. However, as made evident by the radical differences

operating in the Renaissance and classical epistemes, it is worth emphasizing that this new appearance of Man as the principle actor in the stage of knowledge should simultaneously remind us that, as with the other figures of knowledge, Man will also inevitably disappear. Girri's and Cadenas's poetry, therefore, can be read as pertaining to the exploration of other forms of articulating knowledge and a critique of Man's present dominance. Before approaching the fault lines that promise to bring the next epistemological break, we will examine the contradictory terms of the reign of Man and the episteme that is created along his possibilities and limitations so as to best situate Girri's and Cadenas's first poetry as a reaction against the conundrum of Man's position in the current episteme.

Classical representation, because of its sovereign transparency, established a continuous taxonomic table in which and through which knowledge could be founded and apprehended: "Knowledge is signification and signification is both representation and analysis" (Cousins 47). In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant was the first to question the homogeneous space of classical representation, its foundation, origin and limits, as well as to scrutinize the conditions that made this representation possible. When the general domain of representations fractured, a space was opened for a new set of relationships of knowledge. The sign detached from the object it represented, losing its unequivocal identity and becoming contaminated by a historicity that fragmented the fields of empirical knowledge. Language no longer was bound to things themselves, but rather to human will.

It was in the interstices between things and language that Man appeared, the finite subject that modern philosophy —by virtue of Man’s same finitude— has attempted to establish as the knower and base of truth. Man, as the central subject, occupies what Foucault has denominated as “the place of the king” (Les mots et les choses 318-23) as he is the holder of knowledge as well as the paradoxically preferred object of his own knowing gaze. Man seeks to exert his will and power over all things that come into his gaze and his presence reconfigures the episteme: the relationship between words, things and order are made evident through his consciousness and not through the autonomous system of representation. The knowledge of things is no longer determined by mathematically establishing and tabulating identities, but through their external connection with the human being. Man’s reasoning gaze conditions the way in which all knowledge is determined and modern discourse practices are conditioned.

Man is the point from which knowledge proceeds, but this is not his sole function. Through his figure, new fields of knowledge are glimpsed that he makes possible: the human sciences such as psychology, sociology, philology and literature. These disciplines examine Man himself as a being that lives, labors and speaks. Understood thus, Man is a space over which biology, economy and linguistics operate. Behind every living being, one can glimpse long chains of independent processes with their own histories and governing forces —completely antithetical to the general chronicle of all things written in the classical period. These processes, in which Man participates, overwhelm him; they alienate him from himself and define him without his ever attaining the origin of these forces or understanding and controlling their development. The human

being that lives, works and speaks is “governed” by an organism that obeys its own organic laws, that produces and exchanges goods through gestures established by historical processes, and employs a language that preceded him and whose words stand over the chaotic strata of meanings sedimented over time. These three aspects that determine the concrete existence of Man, concurrently prove his finitude by manifesting their incoercible anteriority to his person. He is left as an alienated subject with the insurmountable task of mastering these independent histories that define but elude him.

The figure of Man always possesses a double face. Critics Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain summarize:

At one level Man is considered as the locus of a series of effects, determinations which are imposed upon him by life, labour and language, which define him in his finitude as Man. Yet at the same time there is a perpetual opening of the question of what Man is in terms of being the locus of knowledge (Cousins 52).

Man, in his fundamentally dual role as subject and object of knowledge, determines two contrary means for this knowledge that constitutes the modern episteme. On the one hand, knowledge is sought as empirical contents, defined in positivistic terms as an object of Man’s *cogito* and its corresponding representation. At the same time, a dialectical knowledge erupts through a critical and undefined thought that questions the conditions that make possible any empirical contents. Man lends himself to both forms of knowledge, forming what Foucault will call a “doublet empirique-transcendental” (329): he conceives himself in terms of a finite knowledge of his life, labor and language, at the same time he strives to establish himself as a transcendental being to whom essential and imminent “truth” is ascribed. Foucault terms this modern, paradoxical condition of

knowledge the “analytic of finitude,” (Les mots et les choses 328), and it forms the foundation for modern positivity. The modern episteme is born of an inherent crisis: modern Man’s finitude makes possible his knowledge, but also requires that he overcome its limits.

1.4 THE CRISIS OF MODERN SUBJECTIVITY

The analytic of finitude heralds the modern episteme’s internal contradictions, which constitute the base of the problems that Girri and Cadenas grapple within their early works. Both poets experience the immediate results of Man’s enthronement and seek unsuccessfully —within the terms of discursive practices— to find a resolution to this crisis. This crisis has been described by Dreyfus and Rabinow in terms of three pairs of opposing “doubles,” each of which has been adopted —to the detriment of its counterpart— by modern philosophers as the ground of their thought: transcendental/empirical; cogito/ unthought; retreat/ return of the origin. The first set refers to the irreconcilable positions that define Man through the empirical study of his life, work and language, while simultaneously considering him to be the conditioner of all knowledge, as a transcendental subject. Concretely, this set of conditions manifests in the early works of Girri and Cadenas through the existential oscillations of the poetic subject that unsatisfactorily seeks to know itself through the elements that compose his person and his being as a knowing subject.

The second set of doubles contends that Man’s *cogito*, though considered the force behind the progress of reason, is incapable of penetrating the totality of knowledge;

some element of darkness or “unthought” —be it the subconscious, dreams, madness or, most fundamentally, the very being of the self and all others— eludes all attempts of the *cogito* to illuminate and make speak its dark silence. Human *cogito*, as described by Descartes, no longer is grounded in the representation of the classical episteme. Modern *cogito* is not a guarantee of reason’s knowledge — defined as sovereign and conscious thought that assured the transparency of knowledge and the existence of the thinker. With the emergence of Man, *cogito* is reevaluated and treated like all other thought — conscious or unconscious— that passes through a *subject*. The modern study of the *cogito* is “the beginning of an investigation of what in ‘thought’ escapes consciousness of thought” (Cousins 55). Consequently, the postulate “I think” no longer results in “I am” because Man is always radically alienated from the being that his consciousness attempts to reach, by overcoming its own limits. In Girri’s and Cadenas’s first works, the poetic voice often refers to the fundamental unknown that lurks in all thought that attempts to explicate either the self or its world, undermining any sense of positivistic knowledge.

Lastly, the third pair, the “retreat/ return of origin,” summarizes the paradox that situates Man as the source of a history whose origin he never can attain or fully comprehend. Modern thought, in its foundation, recognizes that Man is inscribed in a world, society and language that antecede him. As a consequence, he finds himself excised from his origin and that of the very practices that define him. The elements of his being have their own internal foundation, history and measuring standards and they abscond within themselves their truth and origin. As a result, Man is continually reminded that because he is limited by the very things that define him, it is impossible to

assign him an origin. Nevertheless, Man's thought endeavors to reach what he conceives to be his origin —that unreachable and impossible point that Foucault describes as “le sommet virtuel d'un cône où toutes les différences, toutes les dispersions, toutes les discontinuités seraient resserrées pour ne plus former qu'un point d'identité, l'impalpable figure du Même, ayant pouvoir cependant d'éclater sur soi et de devenir autre” (Les mots et les choses 340-41). The strategy and task of modern thought is to reach the figure of the Same, to name being and make it visible.

The idea of an origin is an important part of the modern episteme's cartography; as a hidden fountain that always lies beneath the surface, it is paradoxically present but remote, and Man attributes it to a past or future, always beyond his grasp. The diverse paths of modern philosophy make incursions in time to attempt to make visible that unreachable origin. The positivistic route attempts to place Man's origin within the chronological series of the evolution of other beings; in contrast, the transcendental path seeks to make of Man's experience and knowledge of things, the origin of the truth about them. These chronologies are irreconcilable, as one subordinates Man to things and the other, things to Man. Within these options, philosophers such as Hegel, Marx and Spengler strove to make thought the eschatological route to a future plenitude, an attainable totality, the resolution of history, the perfection of thought and Man's meaning. This illusive origin also seemed to retract in time, and Man required strategies to operate its return. Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Heidegger, for example upon conceiving the origin's extreme recession and its implied loss for Man, suggested the notion of the origin as pure void. These visions hold in common the ultimate end of Man and of history because in

their thought, “s’efforce de retrouver l’homme en son identité – en cette plénitude ou en ce rien qu’il est lui-même” (Foucault Les mots et les choses 345). In Girri’s and Cadenas’s works, both notions of the origin recur frequently: sometimes as an irrecoverable past where identity and meaning were transparent and at others as a future moment of complete reconciliation. Both means of conceiving the origin and its relationship with Man are discarded as fallible answers to a problem that lies in the figure of Man himself. Girri and Cadenas, as we will observe shortly, coincide with Foucault’s analysis that none of the elements of the doubles is capable of satisfying and accounting for the opposing epistemological conditions that makes its double, through Man, possible.

It is logical that the birth of Man coincides with that of his dark twin, the Other, that represents Man’s limits. In its absolute form, the Other is death —Man’s fundamental finitude— but its presence as the boundary of human existence is felt in all aspects of Man’s being: his life, work and language. The Other resides in the dark and hidden limits of human knowledge where Man bumps up against his own finitude. In modern philosophy, the Other has been heralded under different names, according to the conceptions and analysis of its thinkers: for Hegel the Other was *An sich* (in opposition to *Für sich*); for Schopenhauer, the *Ubenwusste*; for Husserl, the implicit or inactual; for Marx it was alienated man (Foucault Les mots et les choses 338). In the section, “L’homme et ses doubles,” Foucault further develops this idea:

L’homme n’a pas pu se dessiner comme une configuration dans l’*epistémè*, sans que la pensée ne découvre en même temps, à la fois en soi et hors de soi, dans ses marges mais aussi bien entrecroisés avec sa propre trame, une part de nuit, une épaisseur apparemment inerte où elle est engagée, un impensé qu’elle contient de bout en bout, mais où aussi bien elle se trouve prise.

L'impensé comme une nature recroquevillée ou une histoire qui s'y serait stratifiée, c'est, par rapport à l'homme, l'Autre: l'Autre fraternel et jumeau, né non pas de lui, ni en lui, mais à côté et en même temps, dans une identique nouveauté, dans une dualité sans recours (Les mots et les choses 338).

In the modern episteme, the Other is what constitutes Man's consciousness, and that which escapes him.

In the modern episteme, new forms of knowledge, organized as the human sciences, are inscribed in a continuous movement committed to vanquish and elucidate this Other, in order to transform it into the Same: part of the empirical knowledge of Man. The distinct branches of modern knowledge about Man seek to elaborate systems to clarify and grasp that part of thought that eludes consciousness. As Dieter Freundlieb comments, for Foucault "these sciences are ultimately impossible because their objective is the complete self-transparency of man, which they try to achieve by turning the *conditions of the possibility* of empirical knowledge into *objects* of empirical knowledge" (Freundlieb 320). Modern thought, in this sense, is a mode of action that is adopted as an ethic —to elucidate, apprehend and illuminate what is silent, un-thought and obscure. Thought is no longer strictly theoretical because all thinking is, in itself, an act that advances "dans cette direction où l'Autre de l'homme doit devenir le Même que lui" (Les mots et les choses 339). In Girri's and Cadenas's early poetry, the question of the subject's fundamental and invariable alienation from himself and others is mulled over in multiple contexts. Through love, dreams, memory and incantation, there is a common search to bring all that is distant, dark, separated and unknown into the subject's knowing and possessive conscious. After repeated failure to make the "Other" into the "Same,"

both poets begin to denounce and renounce the very foundation of this fallible system of knowledge: Man himself.

With this basis, it is now possible to review those characteristics that define Man as the conceptual place where the possibilities of knowledge manifest, and that distinguish the contemporary episteme. In the first place, Man is raised up as the sovereign subject who attempts to apprehend the laws that govern his existence and to compel them to become completely transparent. However, this mastery of knowledge and of himself is automatically checked because of his contradictory construction. We can recall the pairs of factors mentioned above that determine the finitude of Man's being and knowledge: "le lien des positivités à la finitude, le redoublement de l'empirique dans le transcendantal, le rapport perpétuel du cogito à l'impensé, le retrait et le retour de l'origine" (Foucault Les mots et les choses 346). Given that language as representation no longer suffices as a positivistic base for knowledge—as it did in the classical episteme—in each one of these descriptive pairs, the work of establishing and articulating the positivistic structures of modern knowledge becomes problematic. Man attempts to restore the positivity of representation through himself. The "Other" within each element of his discourse subverts his role as sovereign and master of knowledge. The conditions of finitude become, in fact, the very ground that legitimizes and facilitates Man's knowledge. As Dreyfus and Rabinow explain, "Modernity begins with the incredible and ultimately unworkable idea of a being who is sovereign precisely by virtue of being enslaved, a being whose very finitude allows him to take the place of God" (Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, With an Afterword by and an

Interview with Michel Foucault 30). The inherent limitations of Man provide him with the impetus and ethical motivation to overcome them, to ground himself in his finitude in order to reach beyond it.

Foucault appraises Man's various discourses as "gauches et gauchies" (Les mots et les choses 354) and concedes a mute, philosophic laugh to the modern episteme. This is, interestingly, the same conclusion to which Girri and Cadenas arrive in their poetry and essays: an ironic gaze distances them from the discourses of Man which, in Foucault's terms includes everyone who:

veulent encore parler de l'homme, de son règne ou de sa libération, à tous ceux qui posent encore des questions sur ce qu'est l'homme en son essence, à tous ceux qui veulent partir de lui pour avoir accès à la vérité, à tous ceux en revanche qui reconduisent toute connaissance aux vérités de l'homme lui-même, à tous ceux qui ne veulent pas formaliser sans anthropologiser, qui ne veulent pas mythologiser sans démystifier, qui ne veulent pas penser sans penser aussitôt que c'est l'homme qui pense (Les mots et les choses 353-54).

Man, as we have seen through Foucault's analysis, is only one of three configurations of knowledge that the Western world has experienced since the Renaissance. For over 200 years, philosophical thought has been dedicated to defining what Man is in his essence and, to analyze all that can be presented to his experience as Man. Conceiving all knowledge as parting from Man and his experiences, leads to what Foucault calls the "sommeil anthropologique" of philosophy, when Man's empirical characteristics are conceded transcendental functions, and vice versa (Les mots et les choses 351-54) — a characteristic of modern Western metaphysics whose roots reach back to Plato. In the circularity of this thought, all knowledge —both transcendental and empirical— is compounded in Man, the privileged subject that seeks to find the Same in all figures of

alterity. The human being's knowledge is at the present time so strongly rooted in the figure of Man that it is difficult to think in a manner different from dialectical humanism —understood here as the metaphysics of subjectivity that, like a double helix, binds alienation to reconciliation, with the trust and expectation that Man will, with time, attain complete authentication. Foucault, in contrast, views this and all philosophical discourse as an irregular, historical praxis without an essential truth, capable of being reverted and rearticulated.

The possibility of modifying the contours of knowledge drawn by Man would announce what Foucault denominates his “death.” “Dès lors, les chances de *penser autrement*, hors du lieu anthropologique dessiné par le XIXe siècle ne peuvent surgir que de l’annonce d’une disparition prochaine de l’homme” (Gros 44). One should not misunderstand the pronouncement of Man's expiration: it does not suppose the disappearance of the human being nor his omission in the configuration of the episteme. Rather, another role or place is allocated to him within the relationships and forces that make possible and determine his cognition. We can recall that the human being did not exist as Man in the Renaissance or classical formations and representations of knowledge. Similarly, the death of Man heralds his separation from the epistemological center, the abandonment of his protagonism in the creation of order, and his incorporation into language. Foucault poetically describes this possibility in the last paragraphs of *Les mots et les choses*:

L’homme est une invention dont l’archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine.

Si ces dispositions venaient à disparaître comme elles sont apparues, si par quelque événement dont nous pouvons tout au plus pressentir la possibilité, mais dont nous ne connaissons pour l’instant encore ni la forme ni la promesse, elles basculaient, comme le fit au tournant du XVIIIe siècle le sol de la pensée classique, — alors on peut bien parier que l’homme s’effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable (Les mots et les choses 398).

It is in the space of certain literature that Foucault discerns the heralds of a new form of organizing knowledge that forms the base of a new episteme. We should recall that Foucault’s reading of “El idioma analítico de John Wilkins” by Jorge Luis Borges served “para señalar a Foucault un camino del pensamiento” (Rodríguez Monegal 187) that became the guiding premise behind *Les mots et les choses*. In Cervantes’ *Quijote* Foucault identifies and reads the transition and conflict between the Renaissance and classical epistemes. The Marquis de Sade’s Juliette and Justine are the motive of Foucault’s observation about the twilight of classical representation and the ascent of Man. It is not surprising that for the modern period that interests us, it is to literature, again, that Foucault returns with hopeful expectations to divine the fortunate death of Man and the coming of a different, more propitious principle for thought. For Foucault, certain literary experiences from Stéphane Mallarmé and on, like those of Antonin Artaud, Raymond Roussel, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot and Pierre Klossowski, capture an experience of language in which Man ceases to exist.

The example of Mallarmé that Foucault offers sheds light on literary language’s privilege and anticipates a new episteme and the disappearance of Man. As we have already seen, when the unity of classical discourse shattered, so did the fields of knowledge as well as language itself. Modern Man strives to free his enigmatic and

fragmented language from its silent and unfathomable content and render it manageable cognition. Before Mallarmé, the modern work was inserted in the interior of this language pertaining to human knowledge and formed with rhetoric, the subject and images. As Nietzsche observed, the standard use of language makes modern knowledge hinge on the subject (Man) who formulates the discourse (Les mots et les choses 316-17). Nietzsche's criteria, however, is not sustained in Mallarmé's work, because when the former questions "Who speaks?" the latter's response is "ce qui parle, c'est en sa solitude, en sa vibration fragile, en son néant le mot lui-même — non pas le sens du mot, mais son être énigmatique et précaire" (317). Mallarmé's project sought to return language to its plenitude and is universal unity in that single Book, page and word where he himself would be erased in the process.

For Foucault, this type of literature is the reverse of modern discourse. It is the "silencieuse, précautionneuse déposition du mot sur la blancheur d'un papier, où il ne peut avoir ni sonorité ni interlocuteur, où il n'a rien d'autre à dire que soi, rien d'autre à faire que scintiller dans l'éclat de son être" (Les mots et les choses 313). The mode of literary language, unlike other forms of discourse, is folded over itself, becoming its own origin and form. In his essay, "La folie, l'absence d'œuvre" de 1964, Foucault demonstrates the strange proximity between literature and madness, because both are prodigious reserves or matrixes of sense that lead to the instauration of a void where meaning's infinite possibilities could be lodged. For Foucault, the "being" of literature, like that of madness, is "quelque chose sans doute qui a affaire à l'auto-implication, au double et au vide qui se creuse en lui" and that "il en a fait remonter les mots jusqu'à

cette région blanche de l'autoimplication où rien n'est dit" (Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975 446-47).

Literature's "being" lies outside of its representative function, where Man is not edified as the speaking subject. In literature, language is not the tool for the self-expression and self-edification of the speaker or of his dialectical knowledge. In fact, literary language surmounts dialectics and separates Man from the epistemological center where he had reigned since the beginning of the 19th century. Literature demonstrates its complete autonomy from Man: "Ce que Nietzsche tentait quand il appelait de ses vœux le surhomme, ce à quoi Foucault s'essayait aussi quand il décrivait l'expérience littéraire comme fondamentalement *inhumaine* (irréductible bien aux principes d'un sujet constituant qu'aux données des savoirs positifs" (Gros 44). There is no authoritative subject of literature, no reflection of external objects and states for him to grasp. The author, as the originator and composer of thought through language, represents a parallel discursive figure to the construction of Man. Both author and Man are dispersed in literature, brought inside its folds. Literary language comes to possess its own ontological category as a place of self-representation where only its own being is named: "literature itself is regarded as more transgressive, closer to Being [...] literature quests for an autonomous space ultimately based, as we have seen, on the materiality and functionlessness of language" (During 114-15). In the void of a naming subject, literature offers a unique means of thought, born of and always leading back to itself. Foucault comments in an essay published in 1966, the same year as *Les mots et les choses*:

“Depuis, on peut dire que la littérature est le lieu où l’homme ne cesse de disparaître au profit du langage. Où ‘ça parle’, l’homme n’existe plus » ("L’homme est-il mort ?" 572).

It should seem clear now, that Foucault’s turn to literature is a move meant to: “regain access to a fundamental thinking, a thinking from without (*la pensée du dehors*) that could break with the traditional philosophy of consciousness and the subject” (Freundlieb 307). In fact, his 1970 inaugural address at the Collège de France begins with an invocation of desire for that particular kind of thought, language and speech and the position he yearns to adopt through it:

Plutôt que de prendre la parole, j’aurais voulu être enveloppé par elle, et porté bien au-delà de tout commencement possible. J’aurais aimé m’apercevoir qu’au moment de parler une voix sans nom me précédait depuis longtemps : il m’aurait suffi alors d’enchaîner, de poursuivre la phrase, de me loger, sans qu’on y prenne bien garde, dans ses interstices, comme si elle m’avait fait signe en se tenant, un instant, en suspens. De commencement, il n’y en aurait donc pas ; et au lieu d’être celui dont vient le discours, je serais plutôt au hasard de son déroulement, une mince lacune, le point de sa disparition possible (*L’ordre du discours* 7-8).

To write as if enveloped in words, to be a slender gap from which the speech of a nameless voice proceeds and disappears is, for Foucault, the ideal form of discourse that can exist precisely because Man is absent. If Foucault’s own writing actually achieved this type of self-effacing enunciation is a point of debate. However, he did repeatedly encounter and analyze certain literature as privileged examples where this fundamental thinking beyond the Man is evident.

In the works of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas, an evident transition occurs, moving from a poetry inscribed in the shadow of Man – that of the subject’s denunciations of and repeated attempts to resolve the fundamental contradictions we

have reviewed, inherent to his being and knowledge —to a practice of writing as the space where language speaks, manifesting an alternative knowledge. It is logical to inquire at this juncture, the precise meaning of this “being” ascribed to language. This is a question that haunts Foucault and which he never does answer in unequivocal terms. In the final chapter of *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault repeatedly insists that the *question* of the being of language is fundamental to understanding what could be a new epistemological arrangement without Man. He states: “la question du langage se pose, prouvant sans doute que l’homme est en train de disparaître” and later emphasizes the inconclusive nature of his ponderings:

Bien sûr, ce ne sont pas là des affirmations, tout au plus des questions auxquelles il n’est pas possible de répondre; il faut les laisser en suspens là où elles se posent en sachant seulement que la possibilité de les poser ouvre sans doute sur une pensée future (*Les mots et les choses* 397-98).

The nature of this “future thought” that is opened through posing the questions of language’s being, is hinted at as an imminent promise where Man’s death is announced —as Nietzsche had proclaimed that of God’s— and a new light begins to shine.

1.5 THE PRIMORDIAL ORDER OF BEING

“L’être du langage,” however, is a slippery term, and a potentially contradictory one for a philosophy grounded in the rejection of all essentialisms and non-historically based discourses. As Béatrice Han observes, some of Foucault’s initial statements as well, lead the perspicacious reader to believe that underlying all culturally-based temporal orders, *order* exists as itself:

de sorte qu'elle se trouve devant le fait brut qu'il y a, au-dessous de ses ordres spontanés, des choses qui sont en elles-mêmes ordonnables, qui appartiennent à un certain ordre muet, bref qu'il y a, de l'ordre. [...] antérieure aux mots, aux perceptions et aux gestes qui sont censés alors la traduire avec plus ou moins d'exactitude ou de bonheur (c'est pourquoi cette expérience de l'ordre, en son être massif et premier, joue toujours un rôle critique) plus solide, plus archaïque, moins douteuse, toujours plus <<vraie>> que les théories qui essaient de leur donner une forme explicite, une application exhaustive, ou un fondement philosophique (Les mots et les choses 12).

Whatever it may be, the important fact is that Foucault postulates an intermediary but fundamental domain that is distinguished as the bare, first, mute and “true” order that lies below all conscious “ordering” activity. Is it this “true” order that the “being of language” articulates in literature? Does this discussion of the death of Man, the glimpsing of a new knowledge made possible through the being of language, and the idea of a pre-epistemic order, point to the thesis that Han adopts as the title of her book, *L'ontologie manquée de Michel Foucault*?

The “ontology” around which Foucault dances in the most poetic of his passages (but never proffers itself in unhesitant terms) does appear in the poetry of Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas as that which literary language points to and from which it is derived. In their middle works, the elimination of the dominant poetic subject and the abandonment of the quest to reconcile the contradictory terms of Man's being, open to language the possibility to speak the truth of an order more fundamental, archaic and original than that of Man. Although neither poet systematizes his thought in philosophic treatises, the second poetry of both authors communes with the writing of a philosopher who dedicated himself singly to the task of “thinking” Being and its relationship to language. In order to explore the nature of this ontological poetry, this thesis will now

turn to German philosopher Martin Heidegger as a means to enter fully into the discussion of Being, its means of “presencing,” and what it speaks.

Foucault’s reticence to speak further about language’s *being* —the original order that historical epistemes belie— and his avoidance of Heideggerian ontology in his philosophical works, can be read as “l’*impensé* de l’oeuvre de Foucault — non pas ce à quoi elle n’aurait pas pensé, ou ce qu’elle aurait oublié, mais ce qui travaille en elle sans qu’elle puisse le formuler clairement, et nécessite donc une élaboration extérieure” (Han 27). In fact, although Foucault does not dedicate a single essay to Heidegger’s works, the German philosopher’s thinking profoundly influenced his own, as evidenced in the frequently cited lines transcribed from an interview with Gilles Barbedette and André Scala in 1984, and published just three days after Foucault’s death. The interviewers suggest that “c’est Heidegger qui, à partir de là, fonde la possibilité d’un discours a-historique,” to which Foucault responds:

Heidegger a toujours été pour moi le philosophe essentiel [...] Tout mon devenir philosophique a été déterminé par ma lecture de Heidegger. [...] Tandis que Nietzsche et Heidegger, ça a été le choc philosophique ! Mais je n’ai jamais rien écrit sur Heidegger et je n’ai écrit sur Nietzsche qu’un tout petit article ; ce sont pourtant les deux auteurs que j’ai le plus lus. Je crois que c’est important d’avoir un petit nombre d’auteurs avec lesquels on pense, avec lesquels on travaille, mais sur lesquels on n’écrit pas (“Le retour de la morale (entretien avec Gilles Barbedette et André Scala)” 1522).

I would assert that for the contemporary study of poetry, Heidegger is, as Foucault opines about his own philosophical development, the “essential” philosopher. Heidegger, more than any other modern thinker, sees in poetry the place where *Being’s* truth —not that of Man’s assertive *cogito*, his accurate perception and verifiable

certitude— is established, originating from its house in language. Heidegger’s spiraling thinking lodges itself in the heart of Being’s question, daring to repeatedly ask and seek answers to the interrogatives Foucault’s writing poses. Although Heidegger’s critics observe in his work a turn (*Kehre*) between *Being and Time* (1927) and his “Letter on Humanism” (1947), the entirety of his works and arguments is dedicated to the underlying examination of the being of Being (Inwood 231-32). “The being of Being” is a postulate of existence that interrogates the word “is” as *the* true question that must be answered before all others. In Heidegger’s later writings —the period that most interests us here— the question of Being is examined in direct conjunction with language, and more specifically with poetry, where “one may hear the call of the language that speaks of the being of all these beings and respond to it in a mortal language that speaks of what it hears” (Hofstadter x).

Before we turn to Heidegger’s view on poetry and its role in revealing Being, it is relevant to recall his evaluation of modern man in relationship to his world and language. We find notable parallelism between Heidegger’s discussion of “Enframing” (*Gestell*) and Foucault’s description of the modern episteme. In the chapters that follow, where Girri’s and Cadenas’s critique of modern man and his relationship to his reality is examined, Heidegger’s perspective will be a complementary to that of Foucault’s diagnosis of modernity. Heidegger’s 1954 essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” predates Foucault’s 1966 diagnosis of Man’s manner of forming discourse and, through such practices, approaching and understanding his world. This essay will take us to the threshold of the question of Being and poetry.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger is concerned with reaching a critical comprehension of Western history and thought in the modern age, an era he defines as dominated by science and technology. Heidegger discovers the etymological and functional roots of technology in the Greek practice of *techne*, a type of instrumental “bringing forth” of things (originally handcraft and art) into unconcealment, not in and of themselves and revealed as such to the human being, but through a controlling mastery and “fixing” of things, seeking to dominate them and secure them for himself. It is a knowledge that seeks mastery over that which rises and comes to presence on its own. *Techne* signals the incipient distancing of man from Being, in action as well as in thought; from *techne*, philosophy learns to approach the things of the world as objects that thought should grip and set in order.

Like Foucault will do later in his epistemic descriptions, Heidegger historicizes forms of knowledge, a practice that he terms manners of “revealing Being.” Heidegger actually states that “the word *techne* is linked with the word *episteme*. Both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 13). In his description of *techne*, Heidegger points to the Descartes’ “*ego cogito ergo sum*” as the clearest breaking point that heralds the modern age: “Man becomes that being upon which all that is, is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the relational center of that which is as such. But this is possible only when the comprehension of what is as a whole changes” (“The Age of the World Picture” 128). Modern thought objectifies all that it considers through representation, setting it up

before man as subject to be “present at hand” (“The Age of the World Picture” 131).

Translator and critic William Lovitt comments that:

Modern technology in its essence is a ‘challenging revealing.’ It involves a contending with everything that is. For it ‘sets upon’ everything, imposing upon it a demand that seizes and requisitions it for use. Under the dominion of this challenging revealing, nothing is allowed to appear as it is in itself (xxix).

Through technology’s representation, all things including life, nature, history and men themselves are processed and positioned to be used and controlled as a “standing reserve” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 17) — a term Heidegger uses to signify that which is available to man and ready for his use. Man and his technology reveal Being through the configuration of Enframing (*Gestell*), which is “the gathering together that belongs to the setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering as standing- reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of Enframing” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 24).

Man is an agent: as subject he represents reality as an object to himself in order to gain dominion over things and make them available for his use and will. Heidegger alleges that Enframing encumbers the revealing of things as they appear in themselves. Here Heidegger’s understanding of a “thing” is of great relevance, and for such, I draw upon his lecture from the year 1950, “The Thing,” dedicated strictly to its study. Heidegger recalls various historical senses of a thing —as an object that is present-at-hand or put before us, even if it presences only in mental representation; as the sum of perceptible qualities; as a bearer of properties; as a form imposed on matter; as a

something and not a nothing ("The Thing" 164-67) — all of which he groups together as stemming from Western metaphysics. He then argues that things have never shown themselves *qua* things: “the thing as thing remains proscribed, nil, and in that sense annihilated. This happened and continues to happen so essentially that not only are things no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet at all been able to appear to thinking as things” ("The Thing" 168). We will shortly return to Heidegger’s alternative answer to “what is a thing?” which proposes a change of assessment, seeing and relationship with beings, as this thinking relates directly to poetry’s role. For the moment, it suffices to emphasize Heidegger’s prognosis that for man today, the “real” is “taken in such a way that it first *is in being* and *only* is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth” ("The Age of the World Picture" 129-30). Under Enframing’s dominion, everything exists and appears as though it were man’s making: “It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself” ("The Question Concerning Technology" 27). Heidegger reads this mode of thought as the culmination of Nietzsche’s will to power, which dismantles all transcendental values of society, but places Being and beings in the grasp of the individual subject and consciousness where their principle meaning rests in serving some end which can be controlled. Girri and Cadenas criticize this type of technological thought, especially in the way in which it relates to language in its common usage.

Language, in such a context, is restricted to mere instrumentality, as a tool for fixing signification, value and order to things through representation, thus making them available for man’s disposal. Subjectivity and man’s domination over the world as his

object is anchored in the structure of technological and metaphysical language, grasping things as objects through the linguistic sign and rendering them statically present. The sign is functional equipment that makes its referential context accessible. Under the hold of human subjectivity and Enframing, language is reduced to the role of expressing and transmitting man's thinking, feeling and willing, seen as his faculty and possession through reason. Metaphysical representation is the utterance of a subject caught up in the calculation of objectivity's conditions through language.

The overwhelming predominance of Enframing makes man oblivious to other ways of "revealing" or knowing; the monopoly that technological rationality holds over truth-claims and reality, causes man to ignore other experiences, meanings, possibilities and truths. We may now observe with greater clarity the similarity of Foucault's description of the modern episteme and Heidegger's account of Enframing. Both philosophers consider the human being's relationship to his world and knowledge as a historical phenomenon — not an intrinsic and inherent attitude and position. Whereas Foucault's declared historic neutrality is belied by his hopeful tone when speaking of the possible death of Man, Heidegger does not couch his description of Enframing in any uncertain terms. Heidegger denounces directly the danger of Enframing, and particularly man's unawareness of his own fundamental part in it. William Lovitt writes that: "In this 'oblivion' that blocks the self-manifesting of Being, man's danger lies. The danger is real that every other way of revealing will be driven out and that man will lose his true relation to himself and all else" (xxxiv). As I have stated previously, Girri and Cadenas seek to go beyond the human being's experience in what Foucault calls the modern

episteme of Man, and what Heidegger refers to as the age of Enframing. Whereas Foucault maintains a more aloof distance to the historical phenomena he describes, never pronouncing openly his preference for a radical change in the organization of knowledge and the human being's role, Heidegger actively attempts to trace an alternative way of approaching the world outside of these conceptual frameworks. Girri's and Cadenas's writings also embark down such a path —if less systematic—, and Heidegger's radical example will be illuminating in understanding these poets' projects.

1.6 THE QUESTION OF BEING

In defining Enframing, Heidegger never loses sight of the central question around which his entire works revolve: that of Being. Enframing is a means of revealing Being but in such an overwhelming and rigid fashion that it gives the misconstrued appearance of being the only manner in which things come into presence and the single path man's experience can take, to so great an extent that man forgets that he has forgotten Being. Heidegger's lifelong project adopts a series of angles and positions from which to approach this most fundamental question of Being. The first of these is an attempt to ask the question of Being within the context of the being that is capable of articulating it: man.

In his most canonical work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger critiques and analyzes modern subjectivity and *Dasein* —Heidegger's term for human existence as a “Being-there” or “Being-in-the-world”— which define *Dasein's* relationship with and oblivion of Being. In Heidegger's thought, Being is not understood, as it is in metaphysical

humanism, as the “‘most general’ being that encompasses all beings or ‘as the product of a finite subject’” (Gosetti-Ferencei 40). In Heidegger’s thought, Being is rather the happening of truth as unconcealedness. Being is the “isness” of existence and it is this “is” that is constantly interrogated by Heidegger. George Steiner articulates the difficulty in speaking of Being: it “has at one and the same time an indefinite meaning and an overwhelming present one” (50). As neither a “how” or a “what,” Being is first approached by Heidegger through its presencing to Dasein, as the one entity capable of asking the ontological question of Being by means of questioning his own being (Gelven 13).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to think the question and forgotten state of Being within the ontic condition of *Dasein*’s temporality and his state of fallenness (*Verfallen*), through the existential analytic of *Dasein*. Fallenness is *Dasein*’s tendency to be distracted by the world of beings and their presence, a state of idle stupor, without attending to his own Being-there: *Dasein* is occupied with “idle talk” or empty chatter (*Gerede*), “curiosity” (*Neugier*) or the incessant fixation with distraction and novelty, and “ambiguity” (*Zweideutigkeit*) or a facile and superficial public disclosedness of something (Being and Time 210-19). *Dasein*’s fallenness is his inauthentic mode of Being-in-the-world, and Heidegger grounds his study of the ontological in *Dasein*’s ontic existence in time and in a world of other beings, as the horizon or site of Being’s disclosure. In accord with critic Gosetti-Ferencei, the forgetting of Being is not solely *Dasein*’s forgetting, but also Being’s withdrawal and concealment, a concept that is present in all of Heidegger’s work: “A relationship to Being turns out to have the

structure of Beings's own self-showing: the *aletheia*-structure [the ontological structure of the truth] of unconcealedness and hiddenness" (36). The phenomenological appearance of things and Beings is always only partial, and *aletheia* itself is the structure of the presence *and* absence of truth.

As was stated previously, Heidegger's own thinking takes several prominent turns (*Kehre*), the first one being a move away from seeking an understanding of Being through the transcendental a priori structures of *Dasein*, to a disclosure of Being through art and particularly poetry. Heidegger arrives at an understanding that poetic language, liberated from the binds of logic and Enframing as well as from the metaphysics of subjectivity, is the most propitious ground for a thinking of Being. Heidegger emphasizes the self-concealing, mysterious and elusiveness of Being and posits art and language as the dimensions in which Being's revealing-concealing duality is made evident, and where things and the human being are restored to Being itself. Although Girri and Cadenas do not use Heidegger's very particular vocabulary, their ideas commune with those of Heidegger's in seeing in poetry an opening for the thinking of what *is* as presence and absence.

Art and poetry in particular are, for Heidegger, the privileged spaces for Being to be experienced. Unlike modern *techne* as technicity, which functions as a reductive totalization of that which is revealed for man's use as equipment, art and poetry are a form of deconcealing in which the work of art is a self-sufficient, autonomous presence, although created by the human hand. Beyond the circumstances and processes of its genesis, the work is self-subsistent and its most prominent feature is *that it is* rather than

it is not (Heidegger "The Origin of the Work of Art" 63). The nature of art is defined by Heidegger as "the truth of beings setting itself to work" where "to set" means to "stand in the light of its being" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 35). Art is not mimesis but the bringing to light of things by making them show in the founding of truth, understood as a bestowing, grounding and beginning. Hans-Georg Gadamer clarifies this concept of beings "standing-in-themselves" when he writes:

What Heidegger means can be confirmed by everyone: the existing thing does not simply offer us a recognizable and familiar surface contour; it also has an inner depth of self-sufficiency that Heidegger calls 'standing-in-itself.' The complete unhiddenness of all beings, their total objectification (by means of a representation that conceives things in their perfect state) would negate this standing-in-itself of beings and lead to a total leveling of them. [...] In the work of art, we experience an absolute opposition to this will-to-control, not in the sense of a rigid resistance to the presumption of our will, which is bent on utilizing things, but in the sense of the superior and intrusive power of a being reposing in itself. Hence the closedness and concealment of the work of art is the guarantee of the universal thesis of Heidegger's philosophy, namely, that beings hold themselves back by coming forward into the openness of presence. The standing-in-itself of the work of art betokens at the same time the standing-in-itself of beings in general (226-27).

A thing, when understood outside of its customary status as object through representative thought, is for Heidegger a self-sustained and self-supporting presence that comes into its own being always in relationship, and in the gathering and mutual belonging of the "fourfold" in the "oneworld," which is the world. The "fourfold" is a poetic and difficult way of understanding the world outside of the conceptual framework of *Gestell* and its subsequent derivation of subject-object. The "fourfold" is not a concept that can be grasped or explained; Heidegger describes it as the mirror-play (*Spiegel-Spiel*) of four elements —earth, sky, divinities and mortals— which are betrothed to each other

and freely appropriate each other and are joined to form the “world.” It is only in the thing understood as a thing, that these four are in free play that “sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another” (“The Thing” 177). The fourfold’s belonging together is made evident in the thing, as the point of intersection of their mirror-play. The thing itself is left in its mystery as that which gathers and unites the fourfold as the world. In fact, the gathering of the four in staying is called the “thinging of the thing,” and that event is what allows the world, as the unitary “oneworld” of that “fourfold” to come into its own.

Heidegger’s preferred example of a thing is a jug whose jug-character is shown to be its void which allows for the gathering of drink and its outpouring: a drink which is given by sky and earth betrothed and poured out for mortals as a libation or consecrated gift to the gods. Heidegger’s very poetic thought seeks to recall the mutual belonging and entrusting of all elements to each other —the oneworld which is also the world— that is unconcealed through the presencing of the jug as thing (“The Thing” 170-73). It should be stressed that Heidegger does not seek to grasp the thing in any definition, but rather to recall and respond in wonder to the thing’s gathering and uniting of the fourfold. Heidegger warns that things do not appear by means of human making or representation, but at the same time, that they cannot presence without the vigilance of mortals (“The Thing” 179).

The presencing of things as things in this new sense is made possible in large part because of art and poetry. As we may recall from before, Heidegger writes of art’s nature as the “truth of beings setting itself to work.” Truth, for Heidegger, is approached over

time in different manners that can be seen as complementary. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” truth refers to the “opening up, clearing, lighting, the self-showing of beings in overtness.” This self-showing is not for the human being’s perception, will and understanding but is the being’s own way of being present. Later, in “...Poetically Man Dwells,” Heidegger returns to the problem of truth as the “rightness and fitness by which beings belong to one another” (Hofstadter xx). This evolution of the Heidegger’s thought about truth signals the fourfold, and each element’s own way of existing in belonging in mutual appropriation to the others. The open and light interplay of the fourfold is truth as the “disclosure of appropriation,” which indicates the dance of being as a light, easy, open appropriation of all things which, in this relationship, brings them into the light of their own. In much of Girri’s and Cadenas’s writing as well, poetry will attempt to afford a way of approaching things that sets them in their own being and belonging. Girri writes in *El motivo es el poema*: “Que el poema refleje las cosas con la espontaneidad que ostentan al aparecérsenos” (75) and Cadenas, in this same vein writes a brief poem, “Flor” which simply reads: “Desde qué profundidad surges/ como llama/ para esconderla” (“Memorial” 231).

Art and poetry are where the truth of beings and things is set into work. The following summarizing statement of critic Dilip Naik should make more sense now when he states that “Being as setting-free and letting-be allows the thing to appear. Then, and only then, can we properly say that the thing *is*” (46). The place where this occurs is in art and poetry, and the event of or happening of this disclosure is given the name of *Ereignis*,

a topography of the historical disclosure and withdrawal of Being. *Das Ereignis* is the event of the fourfold:

The mutual lighting-up, reflecting, *eräugnen*, is at the same time the mutual belonging, appropriating, *ereignen*; and conversely, the happening, *das Ereignis*, by which alone the meaning of Being can be determined, is this play of *eräugnen* and *ereignen* (Hofstadter xx).

The event of disclosing allows each thing to be and to presence in openness. The work of art and the poem open the place for things to find their full, mysterious, appropriate dimension in the belonging together of the fourfold in one, and make this happening pertinent to man. Art lets beings be in their imminent “thereness,” as present presence.

1.7 THE HOUSE OF BEING

Within the arts, poetry holds a privileged position, because language in its fullness—not referring to its predominantly current state of being unattended and worn out, used up, employed for empty communication, possessive representation or idle chatter— is called by Heidegger the “house of Being” (“What Are Poets For?” 129) and its saying is the “flowering of Being” (Heidegger “A Dialogue on Language”). Language is not, for Heidegger, a fixed, objective construct or system of signs and ciphers in which a thing called Being is posited and possessed by a subject. The “house” in which Being is sheltered is the precinct of the absent gods. Dilip Naik explains that

The temple is not the god. It does not ‘have’ the god. It only makes way to his presence precisely by not making him present in anything that is presently available [...] Language is the house of Being in that it calls to the presence of Being, a presence which is not the presence of something readily present, but a presence sheltered by and in absence (19).

As the “house of Being,” language and the word give Being as a promise in its showing of the “isness” of things. For Heidegger, language is a revelatory blossoming of Being in that the word is the closest to Being’s truth: it reveals Being’s nature as the unconcealment of concealment, which is at the heart of things themselves. The poetic word grants things their “thingness” of mutual appropriation and belonging, at the same time as it demonstrates their mysterious and ungraspable essence. In a parallel manner, Being itself is always shown in a dual play: in the presencing of beings, Being itself withdraws to allow their presence. The word is of this same nature:

The word is not, properly speaking, because it would signify totally, present its transparent sense without obstacles, but because, cut off, it remains open to... (The ellipses mark what remains to be said.) The word is dedicated, promised, and yet, in this promise, *nothing else* promises itself, neither the kingdom of Being nor that of God —nothing but the promise (Froment-Meurice 74).

Being is brought to word in language for it renders apparent the impossibility of its absolute univocity. Whereas language as technicity requires a totalizing, controlling and exhaustive revealing, the poetic word allows things to be brought into presence without requiring them to be fully present (Gosetti-Ferencei 59). This idea resonates fully in Girri’s and Cadenas’s poetry and essays, and the following chapters will dedicate space to exploring how each poet conceives of the poetic word. In Heidegger, this word is a saying in which “[l]anguage speaks as the peal of stillness” (Heidegger "Language"), maintaining in its center the unsaid, the silent, that which remains concealed. If language is understood as *aletheia* or unconcealment, it nevertheless streams —much like the Greek river— from concealment (*lethe*) and is forever inseparable from mystery and the unsaid. Stillness is not simply the absence or negation of sound, but as critic Gerald L.

Bruno writes, it is a plenitude “not in the metaphysical sense of a totality in which everything is contained (in place), but in the sense of a palpability for which there is no determinate object” (94). Stillness’s peal is the calling of the world and the thing into their own as self-disclosure within the nearness of the fourfold. The round mirror dance of earth, sky, gods and mortals is the peal of silence and is what language speaks.

We can briefly refer to the first verses of Cadenas’s poem “Rilke” to glimpse the accord between Heidegger’s thought with that of our poets. In this poem, things are given to themselves in their proper and mysterious exactitude an existence that is not fixed, but one of “happening” through silence:

Las cosas supieron, más que los hombres,
de su mirada
a la que se abrían
para otra existencia.
Él las acogía transformándolas
en lo que eran, devolviéndolas a su exactitud,
bañándolas en su propio oro,
pues ¿qué sabe de su regia condición
lo que se entrega?

Piedras, flores, nubes
renacían
en otro silencio
para un distinto transcurrir (“Gestiones” 443).

For Heidegger, language is essentially poetry, and the essential being of poetry is a saying as showing, a letting appear in the open. Everyday language is not fundamentally different than poetry, nor is poetry a higher mode of everyday speech. It is simply that poetic language, unlike that of daily use, still resounds and responds to the peal of stillness, Heidegger specifies that “we are to think of the nature of poetry as a

letting-dwell, as a —perhaps even *the*— distinctive kind of building” (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 213). Poetic “building” is not conceived as man’s mastering and shaping of language to become his means of expression through a poetic formula or a knowledge of poetic speaking. For Heidegger, there is the disbandment of the idea of agency in poetry:

For, strictly, it is language that speaks. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal [...] But the responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry. The more poetic a poet is —the freer (that is, the more open and ready for the unforeseen) his saying— the greater is the purity with which he submits what he says to an ever more painstaking listening, and the further what he says is from the mere propositional statement (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 213).

The human being’s relation to language is one of listening, not that of speaking subjects. What should be noted as well, as Gerald Bruns observes, is Heidegger’s radical statement that “The peal of stillness is not anything human” (Heidegger “Language”). Language is not human in its essence or provenance; it seems simply to occur, to issue forth and places a claim on man, to which he responds, answers and accepts through listening. Listening and speaking are intrinsically linked together, and that speaking that listens is the human answer and acceptance of language’s claim and call. When the human being speaks as a listening to language, his is a saying that speaks what has been heard. Girri writes of the experience of poetry as an austerity of the individual and subject, when the poet is an instrument who listens: “El tránsito en que aquello de ‘el ritmo de lo escrito es el ritmo del que escribe’ caduca, y a partir de allí no se escuchará sino el ritmo del poema” (“El motivo es el poema” 69).

Language is not given to man as a tool for rational cognition and apprehension of knowledge, but rather as something that he experiences. Man is a privileged listener or custodian who submits himself in attentive awareness and openness to the summons that the voiceless peal of language addresses to him. The human being —or mortal, as Heidegger refers to man in his idea of the fourfold— alone is the medium and the permeable locus that opens as the place of disclosure for language and of things. Liberated of the language of dominating humanism and will, the human being is but a clearing, an open space for Being to speak in language. The mortal's proper relationship with language is one of attentiveness but also of renunciation. In poetry, language makes present things in their thingness, but it can only do so in guarding silence and stillness within words. Poetic language draws one up to the rift where words themselves fail and abdicate their power of plenitude in presence, letting things be without seeking to overcome them. In poetry, language resists keeping things under control, and the naming of things in poetry preserves that which “cannot be subsumed or assimilated into our orders of signification” (Bruns); language in this sense cannot be made ready at hand through signs, propositions or conceptual systems which can structure discourse. For the human being, to experience language is for the subject to be divested of itself and all that pertains to it, to be left open as an ear to be possessed, appropriated by a silent call. The peal of silence appropriates mortals and allows them to appropriate earth, sky and gods —not in the sense of subjective possession over objects— but as a figure in a play, which he does not determine and to which he is expropriated.

To be a poet involves a loss of subjectivity that does not signify self-annihilation, but rather a belonging to the peal of silence and to the round dance of the fourfold. The poet renounces subjectivity and his consequent place in the center of Enframing. Man is not eliminated, but reappropriated to his world through his open attention to it. This state of attentive disposition—in which the metaphysical “I” as the locus of thought and knowledge is overcome—is very dear to both Girri and Cadenas, and it is reiterated as the condition necessary for the writing of poetry. Girri recalls Keats’s experience of writing as a stripping oneself of a fixed identity: “despojarse, mientras el poema progresa (esto a expensas de aquello), de los incontables yoés que en él conviven, y cuya fase última, el sentimiento de nulidad, coincidiría con la culminación del poema” (“El motivo es el poema” 71). In various poems, like this brief one, Cadenas extols the appropriate posture of the human being: “Atención/ redoma hechizada,/ néctar de estar presente” (“Memorial” 246). For Heidegger as well, this is mortals’ mode of being appropriate to the world, and the poet’s saying is the ultimate manner of coming into our own. Heidegger writes:

The encountering saying of mortals is answering. Every word spoken is already an answer: counter-saying, coming to the encounter, listening Saying. When mortals are made appropriate for Saying, human nature is released into that needfulness out of which man is used up for bringing soundless Saying to the sound of language (“The Way to Language” 129).

By saying and bringing language to voice, the poet moves along a path that creates an open space where the world, in its four parts are set free and allowed to be. Truth is set into work in poetry, in the sense that mortal saying freely sets the world and beings into

presence and brings what is absent into absence. The truth of poetic saying is an event (*Ereignis*) in which everything, including man, comes into its own.

One can summarize Heidegger's understanding of poetry with the term *Gelassenheit*, the letting-be of things as a letting-go of representational thought and subjective will. *Gelassenheit* is a reverent and quiet sheltering which attends things in their mysterious and ungraspable self-unfolding, outside of *Gestell* and technological enframing. Poetic dwelling and living in the open allows thought to be set free, avoiding completely the attempt to reduce the Other to the Same by allowing the human being to abide in the mysterious company of the other through language's saying of that which is withdrawn. Poetry does not, for Girri, Cadenas or Heidegger (especially the Heidegger of the 1950s-1960s) restore man to a lost utopian paradise. Rather it simply allows man to dwell on the earth, in the company of others in a way other than through representation, calculation, sense-making and domination. The poem gives a new direction to thought where there is a release of traditional metaphysical notions of the subject and object to come to a dwelling of care, listening and preserving of that which is other but to which one is expropriated and through which one comes into ones own.

Through examining Heidegger's approach to poetry, we have come to a possible understanding of what Foucault may have glimpsed as that which could succeed the death of Man. Heidegger's understanding of Being, moves the human being outside of the center of knowledge and welcomes him —but not as subject— to dwell and belong in the world. In art and poetry, Heidegger encounters a method of setting this new knowledge to work experientially. To resituate the human being in relationship to Being

in both presence *and* withdrawal is a radical turn from the posture of Enframing or the structure of knowledge edified by Man that Foucault describes. Such an approach to the human being, his relationship to the world and language may seem to some readers to be fanciful, foreign and a conundrum for cognition. With locutions like “the thing things” or the “fourfold,” Heidegger asks us to let go of definitions, dominance, and disposal of these traditionally called “others” and to let them —and ourselves— be. This approach to the human being, language, knowledge and the world will facilitate our reading of Girri’s and Cadenas’s works, for both authors articulate similar positions.

1.8 THE EASTERN SLOPE

Where Heidegger’s notions about language, about the “poetic open” and the idea of *Gelassenheit* as a letting-be and setting-free challenge traditional Western thought, it finds uncanny resonance and parallels with various philosophical traditions of Eastern Asia, particularly Taoism and Zen Buddhism. To bring this discussion full circle, it is notable that both Girri and Cadenas were consistent readers of Taoist and Zen texts, as well as the works of Jiddhu Krishnamurthi. Girri and Cadenas directly reflect on their readings of Eastern philosophy and religion in both their poetic and essayistic works. These Oriental texts enhance our poets’ perspective, and offer a means of exploring ideas such as the reduction and elimination of the subject, the adoption of a state of open and present attentiveness, the coexistence of opposites within ambiguity and reconciliation, and the role of silence, the void and nothingness.

Many of these topics should already seem familiar from Heidegger, and it is in the company of this philosopher that we will approach several prominent ideas taken from both Taoist and Zen (Ch'an) Buddhist traditions that appear in the writings of Girri and Cadenas. This turn to Eastern traditions is coherent within the philosophical framework thus far examined. In seeking to move beyond the episteme of Man and the structure of Enframing, both Foucault and Heidegger see in non-Western philosophical experiences a way to distance themselves from traditional metaphysics of the subject, a fundamental concern in Girri's and Cadenas's poetry.

In dialogue with a Japanese Zen monk, Omori Sogen, in Uenohara, Foucault comments about the "current crisis of Western thought" and the possibility of finding a new path "en confrontant la pensée occidentale avec la pensée de l'Orient" and he adds "Ainsi, si une philosophie de l'avenir existe, elle doit naître en dehors de l'Europe ou bien elle doit naître en conséquence de rencontres et de percussions entre l'Europe et la non-Europe" ("Michel Foucault et le zen: un séjour dans un temple zen" 622-23). In this same occasion, Foucault highlights what he sees to be most important about Zen "mystic" practices: the goal of the attenuation of the individual — the same figure that edifies the modern episteme. As Uta Liebmann Schaub demonstrates, Foucault's discussion of a new literary language, where the individual as Man disappears, finds its parallels in Oriental texts. She writes that "This new language would be" and here she quotes Foucault, "the exact reversal of the movement which has sustained the wisdom of the West at least since the time of Socrates" (313). It seems clear that Foucault's

anticipation of an arrangement of knowledge beyond Man, would draw at least in part from Eastern thought.

In Heidegger's works, Oriental texts and concepts play even a more prominent role. With Taiwanese philosopher Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, Heidegger translated into German eight chapters concerning the *tao* of the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao-tzu, one of the most important Taoist texts (Hsiao 97). Hsiao asserts that this experience exerted a "significant influence on Heidegger" (98) and that much of what Heidegger later "'brought to language' has frequently been said in the thinking of the Far East" (94). Although he was reticent to speak openly about his familiarity with East Asian ideas and his sources⁷, various studies have demonstrated that Heidegger was already familiar with German translations of *Lao-Tse* and Zen texts as early as his writing of *Being and Time*.

Heidegger also shared dialogues with various prominent Japanese philosophers — Kuki Shuzo (the author of the first book-length study on Heidegger), Yamanouchi Tokuryu, Miki Kiyoshi, Tanabe Hajime (the "founder" of the Kyoto School) and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (Zen's chief exponent in English). Most well-known by readers of Heidegger is his 1954 "dialogue"⁸ with a Japanese professor of German literature, Tezuka Tomio, "From a Conversation on Language: Between a Japanese and an

⁷ See Graham Parkes' complementary essay "Rising Sun Over Black Forest: Heidegger's Japanese Connections" included in Reinhard May's book *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*. Trans. Graham Parkes. 1996. New York: Routledge, 79-117.

⁸ I write the word "dialogue" within quotes, because as Reinhard May has demonstrated in the work cited above, most of the words attributed to the "Japanese" are in fact comments of Heidegger's own authorship, and several of the topics "discussed" were, in fact, never touched upon in conversation. May has textually compared Heidegger's published version of this "dialogue" and Professor Tomio's detailed account of their conversation, finding large discrepancies in their recollection of their dialogue. In addition, May has

Inquirer,” published in 1959. Here, Heidegger asks about the Japanese characters for the word language (*kotoba*) and the meaning of the Japanese word *iki*, which in the dialogue get translated as “grace.” The explanations given coincide with Heidegger’s thoughts about language and the grace and stillness from which language speaks. Precisely because of the apocryphal nature of many of the “Japanese’s” explanations, this “conversation” is revealing in that it demonstrates Heidegger’s independent knowledge of Taoist and Zen Buddhist texts — the sources he used to craft the answers he attributed to the Japanese professor.

Many articles have been written about what seems to be the rich “sympathetic resonances” (Parkes "Rising Sun Over Black Forest: Heidegger's Japanese Connections") between Heidegger’s ideas and East Asian thought, ranging from parallels with Vedanta to modern Japanese philosophy, in particular that of the Kyoto School⁹. For the purposes of this study, these observations are pertinent in the measure that Heidegger — whose philosophical view of poetry, language, things and the human being’s role beyond that of subject is perhaps the most radical attempt within the Western tradition to open a new mode of thinking— seems to draw much of his inspiration from far Eastern philosophical traditions. Critics like John Steffney, see Heidegger’s later works as a path of thought that closely approximates certain East Asian ideas, but are still less “radical” than the complete transcendence of all dualities that is posited at the center of Zen and Taoist beliefs (324). Alberto Girri and Rafael Cadenas, as is clearly observable from their

identified the Taoist and Zen sources that “inspired” many of the words that Heidegger wrote as having been spoken by his Japanese visitor.

poetic and essayistic works, find important stimulation in Taoist and Zen texts for proposing “radical” alternative approaches to understanding the poetic act, the role of the subject and the type of knowledge proportioned through poetry. The following examination of several key notions from both traditions will be the last step in completing the constellation of concepts that will be drawn upon in the analysis of both poets’ works. In order to build on the ground already established, when outlining certain Taoist and Zen concepts, the parallels found in Heidegger’s thought will be recalled. Due to the scope of this study, only those ideas that resonate most clearly in Girri’s and Cadenas’s works will be examined: 1) the underlying unity of all 2) the dispossession of the self; 3) the concept of the empty and silence; 4) the state of present presence; 5) *satori* or sudden illumination.

1.9 THE UNNAMABLE WAY

We will begin with a few ideas that are central to Taoism, an ancient body of knowledge whose multifaceted teachings touch on almost all aspects of life, from warfare to literature. The most important classic Taoists texts are undoubtedly the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* (a text composed in China probably during the 12th century B.C. attributed principally by Wen Wang and used for divination), the *Lao-tzu* or *Tao-te Ching* (a compilation of highly condensed teachings and insights originally intended for a ruler, dating from around 500 B.C., and traditionally attributed to Lao-tzu), and the *Chuang-tzu* (a monument of Chinese literature from the 4th – 3rd century B.C. that offers a philosophy

⁹ See the volume edited by Graham Parkes: *Heidegger and Asian Thought*. 1987. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P.

for private life and seems to illustrate metaphorically the *Lao-tzu* (I-ming vii-xix). Other major Taoists texts, such as the *Huai-nan-tzu*, the *Pao-p'u-tzu* and the *Lieh-tzu*, have not been as widely disseminated or translated. As the basis of Taoist religious and philosophical ideas, we will primarily consider elements of the *Tao-te Ching*.

Girri and Cadenas write poems that refer directly to the idea of *tao*, so it is here that we will begin. In very simple terms, *tao*, from which Taoism takes its name, is generally translated to mean the “Way,” path, course, as in the course of nature or the flow of water. As Jonathan Star signals, the word can be both noun or verb: “It can represent the substance of the entire universe and the process by which the universe functions” (Star 272). *Tao* is beyond all description, and even if it overwhelms human comprehension, language and thought, it seems to admit a speakable aspect:

Tao is both Named and Nameless
As Nameless, it is the origin of all things
As Named, it is the mother of all things (L. Tzu 14)

Tao connotes the unchanging, absolute potentiality that exists before any thing can come into being and simultaneously the impermanent, dynamic world that flows from it. *Tao* has been described as the region where the world of nonbeing (or the reality that is not finite or determinate) comes to relate to the world of that which is determinate, individuated and *there*. Non-being does not have a negative charge; the nothingness or void with which it is associated is simply the non-manifestation of perceptible qualities and the harboring of all possibilities. The functioning of *tao* is the “so of itself” that comes into being spontaneously on its own accord. It can be thought of as the “is-ness” of all existence, things, forces, orders and rhythms. Lao-tzu writes in verse 34:

The great Tao flows everywhere
It fills everything to the left
and to the right [...]
It brings all things to completion
without their even knowing it (L. Tzu 47)

Tao is the movement of non-being to being. Being brings phenomena into presence through the process of differentiation from that which is hidden in the mystery of the same. Jeaneane Fowler's description of *tao* is helpful in summarizing the characteristics mentioned above:

The source of all creation, then, is the mysterious depth and darkness of *Tao*. There are no distinctions between this and that or even between Non-Being and Being, or non-existence and existence. It is the potential for all things and that to which all things will return — the utter silence of the primordial Void. It is cosmic totality, Void or chaos (*hun-tun/ hundun*) that projects itself outward to form the whole of the universe and then reverts back to chaotic completeness. In this sense *Tao* is beyond One, beyond unity, but always present throughout all creation, “deep and always enduring” (110).

The above descriptions may resonate with certain ideas developed within the discussion of Heidegger's thoughts about language and Being. Heidegger, in fact, writes often of “way-making,” as early as *Being and Time*, and the idea is later developed in works such as *Woodpaths*, *On the Way to Language* and *The Fieldpath* (Fowler 79). This idea of *tao* in Heidegger, according to Reinhard May, is associated with that region or “freeing ‘clearing [Nothing], in which what is illumined reaches the Open [*das Feie*, Nothing] together with what conceals itself [Being]’” (39). The *tao*'s simultaneous revealing and concealing of being and non-being reminds us of Heidegger's description of language. Joan Sambaugh writes: “This is not exactly Heidegger's language, but surely the true spirit of his thought” (90).

Although it would be erroneous to try to equate Heidegger's understanding of language and the central notion of *tao*, in approaching Girri's and Cadenas's works, I would venture that such a pairing is not far-fetched. Neither poet seeks to systematize their thought in an over-arching structure nor do they adopt or endorse that of any particular religion or philosopher. However, both do strive to reach an understanding of reality and literature from an angle other than that of traditional metaphysics of the subject. Heidegger's experience of Being through language and the experience of *tao* as that which flows spontaneously as the dynamic, myriad of things of existence and their essential unity, leave no room for Man as subject, creator of order and articulator of truth. We have already discussed this dimension in relation with Heidegger, and we will now turn to a brief examination of the idea of the subject in how it relates to Taoism. This will allow us an even greater understanding of verses such as these by Cadenas: "No soy lo que llevo/ sino el recipiente./ Lugar de la presencia,/ lugar del vacío" (Memorial 236); or these by Girri: "... aun muriendo/ no perezco, soy, tengo,/ estoy en el Camino" (El ojo 32).

In Taoism, all creation is conceived as a cosmic force that radiates beyond itself into the vast multiplicity of forms. Essentially, all reality is also that center of non-differentiation and non-duality. *Tao* holds the unformed potentiality of all the world's manifestations as well as all of the realized forms, and is considered to be even beyond and prior to the idea of the One. All is *tao*, which underpins everything, relates them together and makes them belong: "At the great Origin there was nothing, nothing, no name./ The One arose from it; there was One without form./ In taking different forms, it

brought life [...] / Before any shape was given, their roles were assigned, / varied and diverse but all linked to one another” (Palmer 97). The human being, as one of the differentiated elements of the creation, is limited in his experience of reality as subject or individual consciousness. Taoism calls the wise to seek a different experiential knowledge of what *is* through the following recommendation: “the ‘I’ of the self has to lose its ‘me’” (Fowler 115).

The abandonment of the “me” of the self allows one to reach a point of equilibrium, a resting state of emptiness and stillness. Each entity continues to maintain its innate nature, but sitting in forgetfulness of its individuation, one becomes a mirror that reflects the flow of existence and its underpinning unity: “Where ‘this’ and ‘that’ cease to be opposites, there lies the pivot of the Way. Only when the pivot is located in the center of the circle of things can we respond to their infinite transformations” (Mair 15). The ego abandoned, there is no attachment to this or that, for the empty self contains all and none: In the *Chuang-tzu* it is written:

The heart of the wise man is tranquil.
It is the mirror of heaven and earth
The glass of everything.
Emptiness, stillness, tranquility, tastelessness,
Silence, non-action: this is the level of heaven and earth.
This is the perfect Tao. Wise men find here
Their resting place.
Resting, they are empty (Merton 80).

The human being who is empty, still and at rest is in “correct” living, or “*te*,” in accord with the *tao*. In this state, human action and being are able to experience *tao* both through all beings and that which is not manifest. *Tao* is not something that is acquired, for it is

ever-present in all that is and is not. However, *te* refers to the expression and experience of *tao*, of its operation through one particular form of *tao* (Star 260). *Te* is action, thought and being that is cultivated to allow the creative power of *tao* to manifest in its naturalness and spontaneity of endless transformations — even as this means from life to death.

Te entails following the principle of *wu-wei*, which in general terms means “not acting,” not in the sense of inactivity, but rather as action that is carried out through non-assertion, without the interference of the will. Through *wu-wei*, human action and thought are free of selfish, controlling constraints and conditions and naturally correspond to the movement of *tao*. *Wu-wei* and *te* rely on a quiet, watchful listening and seeing that is receptive, effortless and non-interfering. To adopt this mode of being is to allow oneself to wander without purpose, and in complete detachment and forgetfulness of results. *Wu-wei* is the antipode of the current Western forms of knowing and being, as described by Foucault’s analysis of the modern episteme of Man or Heidegger’s Enframing.

It implies a posture of openness, responsiveness and suppleness in which the human being is more like an empty vessel — a metaphor which was already examined in Heidegger’s writing in connection to the proper understanding of a “thing,” and which also appears in the poetry of Girri and Cadenas. The *Lao-tzu* reads: “Clay is molded to form a cup/ yet only the space within/ allows the cup to hold water” (L. Tzu 24). In Taoism, the mind emptied and freed of desire erects no obstruction or distraction to the acting of *tao* through him. The human truly comes into his own through emptiness or silence, as a receptive being in harmony with the rest of existence. This in no way implies

the annihilation of the human being, a negation of his existence or the fundamental questioning of his belonging within reality. Rather this “emptiness” is of the possessive “me” and the realization of man’s complete potential and his place in the natural order. In a similar fashion, the human being is called to occupy a place in Heidegger’s fourfold mirror play with the earth, sky and gods.

The “empty” is often described in Girri’s and Cadenas’s works as a type of hearing —similar to what Heidegger described as that attentive listening which constitutes the proper function of the poet— or a type of mirror-like seeing. The eye, untainted by the subject’s limitations, desires and preconceived notions, acts a neutral mirror that gathers in its gaze all things equally. In his typical epigrammatic style, Cadenas offers this poem: “¿Qué hago/ yo detrás de los ojos?” (Memorial 261). The self as subject (“yo”) is not only *not* needed, but also constitutes the impediment for “authentic” seeing and living, in which the self is “possessed” by being and reality. Another poem by Cadenas thus reads: “Sé/ que si no llego a ser nadie/ habré perdido mi vida” (Memorial 249). The self discovers its truest role through the dispossession of its own parameters and the openness to the creation and to what is to be created. Girri’s poem entitled “Cuando la idea del yo se aleja” describes how, when the body (“blando organismo”) no longer knows how to say “Yo soy,” the self finally reaches a new understanding that is not tied to “enfermedad y muerte,/ vejez y nacimiento” (“El ojo” 46). Although this may prove an unachievable ideal, when the traditional idea of the self is overcome, Girri ventures that the emptiness or “vacío” that will occupy its place will allow a radically different type of thought: “ni sin, ni con, ni dentro,/ ni en el medio,/

vacío sin dualismos, oquedad,/ sin uno y dos” (“A lo que el mirar con atención revela” El ojo 87).

The Taoist idea of the “empty” offers Girri and Cadenas a model for a type of knowledge, made possible through the poem, that escapes the parameters of Western metaphysical thought. Girri describes his ideal for poetry in *El motivo es el poema* as:

Poemas (proyectos), como la imagen del círculo que empieza y concluye en sí mismo. Lo que todo poema quisiera tener de mandálico: *soporte para la meditación y soporte para el éxtasis*.

La figura circular, emblema de lo muy lleno y muy vacío, resultante (merced al desarrollo dentro del poema) de un ciclo (“El motivo es el poema” 275-76).

For Girri and Cadenas, poetry is not embraced as the expression of man’s self-projection, but as an independent manifestation of being that maintains in its center the silence and emptiness from which language was brought to presence. Girri elaborates on this point in the same book: “El poema responderá, entonces, a la necesidad de que el *lenguaje sea encarnado*. Y, al mismo tiempo, nunca reunirá todos los elementos. Algo o mucho quedará fuera; de allí el poema que nace” (277). Language “incarnates,” as Heidegger also wished to demonstrate, the double nature of “that which is” as revelation *and* concealment, be it called “Being,” in Heideggerian terms, or *tao*. The poem is born of that which remains outside, unarticulated and silent. Its speaking is ambiguous in that its own center remains empty, and by that virtue convokes the undifferentiated whole from which it arose. As a type of “mandala,” the poem is a representation of reality and universal forces. By reading the poem, one “enters” the mandala and arrives at its center

from which, it is traditionally understood, emanate the processes of disintegration and reintegration.

At the center of *tao* is a fundamental ambiguity that allows for simultaneous arriving and departing, being and nonbeing. Taoism understands the universe as constantly changing and pulsating from unity into plurality and back again. There are no static, “fixed,” or idealized identities, as everything is continuously being transformed and reshaped. In addition, all labels meant to designate, classify and determine the “identity” of something inevitably fail because their intelligibility is always only correlative, as is written in the *Chuang-tzu*: “Can a man cling to the positive/ Without any negative/ In contrast to which it is seen/ To be positive?” (Merton 88). Words cannot be fixed, unequivocal values that “translate” reality “objectively.”

This brings us to a fundamental paradox at the center of the practice of poetry and the writing of philosophical texts about *tao*. Through language, Girri and Cadenas seek a more authentic understanding of their reality and their place within it. Their poems circle around an intuition that displaces themselves as subjects, speakers and generators of language: one of silence, of stillness, of quietude. Any attempt to articulate such a state, however, automatically restricts this original experience. Both Taoist texts and Girri’s and Cadenas’s poetry attempt to use words as a way to facilitate a fresh way of observing and approaching the world so that this silence and original unity is made present in all that is experienced. However, to literally create silence and to name the unnamed is a task that will inevitably fail. For this reason, the opening verses of the *Lao-tzu* are eloquent in highlighting this conundrum: “A way that can be walked/ is not the Way/ A name that

can be named/ is not the Name” (L. Tzu 14). Nevertheless, Taoist masters did not remain silent, but wrote their words around this ineluctable caveat. And similarly, Girri and Cadenas persisted in the path of poetry despite the sense that their ultimate goal would forever be unattainable. Girri aptly sums up this realization in the last verses of his poem, “Imaginar un lenguaje” when he writes: “y la intuición/ de cómo el que pesa, arroja, mide la piedra/ puede equivocarse, suele errar/ y yerra con frecuencia,/ suele/ transformar y expresar la piedra/ en una mentira” (“Casa de la mente” 121).

1.10 ZEN

This mistrust of language brings us to the second Eastern religious and philosophical tradition that informs certain aspects of Girri’s and Cadenas’s writing and was also influential in Heidegger’s views of man’s being in relation to other things¹⁰. Zen—also known as Ch’an, in the Chinese—is a branch of Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) Buddhism that originated in China in the 6th century, with the arrival of the first patriarch of Bodhidharma to China from India in 527 AD. It gained full development in Japan in the 12th century and currently has three main branches: the Rinzai (Lin-chi), the Soto (Ts’ao-tung) and the Obaku (Huang-po). One of people most instrumental in bringing Zen to the West was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966), a Zen monk, professor of Buddhism in Otani University in Kyoto and Columbia University of New York, the author of numerous books on Zen, Mahayana Buddhism, mysticism, and Japanese

¹⁰ I have previously referred to Heidegger’s frequently quoted comment to a friend who observed him reading one of D. T. Suzuki’s books on Zen, “this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.” See

culture, and the translator of Taoist and Zen texts. Suzuki's works have been widely distributed and translated into Spanish. Both Girri and Cadenas quote from Suzuki's writings; Girri does not specify the books he cites¹¹, but Cadenas refers his readers to *Budismo zen y psicoanálisis* written by Suzuki in collaboration with Erich Fromm and published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica¹². Although numerous books now expound the fundamentals of Zen, I will refer principally to Suzuki's explanations, as his were the books to which Girri and Cadenas refer.

According to Suzuki, much of Zen Buddhism draws on its historic predecessor, Taoism. As Suzuki frequently quotes the *Lao-tzu* and *Chuang-tzu* in order to illustrate Zen concepts, certain overlap in Taoist and Zen ideas should not be surprising. Suzuki insists that all schools of Zen are centered around what is considered to be Buddhism's essence and fundamental experience: the realization of *satori*, the Japanese term that means enlightenment or awakening. In an explanation of *satori*, Suzuki writes: "*Satori* constitutes the essence of Zen, for where there is no *satori* there cannot be any form of Zen. Zen revolves around this axial experience" (*Zen and Japanese Buddhism* 47). Gautama's attainment of a new state of awakening under the Bodhi-tree is set forward in Buddhism as the ultimate goal to which to aspire, be it for one's self-realization (as in

William Barrett, "Zen for the West," *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

¹¹ See, for example, the May 1st entry of Girri's *Diario de un libro* where he quotes Suzuki as writing, "Es como la lluvia que cae sobre justos e injustos; como el sol que se levanta sobre el bien y el mal, sobre tus enemigos y sobre tus amigos. En cierto sentido, el sol es inocente y perfecto, como lo es la lluvia. Pero el hombre que perdió la inocencia y adquirió el conocimiento diferencia lo justo de lo injusto, el bien del mal, los enemigos de los amigos."

¹² See Cadenas's "Bibliografía" of *Realidad y literatura*.

Hinayana Buddhism) or to thereafter guide others to a similar state (as taught in Mahayana Buddhism).

Satori is a mode of unmediated consciousness of reality, the experience of the harmonizing of all contradictions and opposites beyond even the very notion of the “One” and the “many.” Much like being united with *tao*, it does not annihilate the self, but “my individuality, which I found rigidly held together and definitely kept separate from other individual existences, becomes loosened somehow from its tightening grip and melts away” (Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki 105). The human being enters into the field of emptiness in that all egoism is shed and the self is free of all noetic paradigms, knowledge and means of approaching reality. Nancy Wilson Ross in her anthology of Zen, quotes Shinichi Hisamatsu who writes: “To realize the *satori* of Zen is to become one who is unhinderedly free, released from all chains, one who recognizes himself truly, being no longer attached to the forms of matter and spirit” (45). In one of his descriptions of *satori*, Suzuki enumerates several of this experience’s identifying characteristics: a sudden intuitive insight (as opposed to learned knowledge); a sense of the “beyond” or absolute; a “feeling of exaltation” as the restrictions on the individual being are done away with; an “authoritativeness” in the sense that the direct and personal experience of Being is insuperable; the affirmation of all that is and is-not as simply *being*; an “irrationality” in the sense that no reasoning or intellectual determination can grasp or make communicable this experience; a “momentariness” because *satori* is not gradually learned or unfolded, but rather is suddenly experienced; and an “impersonal tone” because *satori* is not the “romantic” culmination of a personal

other-worldly experience of the divine, but a here-and-now event that occurs in daily life within the realm of the commonplace (Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki 103-08).

Through *satori* perception, the “awakened” master experiences the “just-so” quality of all things and of his own nature, always within the context of a spirit of release, freedom and of simply *being* “This,” without differential value. Through *satori*, there is no need or desire to escape birth or death, nor is there any supreme teaching which one must strive to master. A Western practitioner of Zen, Ruth Sasaki, attempted to articulate this simple “*isness*” by writing:

Only THIS —capital THIS— is. Anything and everything that appears to us as an individual entity or phenomenon [...] is but a temporary manifestation of THIS in form; every activity that takes place, whether it be birth or death, loving or eating breakfast, is but a temporary manifestation of THIS in activity (Sasaki 18).

Sasaki’s explanation seems to be yet another variation of what Heidegger described as the experience of Being or what is understood as *tao* in Taoist thought.

One of Mahayana Buddhism’s most commented sutras, recorded by Nagarjuna in the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, summarizes *satori* perception in its broadest sense: “There is nothing whatsoever of Samsara distinguishing it from Nirvana. There is nothing whatsoever of Nirvana distinguishing it from Samsara” (XXV:19). Employed in Buddhism to refer to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, the term *samsara* constitutes phenomenological existence, often regarded as a negative condition of bondage and suffering. *Nirvana*, in Mahayana Buddhism, is considered to be the state of pure and eternal awakening and selfhood, as characterized by the enlightened Buddha himself.

Nagarjuna's teachings have been interpreted in a variety of manners, but Suzuki's commentary is perhaps the most useful for our purposes. If *satori* consciousness transcends even the very idea of the One and the many, Suzuki likewise elucidates: "a dualistic conception of the world is not the ultimate one, and thus it is a mistake, due to this wrong discrimination (*vikalpa*), to seek Nirvana outside of Samsara (birth-and-death) and Samsara outside of Nirvana" (Essays in Zen Buddhism 92). One attains enlightenment, therefore, within life itself, experiencing its effects in everyday existence. All things and human actions, without discrimination, can be the catalyst for *satori*; once this state is realized, no thing is known as not pertaining to the empty-fullness of all that *is*.

Like Taoism, Zen rejects the capacity of language to adequately capture or communicate *satori*. As an *experiential* and individual realization, no amount of explaining is capable of transmitting *satori* so that another may grasp and attain it. Zen differs from other forms of Buddhism by placing little emphasis on the study and memorization of philosophical concepts as a component in the road to enlightenment. Words are most often deemed by Zen to be a form of linguistic segmentation and division of reality, and an obstacle to a direct experience of complete, non-rationalized understanding. Suzuki expounds: "words are representations and not realities, and realities are what is most highly valued in Zen" (Zen and Japanese Buddhism 65).

Two important exceptions to this appreciation are worth mentioning. The Rinzai school of Zen distinguishes itself from the Soto and Obaku branches through the utilization of *koans* as a fundamental element of a disciple's education. *Koans* are

statements, questions or dialogues offered by a master to his student for the cultivation of Zen consciousness, through a type of contemplation that surpasses rational thought. In the presentation of utterances that seem to possess no logical explanation, the mind reaches a precipice that requires it to jump beyond its normal parameters to suddenly grasp a greater truth¹³. An estimated 1700 *koans* are the “auxiliary means” that induce in the seeker an awakening to the universe’s fundamental unity, an occurrence that is only possible when “the attentive mind is relaxed, free from purpose and ego, and fully devoted to the task” (Dumoulin 131). In *koan* exercises, words themselves do not “capture” awakened consciousness, but they do facilitate for the seeker a manner to supercede the accustomed path of strict logical thinking and representation. In this sense, the Zen assessment of language coincides with that of Girri and Cadenas, who also persistently question the ability of words to “translate” objectively their vision of reality, but paradoxically consider poetry to be the best (and perhaps only) manner to approximate their experience. Girri and Cadenas also often recur to aphoristic writing in their contemplation of the nature of poetry, being and reality. Although not properly *koans*, these economically phrased and often seemingly illogical statements also induce the reader to move beyond the regular boundaries of rational thought, as in this couplet by Cadenas: “El rostro que no se ve/ es mi rostro” (“Memorial” 269).

The second exception Zen makes for words is the practice of poetry, and in particular that of *haiku*, which attained its full expression in the seventeenth century in

¹³ A famous example highlighting the seemingly non-rational formulation of *koans* is recalled by Suzuki with these words: “A monk asked Tung-shan, ‘Who is the Buddha?’ ‘Three *chin* of flax’” Daisetz Teitaro

Japan. The economy and apparent simplicity of this poetic form —with its alternate verses of five, seven and five syllables— takes as its subject the mundane, immediate, and simple elements of everyday existence, with the aim to cultivate the consciousness of the miraculous “Here” and “Now.” The practice of *haiku* puts in evidence the concept that all beings, indiscriminately, are simply “thus” and that *satori* occurs here, in the company of the things that surround us. The humble elements that constitute each brief verse are not symbols of the infinite, but communicate directly themselves their perfect being in the realm of the ordinary: “Enlightenment now equals ‘every day,’ and the ‘every day’ equals enlightenment. [...] Reality is one single Now. This Now is every day” (Dumoulin 110).

In his comparative study of Zen texts and English literature, Reginald H. Blyth recalls a conversation with Suzuki in which the latter suggested that “poetry is the *something* that we *see*, but the *seeing* and the *something* are one; without the *seeing* there is no *something*, no *something*, no *seeing*. There is neither discovery nor creation: only the perfect indivisible experience” (Blyth 84). Verses are not the place for “my” expression but a disinterested emptiness open for all things to presence. Poetic articulation allows for a cultivation of *prajna*, an “intuitive” perception that surpasses thought founded on the opposition of the one who sees and what is seen, and it transcends attachment to any particular thing (Suzuki Studies in Zen 85). Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), one of the greatest Japanese *haiku* poets and Zen disciples, wrote about a practice of poetry that allows true insight:

Suzuki, Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one – when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural – if the object and yourself are separate – then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit (Basho 33).

In a similar spirit, Alberto Girri wonders “out loud” about the relationship of the subject and object in poetic writing:

¿En suma, el escribir considerado como un camino, no arte? ¿Escribiendo ‘naturalmente’, sin empeño aparente (sin intención ni reflexión)? ¿Conseguir el vacío de sí se asemeja a esa extrañeza, distancia, que nos acomete al recorrer lo que hasta allí hemos escrito. Sólo se cumple si el escribir no busca escribir, cree en el desinterés y el renunciamiento. [...] ‘La ausencia del pensamiento no consiste en no pensar en nada, que ya sería un tomar contacto, apegarse a esa nada, sino un pensar en todas las cosas instante a instante, en perpetuo desapego. (Que todos los pensamientos resbalen perpetuamente sobre las cosas sin fijarse jamás)’ (“El motivo es el poema” 265-66).

In a poem belonging to a series dedicated to Rilke, Cadenas also ponders this type of literary experience: “Es tan recio estar/ ahí/ desabrigado/ sin exigir nada/ salvo/ el dictado hondo,/ su ráfaga/ anonadante,/ la voz/ sin sueño,/ el sonido/ que no pertenece a nadie” (“Gestiones” 451). Common to these three appreciations of poetry is the almost ascetic approach to the self, not an erasure of one’s being, but a resituating in which the subject is placed in the same context and on the same level as its poetic object, without room for distance between the two. The *prajna* (intuitive) perception that Zen attributes to poetry is a personal “impersonality” that comes about through detachment and nondeliberation.

In Zen poetry, as well as the writing of Girri and Cadenas, there is an understanding that silence ultimately contains the underlying truth, but neither of our

poets, nor Zen authors renounce words altogether. Instead, an aesthetic is adopted that attempts to constantly reduce linguistic embellishments, metaphoric expression and hyper-personal self-indulgences. The first-person poetic subject is eliminated, reduced or resituated in the verses and allocated a non-centralized role. As a poetics naked of ornaments, verbal distractions and artifices, its foundation is the spontaneous and natural here and now, wrought in a dry, incorruptibly exact language that leaves no space for anthropocentrism. This writing often approaches the prose fragment with its natural speech, immediacy and clarity in expression, without narrativity. Although an artificial order behind the words obviously exists, an ethical, as well as aesthetic choice is made to write without a clear design, with an inherent insecurity that permits the immediate, instantaneous and every-day elements to make themselves present and visible. This direct, unbiased, fresh and open attitude assumed in poetry is thought of as an act of pure and spontaneous awareness, which at its fullest, leaves only listening and seeing — the perceiver and the perceived having dropped away.

1.11 THE ILLUSION OF THE “I”

This description of a pure state of being and perceiving where the self as subject is eclipsed, is an attempt at articulating what perhaps may be *sunyata*, or unity with *tao* or even the Heideggerian *gelassenheit* of the fourfold, from which an imperfect but necessary poetry is born, offering a glimpse of that which is fully reached only in silent experience. The disbanding of the “I” and Man as the axis of knowledge — as is the case in the arrangement of the modern episteme — is a project that has been undertaken under

various guises, several of which have been the focus of this chapter. I mentioned earlier in this chapter one other source common to Girri and Cadenas that informed their writing and search to disband the metaphysical subject: Jiddhu Krishnamurti, (1895-1986) an Indian thinker and teacher who was educated by the Theosophical Society in Adyar¹⁴ and whose lectures and writings were widely disseminated in the West.

Krishnamurti dedicated his life to giving public talks with the “one cause of setting man free from ignorance, from illusion and from fear and belief” (Shringy 33). Krishnamurti’s primarily oral (transcribed) teachings, as analyzed by Dr. R. K. Shringy, reflect many of the ideas we have already discussed thus far. His purported aim was to help others to reach liberation from the mind’s constrictions and fragmentation of existence that are summed up in the construction of the self and “I” in contrast with that which is not me. Liberation is the complete awareness of the “Real” without any divisions of outer and inner, and free from time and its implications of becoming, instead of simply *being* “what is.” “Becoming” projects a false duality of consciousness and a pursuit of what *is not* yet, leading to desire and discontent, the division between subject and object and the perpetual cultivation of the self as a means of permanence and security. Krishnamurti considers the “I” to be a fictitious entity composed of ideas, memory and experience that out of fear, attempts to construct constancy, feeding on the

¹⁴ The Theosophical Society in Adyar was created in 1882 as a successor to the Theosophical Society founded by Helena Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott in 1875. Other important members were Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater, the former who adopted Krishnamurti, educated him, ordained him the head of the “Order of the Star,” and proclaimed him to be the World-Teacher and Maitreya, responsible for the education of humanity. In 1929, Krishnamurti disavowed this position and all organized religions, distancing himself from the Theosophical Society and its claims.

past to respond to the future. Girri quotes Krishnamurti in translation about this point: “El temor generalmente difundido en todos los dominios, y el temor psicológico, dentro de mí, son siempre el temor de no ser. De no ser esto o aquello, o de no ser simplemente [...] Para liberarse del temor se debe explorar la idea de permanencia en su totalidad” (“Diario de un libro” 51-52).

In stark contrast with fear and never-fulfilling *becoming*, Krishnamurti proposes the idea of “choiceless awareness of what is,” a state of emptiness and freedom from “duality, time-space and self-consciousness” (Shringy 350) that normally condition the mind. Nowhere does Krishnamurti imply that liberation signifies a disengagement or flight from the “Real,” an abstract existential escape or the dissolution of manifestation itself; rather “liberation is *into* manifestation and not *away* from it” (Shringy 357). Without a self-center and the limitations of self-conscious existence constructed through lineal time, the human being is free to live spontaneously, in constant relationship and regeneration with Being, which itself is in constant and total transformation. A Venezuelan critic writes about Cadenas’s poetic imperative, that mirrors Krishnamurti’s thought: “La vida se convierte en una pura atención, es despojada de todo contenido (de todo ‘conocimiento’ diría Krishnamurti) para que la realidad se perciba en toda su inmediatez” (Isava Briceño 52-53). The immediate, unmediated “choiceless awareness” that is liberation’s hallmark, is the consciousness of true creativity and the unbridled freedom for its manifestation. In what he terms a “movimiento krishnamurtiano,” Girri contemplates that:

Despiertos a medias, propendemos a observar, juzgar, fragmentariamente; dividimos y comparamos: así la trama del poema, así su tono, etc. Despiertos por completo, las divisiones cesan, trama y tono confundándose: no más efectos de nuestras *proyecciones* ("El motivo es el poema" 92).

Such a state of wakefulness allows the author —having eclipsed his own fragmentary projections— to achieve a holistic means of poetic composition that is born of an unprecedented openness to the “real” that reciprocally grants the poetic work this “real”:

...admitimos estar ante una Obra de lo real, abierta poéticamente a *lo real*. Lo que ganamos de la lección y efectos del modelo depende de nuestras capacidades para adecuarnos a él. No en aspectos exteriores, no en la imitación, pero en lo que lo particulariza como modelo: su especial vehemencia interna para dar *lo real*. / Ese contacto suministraría el impulso, y/o la situación poética ("El motivo es el poema" 267).

I would like to conclude this chapter with a word dear to Girri, Cadenas, Heidegger, both Taoist and Zen philosophers and Krishnamurti: “attention.” Attention dispossessed of all content; attention given here and now to *being*; to reality in its immediacy as experience but established nowhere; attention as the impersonal contemplation of a mind quieted to offer an empty space to a dynamic and undivided reality forever in flux; attention as a silent offering of the self that recognizes the world’s self-sufficiency and supreme nobility; attention as the stepping back from representation to listen to language’s speech; attention as language’s manifestation in lucid, pure, precise and truthful words. With this word also as our banner, we will now turn our attention undividedly to first Girri, and then Cadenas, to examine in greater depth how these ideas resonate in their respective works.

CHAPTER 2: ALBERTO GIRRI

2.1. The Impossibility of Knowledge

2.1.1 GIRRI, THE AUTHOR

When asked by a dear friend and fellow author, Jorge Cruz, about the motives behind the unswerving cultivation of his poetic vocation, Alberto Girri replied that “...escribo para alcanzar un conocimiento de mí mismo, sin idealismos ni encubrimientos; en otros términos, para llegar a ser lo que soy” (Girri Cuestiones y razones 77). With this directive, the following pages seek to provide the sketch of Girri the writer, the scope of his literary works and the manner in which we will approach his poetry of self-knowledge in this chapter. As Girri’s life and works can, in many ways, be appreciated as a coherent whole, I consider it relevant to begin with a brief review of his biography, relatively unknown outside of Argentina.

Alberto Girri was born on November 27, 1919 in the Almagro neighborhood of Buenos Aires, the son of a Venetian father and a Bonaerense mother. He later moved to the Flores neighborhood of the capital, attending Francisco de Victoria primary school and the secondary school Colegio Nacional Bernardino Rivadavia. From the age of four, Girri began to read and write, his favorite books being those by Almafuerter¹⁵, Emilio Salgari¹⁶, Alexandre Dumas, Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, Jorge Luis Borges and various English-language poets (Girri Cuestiones y

¹⁵ Almafuerter: pseudonym of Argentine poet Pedro Bonifacio Palacios (1854-1917).

¹⁶ Emilio Salgari (1862-1911): prolific Italian author of adventure novels.

razones 167). Even as a child, Girri actively sought to cultivate his literary vocation, alleging that he intuited that the act of transforming internal feelings and thoughts into words “alimentaría con sus resultados, permanentemente, mi vida y la de los demás” (Girri Cuestiones y razones 43).

Girri completed his academic studies in the Department of Philosophy and Philology at the de Universidad de Buenos Aires where he helped found a short-lived literary magazine, *Leonardo*, contributed poems to the Department’s publication *Centro* and first became acquainted with fellow authors Olga Orozco¹⁷ and Héctor A. Murena¹⁸. From his university years, Girri recalls the impact of his inaugural readings of the works of Spanish picaresque novelists, the mystics and Cervantes, as well as the development of his personal cult towards Borges whose books “hasta publicarse *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan*, [...] eran inhallables” (Cruz 179). From Borges’ writings, Girri learned a particular diction in Spanish that approximated English in its concision and neutral rhetoric. These qualities, along with the epigrammatic, impersonal, precise, and ironic dimensions that he appreciated in Borges’ writing, Girri began to adopt in his own poetry. Girri also credits Borges with his initial introduction to Coleridge, de Quincey and

¹⁷ Olga Orozco (1920-1999): Argentine poet and author of numerous volumes of verse including *Desde lejos* (1946), *Las muertes* (1951), *Los juegos peligrosos* (1962), *La oscuridad es otro sol* (1962), *Museo salvaje* (1974), *Cantos a Berenice* (1977), *La noche a la deriva* (1984), *El revés del cielo* (1987), *Con esta boca, en este mundo* (1994), *También la luz es un abismo* (1995) and *Relámpagos de lo invisible* (1998). She was honored with the Juan Rulfo Latin American Literary Prize in 1998.

¹⁸ Héctor A. Murena (1923-1975): Argentine essayist, narrator, playwright and poet of great influence in the fifties and sixties. Murena collaborated in *Sur* and the *Suplemento literario* of *La nación*, co-directed the *Colección de estudios alemanes*, translated the Frankfurt School, and authored a number of original works, including: *La nueva vida* (poetry, 1951), *El juez* (play, 1953), *El pecado original de América* (essay, 1954), *El nombre secreto* (essay, 1969), *Caína muerta* (novel, 1971) *La metáfora y lo sagrado* (essay,

Elizabethan poets, a personal discovery that fomented his preference for other English-language poets. In exploring further this terrain, Girri would later translate many of his preferred authors into Spanish: Eliot, Pound, Williams Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, John Donne, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Roethke and Stephen Spender, among others.

In 1944, Girri began to contribute in the production of the magazine *Correo literario*¹⁹ and soon after became a regular collaborator in the *Suplemento literario* of *La nación* newspaper, directed by Eduardo Mallea²⁰. *Playa sola* (1946), Girri's first book of verse, corresponds to this period. A prolific writer, Girri maintained a steady rhythm of publication, releasing a new collection of poetry every two or three years. Invited by José "Pepe" Bianco²¹ in 1948, Girri sent his first submissions to the renowned literary magazine *Sur*, directed by Victoria Ocampo. He later joined its Committee of Collaborators ("Comité de Colaboración") and continued to contribute his own articles and poems to its pages. That same year, Girri published his first book of translations, *Poesía inglesa contemporánea*, with William Shand. These roles —poet, translator and collaborator— define Girri's existence, becoming his vital axes, with only slight

1973). An anthology of his work entitled *Visiones de Babel* was published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica in 2002.

¹⁹ *Correo literario* was the short-lived project of Spanish émigrés to Buenos Aires. Arturo Cuadraro, Luis Seoane, Lorenzo Varela and Javier Farías produced the magazine from Nov. 15, 1943 until Sept. 1, 1945.

²⁰ Eduardo Mallea (1903-1982): Prolific Argentine essayist, novelist and diplomat. He directed the *Suplemento literario* of *La nación*, served as president of the Argentine Society of Writers and represented Argentina before the United Nations. Some of his most important works include: *Cuentos para una inglesa desesperada* (short stories, 1926), *Historia de una pasión argentina* (essay, 1937), *Fiesta en noviembre* (novel, 1938), *La bahía de silencio* (novel, 1940), *Todo verdor perecerá* (novel, 1941), *Chaves* (novel, 1953) and *Gabriel Andaral* (novel, 1971).

²¹ José "Pepe" Bianco (1908-1986): Argentine narrator, essayist, journalist and translator. Bianco was the Editor-in-chief (secretario de redacción) of *Sur* from 1938 until 1961. His works include: *La pequeña Gyaros* (stories, 1932), *Sombras suele vestir* (novel, 1941), *Las ratas* (novel, 1943) and *La pérdida del reino* (novel, 1972) and *Ficción y realidad* (essays, 1946-1976).

variations: trips abroad to Italy (1959), the United States (1964), Germany, France and England (1968), Italy, Holland, Spain and France (1974), Paris (1975), and Italy and France (1976).

In studying his literary trajectory, Girri cannot be easily identified with his co-generational peers. Chronologically, he is associated with the Argentinean generation of 1940²², a group divided into those who sought to further certain elements of Hispanic American *modernismo*, inspired by neo-romantic trends, and others who explored the recent waves of surrealism, inspired principally by French poetry. This oniric, irrational and highly metaphoric writing was of little interest to Girri, who often felt alone in his literary project. He explains in an interview:

En realidad, yo diría que el auge de esas corrientes y esos grupos [...] me produjeron en general un estado de aislamiento interno y externo. Externo porque la recepción que tuvo mi libro inicial fue de desdén o de burla o de estupor o sencillamente negándolo. [...] Y por otro lado, la presencia de esos poetas de la generación del 40 [...] nada tenía que ver con lo que yo me proponía. En muchos casos me despertaron profunda admiración. Pero una admiración que al mismo tiempo sembró, durante bastante tiempo, dudas respecto de lo que yo mismo hacía (Vera Ocampo 52).

Despite any personal doubts, Girri cultivated his unique voice and developed a particular vision that cannot be assimilated under standard generational groupings. It is because of Girri's exceptional approach and cultivation of poetry within the context of Argentinean

²² The group's "members" —Vicente Barbieri, Enrique Molina and Olga Orozco— often took issue with the earlier avant-garde movement of *ultraísmo*, whose principal proponent in Argentina was the young Jorge Luis Borges. Curiously, when asked to reflect upon this epoch in retrospect, Girri highlighted the fundamental place Borges held in the development of his own poetics, even at a time when Borges was being read by only a limited audience. Girri ascribes to the notion that "la literatura escrita en lengua española es una antes de Borges y otra después de Borges" and attributes to Borges the conception of a new poetic discourse. See: Raúl Vera Ocampo, "La condición de poeta: Alberto Girri," *Creación y poesía* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kir, 1995).

literature that I believe it appropriate to study his works alongside the writings of Rafael Cadenas. In the introduction of this study, I mentioned the numerous literary accolades and public recognitions that Girri received in life. Despite his acclaim in literary circles, Girri's work has not enjoyed wide dissemination outside of his native Argentina, and has remained within limited academic appreciation. By examining Girri's *oeuvre* in conjunction with Cadenas', my intention is not only to demonstrate the parallelism of their evolution, but to also gain a clearer perspective in terms of the place their writings hold within the context of contemporary poetry and thought. Analyzed solely within the scope of their respective generations, we run the risk of mistaking both of these poets as only curious exceptions and not as proponents of an alternate experience of modernity.

As I will do in approaching Cadenas' works in the following chapter, here I also propose a reading of a selection of Girri's writings in two movements. The first encompasses Girri's first production, from 1946 to 1962: *Playa sola* (1946), *Coronación de la espera* (1947), *Trece poemas* (1949), *El tiempo que destruye* (1951), *Escándalo y soledades* (1952), *Línea de la vida* (1955), *Examen de nuestra causa* (1956), *La penitencia y el mérito* (1957), *Propiedades de la magia* (1959), *La condición necesaria* (1960), and *Elegías italianas* (1962). The second extends from 1963 until the publication of his last book in 1990: *El ojo* (1965), *Envíos* (1967), *Casa de la mente* (1970), *Valores diarios* (1970), *En la letra, ambigua selva* (1972), *Diario de un libro* (1972, prose), *Poesía de la observación* (1973), *Quien habla no está muerto* (1975), *El motivo es el poema* (1976), *Árbol de la estirpe humana* (1978), *Lo propio, lo de todos* (1980),

Homenaje a W. C. Williams (1981), *Lírica de percepciones* (1983), *Monodias* (1985), *Existenciales* (1986), *Tramas de conflictos* (1988), and *1989/1990* (1990).

In the first phase, I will consider Girri's persistent epistemological interrogations in relation to the structuring and grounding of knowledge, combined with a marked existentialist anxiety. In the second phase, I will emphasize Girri's attempts to articulate various ontological proposals in response to his dissatisfaction with the rationale of Western metaphysics. This partition of Girri's works should not lead the reader to believe that there exists a radical break in his poetic conception after 1963. Rather, this division serves to shift the focus of this study from the initial queries posited in his first production to the tentative solutions he explores in his later writing. In limiting the focus for this project to this essential axis of Girri's writings, I will not be able to exhaust the rich complexities and polysemic themes present in his texts. Neither do I pretend to offer a reading of each of his individual books. Because of inherent limitations of space, I have selected a corpus of poems that I feel best reflects the underlying purpose of this investigation. Although I will often follow a chronological order in the presentation of individual poems, as Girri returns to the same questions time and time again, I will also recur to grouping poems from different moments in their production. Girri's complete works have been published interspersing his prose and poetry. As this division of genres is a concept that Girri questions, and as his prose offers a complementary form of reflection for his poetry, I will incorporate reflections derived from his prose in my poetic analyses.

The examination of the first stage of Girri's works will begin with an approach to the first-person poetic subject. The distinctive feature of the modern subject, according to Foucault, is that it attempts to discern the world by grounding his knowledge in and through himself. By repositioning all possible knowledge in the centrality of his own figure, the subject soon encounters a series of self-imposed challenges when he realizes that the very source of modern knowledge —the speaking subject that he is— is not completely knowable.

2.1.2 THE SUBJECT THAT I CHOOSE

In his preliminary study to an anthology of Girri's poetry, Horacio Castillo quotes several lines Girri published in *La Nación* in 1977: "En mi caso personal, debo decir, casi a título confesional, que el ejercicio de la poesía no ha sido simplemente voluntad estética sino voluntad de existir a través de la poesía. Ante la inaferrabilidad última del mundo como una gran apariencia, el ejercicio de la poesía es una posibilidad de existir" (Castillo 13). These lines project a stability of the subject that infers an almost harmonious relation between poet and poetry or between subject and its knowledge. The poetic "I," perhaps in a Cartesian attitude, reaffirms its existence only through the vehicle of poetry. Following various aspects of modernity since the Enlightenment (rationalism, teleology and the enhancement of the Schopenhauerian will) the "I" is grounded in the world through an exercise of language that "allows" the poet to produce his own means of existence. In other words, the poet *exists* because he *writes* poetry. A closer reading of Girri's poetry, however, reveals a more complex dynamic of this apparent harmony between the subject

and its language. As we will demonstrate in what follows, Girri's poetic subject is also defined by a fundamental paradox in which his ability to exist in the world through poetry will be contested. Along with this challenge, the whole of the poetic subject will undergo a crisis that will lead to its disarticulation.

Various literary critics of Girri have noted this phenomenon in their studies of his poetry. For example, Barbara Crespo de Arnaud's observations are articulated in the following terms:

Hay dos etapas en la constitución de su escritura: la primera, caracterizada por una mayor metaforización, una retórica más vinculada a lo sensible y la presencia más acusada del sujeto de la enunciación, relacionada con la actitud lírica tradicional. La segunda, en la que se verifica una neutralización de todos estos procedimientos a favor de un incremento del lenguaje lógico, la función referencial y las formas impersonales, vinculadas directamente con el registro de lo intelectual (III).

Crespo de Arnaud's intuitive characterization of the development of Girri's poetics in loose expressions such as a "traditional lyrical attitude" that is exchanged for an "intellectual register" is typical of the analysis his works have received until now. In approaching Girri's crisis of the subject, my aim is to incorporate this reading within a greater context of the modern subject, and in particular, to situate it within Foucault's systematic diagnosis and analysis of Man as the center of the modern episteme, as introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. By establishing a direct correlation between Foucault's theories and my reading of Girri, I intend to demonstrate how the symptoms of the subject's crisis may be accounted for through a thorough revision of the defining elements of modernity. Beyond a mere acknowledgment of this crisis, a Foucauldian reading of Girri's poetry will show how the nostalgia for a lost sense of

stability and a grounded center for knowledge through man, mirrors Foucault's conception of the modern subject and its ultimate impossibility.

At the inception of Girri's poetic journey, the first-person subject predominates as the indispensable element from which any experience of being in the world emanates. In this sense, the subject operates from the assumption of his being the source of order and comprehension of what is. Girri's poetry thus situates us in the middle of what Foucault describes as the condition of the modern subject: Man, here represented by the first-person poetic subject, seeks to establish his dominance as the foundation of knowledge, but inevitably is undermined by his own limitations. Girri's "yo" attempts to gain the clarity that would grant knowledge and meaning to his existence. Nevertheless, a simultaneous perception of his deficiencies undercuts and threatens the consolidation of his understanding of himself and the world. Girri oscillates between a grounding experience of the "yo" that would potentially serve as the base for all possible apprehension, and a disruptive negation of this protagonism. Instead of constructing the realm for Man's transcendental being, Girri's poetry is soon the space for conflict. Critic María Victoria Suárez understands these two defining aspects of Girri's poetic "I" as contradicting "absolutes" that ultimately cancel each other out. To the absolute reaffirmation of existence through poetry, the "I" suffers radical feelings of loneliness, self-deception and even exile from the reality that his presence previously justified. The duality is extended in a continuous juxtaposition of opposites that contradict each positive step taken by the subject toward his reconciliation with the world. Suárez considers this

conflicting movement as a “horizontal negation” through which the “I” gradually undertakes the project of its own annihilation.

In examining Girri’s first books, I concur with Suárez’s interpretation of the primary role of the first person in his poetry: “En medio de la vorágine del cambio universal, el yo que aflora busca un puerto, una forma de permanencia que no sea el cambio mismo” (Alberto Girri: Existencia y lógica poética 37). The “change” to which Suárez refers, can be understood as the constant flux that all beings are subjected to by time —Heraclitus’ river, in the famous analogy. The self wills to overcome his state of contingency through becoming the knowing subject, the articulator of order. Girri explains that his first works were “de orden existencial, en el sentido que era, como en todo adolescente o todo niño, todo joven, una especie de manoteo para aferrar algo que siente vagamente, cual es el sentido de su propia existencia” (Vera Ocampo 46).

To make sense of his own existence, Girri’s subject must transform his surrounding reality into recognizable features. Recomposing the world in the subject’s likeness, would eradicate the threatening counter-presence of the other. This dominion of the poetic subject, however, is always undermined by precisely that which defines him as a *modern* subject, in the Foucauldian sense: by positioning himself as both the subject and object of knowledge, Man is faced with his own finitude as the ultimate unconquerable frontier that bars his ability to fully understand what is. Foucault analyzes modernity through the repositioning of Man as the central object of knowledge. This is what we discussed in the previous chapter as the “analytic of finitude,” a reading of those strategies employed by Man to overcome his limitations in knowing himself, and

consequently, the world. These strategies are the mechanisms through which Man acquires knowledge of the world. The paradoxical nature of these strategies is found in the fact that their source is Man's own finitude. We may recall Dreyfus and Rabinow's explanation of the Foucauldian doublets, the three mechanisms through which Man simultaneously asserts and short-circuits modern positivity:

Seen under this double aspect man appears: (1) as a fact among other facts to be studied empirically, and yet as the transcendental condition of the possibility of all knowledge; (2) as surrounded by what he cannot get clear about (the unthought), and yet as a potentially lucid cogito, source of all intelligibility; and (3) as the product of a long history whose beginning he can never reach and yet, paradoxically as the source of that very history (Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics 31).

Girri's poetry transits this same avenue of thought. A poem that illustrates the concepts that we have hereto been discussing is entitled "Elegir, la opción que elijo," published in *Escándalo y soledades* (1952). The first stanza reads:

Elegir, la opción que elijo,
se acuesta a mi lado,
alternado monstruo
y rama en florecencia.
El amanecer lo trae,
confusiones —de hecho sustancia—,
aíslan el suspiro,
retoman certeza —de hecho finitud—,
tributos de ganas y variantes,
para ser cada vez Alberto Girri,
según el que refleje,
según lo que afuera soy,
con insomnio,
con la cerviz quebrada,
en el lujo de desmentirme ("Escándalo y soledades" 162).

The emphatic "I" that gives voice to these verses exerts its will as the source for choosing the primordial identity of Alberto Girri, and to be able to match his enunciating "I" with

the poet's name. Beyond the simple act of self-acknowledgement and identification, the poetic "I" strives to establish a stable ground for his existence —to become the Same in Foucauldian terminology— avoiding any threatening dissonance (the Other) that could dismantle this constancy of being. In the act of choosing, the subject attempts to control the outcome of his elections and establish the terms of his choosing. Girri clearly comprehends the precarious position of the subject, whose determinations can as easily produce "monsters" as "blooming branches." Confusion and certainty, alternating in the configuration of his subjectivity, produce a doublet that paradoxically founds the existence of the "I" (substance) and its annihilation (finitude). And between will (*ganas*) and variations (*variantes*) the "I" concludes the reflection triggering, as the ultimate "luxury," a negation of preserving "each time" the link between the "I" and the name of Girri. The poem ends with the following verses:

Lobo del absurdo,
aborrecido deslumbramiento,
cruz ansada en mis invocaciones ("Escándalo y soledades" 162).

The (im)possibility of the subject's election, culminates with the desperate hope for countering unavoidable finitude with a talisman for eternity. The Ankh-cross the "I" invokes represented for the Egyptian Christians a syncretic symbol for eternal life. Such a possibility would be the ultimate guarantee of the subject's predominance as the chooser, creator of order and the determiner of meaning. Yet while pronouncing this invocation, the "I" is inevitably confronted by the "wolf" of the absurd that always accompanies the subject. This verse is an acknowledgement of the hazards to which the self as subject is relentlessly *subjected*: the Other that threatens him as the Same, the

origin that continually eludes him, the language he speaks but cannot make transparent, and the unthought that undermines his own cognition. This poem serves as a disclosure of the conundrum of the modern subject in the process of opting to *be* “Alberto Girri,” producing for himself and us an “abhorred dazzle.”

2.1.3 A TIME WITHOUT WINGS OR MEMORY

In her book-length study of Girri’s literary production up until 1985, Muriel Slade Pascoe examines the poet’s treatment of time as a vehicle for approaching the relationship between the world and language, as well as the self and his reality. She divides Girri’s *œuvre* into three periods: denunciation and testimony (1946-1955), solutions (1956-1963) and lucidity (1964-1985). Although we have chosen to read Girri’s production in a two-part movement — all divisions considered to some degree arbitrary — Slade Pascoe’s observations are useful in understanding the position of Girri’s modern subject in what we have termed its first stage.

One element that defines this subject is its denouncement of lineal time that governs the physical world, imposing its inexorably destructive mark on all that is. The poetic voice of this poetry is characterized by its “*sed de absoluto*,” a need for continuity and permanence. Slade Pascoe explains: “A Girri le duele no sólo la conciencia de la desintegración incesante en el mundo sino el olvido progresivo del origen divino, de la ‘real realidad’. Por eso, acusa a su imagen en el espejo de ser ‘préstamo vil, sólo bruma y polvo’ con respecto a lo que recuerda” (35). What the subject “remembers” or intuits is a utopian moment of reconciliation, an absolute or origin before the inception of sequential

time in which language and things perfectly corresponded and man's being and his reality were integral elements of an ulterior order. Girri comments that in writing there is often a "[l]ucha por la expresión (expresividad), esfuerzo para recobrar la memoria de un Paraíso Perdido, algo que, a veces, con inesperados destellos, se actualiza. Y, como una Caída sobreviene cuando ya no creemos que esa memoria podría seguir haciéndose oír" ("El motivo es el poema" 260). This idea of a "lost paradise" from which man has "fallen" is not simply an appropriation of the Genesis myth to explain human suffering, but also a definitive characteristic of modern Man's experience and understanding of his condition.

The search for a lost origin is, according to Foucault, an effect of Man's historicity, which marks the radical break of the modern episteme with the 18th century's taxonomic structures of knowledge. Man projects himself as the center of a new account of the world that begins and ends with himself. Man is no longer one element among others: he is the ordering force behind all possible epistemic knowledge. As the primordial justification for his culture, society and language, the modern Man undertakes the need of explaining to himself and his peers their *origins* in a detailed and exhaustive history in which he and only he can be the ultimate protagonist. It is precisely at the dawn of Man's dream of history that we find the emergence of historical dialectics (Hegel) and its further ramifications (Marx). As he conducts his search for the lost origin, however, Man soon encounters the fact that both his culture and the language to narrate its history are overwhelming factors that precede and surpass him. Dreyfus and Rabinow elucidate:

Although man is defined by the cultural practices which establish the temporal clearing in which objects can be encountered, and this temporality is 'preontologically close' to man since it is his very being, he cannot reflect on

what these practices are precisely because they are too near to him and thus too encompassing (Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics 39).

The need for history is faced with the paradox of having a beginning too distant in time and space to be attainable through his empirical inquiries, and so his “origin” continually recedes or is posited as an equally remote future “resolution” or imminent “return” to that which has been promised since time’s beginning. With this understanding, we can better appreciate Girri’s reflection about the first half of his poetic production, as recorded by Danubio Torres Fierro in an interview:

es como si el vínculo metafísico absoluto haya sido roto en remotísimas zonas y edades, a las cuales nos está vedado retornar. Pero ese retorno puede ocurrir. De acuerdo con la visión paradójica que —creo— siempre opera en mis poemas, lo que acabo de describir no sólo indica la nostalgia de ese paraíso perdido sino también la vaga esperanza de que alguna vez haya una especie de retorno, que de la confusión en la cual está metido el hombre se logre acceder a lo perdido (21).

This “vague hope” is voiced in multiple terms by the poetic subjects that populate the pages of Girri’s earlier poetry. Adopting the persona of the German philosopher, theologian and occultist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), Girri relates one variation of the search for the return:

[...] merced a una voluntad
de ganar lo más sutil
fui tras el secreto lazo
de las cosas con sus nombres,
y tras la causa primitiva
de los encadenamientos:
el número ternario,
el número
representante de Dios,
el que abarca el fin,
el medio,
el principio,
símbolo creado por Dios

antes de extenderse fuera de sí
y crear los seres ("Propiedades de la magia" 288).

The “secret tie of things with their names” reflects the system of correspondences that is presumed to exist at the outset of language where all things could be traced back to a clear and identifiable cause. The search for the secret number that could summarize both origin and resolution reveals the true state of the modern subject in relation to his world: his actual alienation and disconnect from such an “original experience.” Nevertheless, by his will (“voluntad”), he yearns to make transparent to himself the order which he enunciates but cannot comprehend, seeking to be the holder and articulator of the cipher that represents even God.

The crux of Man’s drama as subject is that in narrating his history, he seeks to conjure an original point of departure or a future cessation of his contingency. This process, however, belies his actual construction as the knowing subject: that this ultimate knowing of himself —through an origin or final destiny— will be infinitely postponed. Girri defines modern poetry as a “testimonio de lo inaccesible de versiones absolutas de la realidad, y del reducirse al manejo de verdades sólo relativas, inestables y complejas por definición, y cuyo dramatismo reside en que no las va descubriendo el poeta, las va comprobando” ("Lo propio, lo de todos" 83). Girri’s early texts chronicle the drama of various poetic subjects that attempt to articulate an all-encompassing explanation of reality through which to secure their place at the center of world and make transparent to themselves their own finite being. Despite their limitless will to access an absolute version of reality, their *experience* is that of instability, confusion, relativity and

limitedness, constantly accompanied by the shadow of their own inaccessible origin: a secret absence that fuels their desire. A poem that is representative of modern Man's existential situation is "El examen," published in *Playa sola*, Girri's first book:

Rodeado de misterio,
inquieto y vulnerable como una estatua,
asistiendo sin fe a los pactos del mundo,
emprendía la tarea de escucharme.

Hay en todo lo mío,
en lo subterráneo que me distingue,
un aprendizaje irracional pero certero.
Y desde las resistencias pasablemente juveniles
en que la esperanza deja y deja,
desde las sonatas dulces y los autorretratos dulces,
desde los equitativos exterminios
planeados con vehemencia nocturna,
corre un tiempo sin ala ni memoria,
un tiempo desvelado
que protege y enmascara mi secreto patrimonio.

¡Cuánto pavor y cuánta jactancia enumerada!
En esta mi entrañable duda,
limita sabiamente
el pulso retirado de la noche ("Playa sola" 34).

In the first stanza, the poetic voice announces its position in the world: surrounding him is a mystery that he does not understand. If the world has an order, he does not partake in its secrets. He is vulnerable, exposed and anxious. In seeking answers, he turns to *himself*, to listening to his own voice and what he has established as learning ("aprendizaje"). The subject distinguishes two simultaneous planes: one of time's passing, from juvenile "resistances" to the "sweet" formulations of himself by and for himself, passing through the stages of hope and exterminations. Beneath the endless change inherent to the process of the subject's formation, a timeless stratum of constancy

is sensed that functions in the subject's conception of his identity as both origin and aim. The "patrimony" that is invoked and held as fundamental to his formulation of self, however, is masked and hidden from even the subject himself. The subject concludes his soliloquy with unfeigned honesty: it is doubt and not a coveted origin that defines his existence. Out of "fear" and "boastfulness" Man as subject organizes the narrative of himself, his origins and world that ultimately cannot fulfill him. Meanwhile, Girri insinuates, the indomitable world that Man seeks to order, wisely retires its veiled pulse.

In addressing the problem of time in later books, the strategy and particular angle of the poetic subject varies, although the underlying question remains the same: how to reconcile the figure of Man as subject and his unremitting disintegration and distancing from his source at the hands of time. The poetic voice of Girri's poems fluctuates between attempting to conjure or recover a form of permanence, and denouncing the passage of historical time that corrupts and decomposes all that it carries in its path. Sometimes it is a lost moment of time that is contained in a vague memory that promises to reveal to the subject his transcendental meaning, as in a poem entitled "De pronto": "¿Podré entonces, recuerdo,/ probar tu voluptuosidad,/ tu sentir profético/ descubriendo contigo/ la rueca que me hila, / el huso que me devana/ el hilo que ha de cortarse, [...]" ("Examen de nuestra causa" 198-99). But just as likely the past, as well as the unknown future, brings the terrifying revelation that: "Eres préstamo vil, sólo bruma y polvo,/ Ya que conspiras y saludas y te nutres/ Y hace tiempo aceptaste lo que pronto/ Pronto serás aunque tal mudanza no deseas" ("Trece poemas" 100).

2.1.4 THE DISTINCTNESS THAT PERSISTS IN EVERYONE

For modern Man as the subject of all knowledge, we have seen that the establishing of an origin for his being, culture, language and history is an essential but unsolvable aspect of the episteme that is structured around him. The elusive origin is illustrative of Man's finitude and the conundrum that is inherent to his original structure. Modern Man is defined since his first appearance as a figure in crisis: the identity of the subject is in constant need of (re)establishing its place in the center of the episteme. As he displaced the centrality of God, he is weighted with the burden of proving to himself that he is indeed the conditioning source for all knowledge. It is in this dialectic within himself that the Same and the Other inaugurate an epistemic tension as they exchange places as subject and object of knowledge. The Same, in general terms, is defined by his need to apprehend and define himself and others, rendering them transparent to himself and thus becoming part of his Same. As we recall, it is this drive to which Foucault attributes the birth and expansion of the human sciences. The scope of these disciplines, however, is never far-reaching enough to extirpate those dark regions that inhabit the self or to penetrate and conquer the being of another. The Other, inevitably, is modern Man's constant double; he is the shadow that provides the impetus to Man to establish his knowledge in order to achieve total light, but he is also the perpetual reminder of Man's limitations.

In the first stage of Alberto Girri's poetry, the drama of the Same to overcome the Other is played out in a number of poems through the figures of the poetic subject and a female second person ("tú"). This pairing is a natural one, as the intimacy —both

physical and emotional— between lovers would seem to provide the most providential opportunity for the subject to possess the other and, in doing so, to reveal his own being to himself. This desire is expressed in verses such as the following, from the poem “Epístola de Heironimus Bosch” in which the poetic voice pays homage to the Flemish painter’s insight into human nature, and in particular, to his masterpiece “Garden of Earthly Delights”:

Mas siempre el hombre,
yo, cualquiera, tú mismo,
el hombre y su desnudez
correteando atontado
por jardines de delicias
y planicies infernales
y detrás y arriba
del carro de heno del mundo
en el que cada cual arrebató lo que puede;
su desnudez, no el sexo,
añorando la totalidad de la desnudez,
la primitiva unidad hermafrodita,
el completo ser adán-eva ("Examen de nuestra causa" 186-87).

In these verses, the first person voice identifies himself with men of all times who in both heavenly and infernal circumstances seize and seek to possess the most they can. The drive to procure and master is, on a more profound level, motivated by a yearning for totality. Just as Man attempts to reach his origin, he likewise is compelled to recover a state of complete “Same-ness,” before the self and other were rent apart. The “Adam-Eve being” that is considered to be a “primitive hermaphrodite unity,” represents a utopian state of being and of knowing that would fuse the Same and the Other, ironically abolishing Man as he is presently defined through his “completion.”

Other poems of Girri's further our understanding of the nature of the relationship of Man as subject with the Other. The context of the romantic interaction between a man and a woman serves as the vehicle for exploring what it means to be a subject. It should be noted that "man" and "woman" are arbitrary representatives of the unresolved existential dialectic between what one identifies as the self and the other. Girri commented on this point in an interview with Enrique Pezzoni that there is: "la serie de poemas sobre el amor, en los que una y otra vez se insiste en el abrazo amoroso como prueba, precisamente, de distancia, de separación, de imposibilidad de reconciliar los opuestos" (Pezzoni "El hacedor en su crítico" 157). The final two verses of the poem "La separación" also succinctly complement this explanation: "La procaz esperanza de descubrir en el amor cumplido/ Un perfecto glacial conocimiento de mí mismo" ("El tiempo que destruye" 110). The modern subject acknowledges the limits of his science — both of himself and of the other— and is compelled to surpass them. The act of love appeals to the subject as a way of accessing what is veiled and generally impenetrable to his reasoning, and bringing it to light. The adjective "glacial" is telling, in that the knowledge desired is detached, crystallized, frozen and fixed into icy transparency.

Girri's poetic subjects are not afforded the luxury of cultivating a conciliatory experience of love. The voices that speak from his poems may harbor an initial illusion about their capacity for reconciliation and co-penetration, but experience amends these naiveties. One poem's title summarizes the veritable condition of the subject who acts upon his impulse to overcome his own finitude through approaching the other: "El

engañado.” The poem denounces the deceived lover that “[c]ree buscar el absoluto” and unmasks the motives and the results of such an attempt to go beyond himself:

Ni siquiera la duración del momento
Es cosa que recuerde bien,
Porque su memoria sólo guarda con cuidado
Lo que él es y acepta en el impulso.
Primero, un ansioso, falso apremio
Desafiando al tiempo mortal,
A la pesadilla vergonzosa del futuro;
[...]
Un darse cuenta que el salir de sí mismo
Para verse vivir en otro rostro
No es comunión, es desunión,
Es abandonar en mezcla insípida
Lo distinto que persiste en cada cual.
Y al terminar la pugna,
Devorada ya la imitación que busca,
Vuelve a estar en el sitio de partida,
Y solo ("El tiempo que destruye" 105).

The poetic voice begins by ironically signaling the first barrier to surmounting his finitude: the mind and memory cannot operate outside of the “I” that forms the borders of his consciousness or the time that demarcates his mortality. These conditions assumed, the subject awakens to his manifest loneliness and heterogeneity that cannot be reconciled with the Other. One cannot leave oneself to be merged with another, nor can the other imitate the subject so that their differences are dissolved. Man can never master himself or the other because there will always be “lo distinto que persiste en cada cual.” In an article written about a posterior book of Girri’s, *Valores diarios* (1970), Alice Borinsky comments on the role of the second person in this stage of Girri’s poetry. I believe these observations are relevant to the subject being described in “El engañado”:

El camino que conduce a la respuesta a estos interrogantes se materializa en la relación con el *tú* a quien se vitupera, hiere, utiliza para demostraciones, de quien se sospecha. Es un *tú* cuyo cuerpo (el lugar del sufrimiento físico y el centro de placer) permanece siempre ajeno o huidizo; es un *tú* con una identidad en constante lucha [...] La identidad es, así, delineada como una hipótesis de equilibrio inestable; ser *uno* es un campo de batalla que a veces brinda el espejismo de la autenticidad (884-85).

Borinsky attempts to prove that “El afán revelador de la poesía [de Girri] es descubrir los límites de la elocuencia del otro” (886), but I would argue that it is actually one’s own limits that are Girri’s concern. The one who is vituperated, wounded and suspected is the subject himself, whose identity is never consolidated. One is never *one*, as the Other incriminates the solidification of a unified concept and experience of the self. Man by definition will always be confronted with the radical *autri* that inhabits himself and the things and beings he attempts to know.

Just as Girri concludes that the other is always out of the subject’s consciousness and reach, even in the embrace of two lovers, he also exposes that part of himself that cannot be subsumed in the pronoun “I.” He terms this side of his own being a “fanatical guest,” spy,” and “accomplice” and ultimately says that he “[e]s un hermano”:

Es un hermano
el fanático huésped
alzado sobre mí, dentro de mí
espía y cómplice
resolviendo en péfida igualdad
la oposición y tensión
de mi terrena estructura
que se lanza tras su imagen
como exorcizando lo creado
para crear un hombre nuevo,
inmune a los fantasmas
que dejé de lado,
diezmo que debo pagar

por la anhelada paz
de aquel que desespera.

Es un hermano,
retrospección él, soledad ambos,
rechazándonos, amándonos ("Examen de nuestra causa" 173).

The poetic subject is structured in duality so that whatever he claims to be and know is mirrored in opposition in his twin that stands over and in him. The first person attempts to create himself as a “new man” who is “immune to the ghosts” —the unassailable others— that destroy his peace and wholeness. This “new man” would have to be fundamentally different from himself, so much so as to imply a complete exorcism of what he is thus far. The subject, however, is as close to becoming that Man as he is to reaching and inhabiting his origin. In the end, Girri’s poetic voice acquiesces and subscribes to the equalizing condition of the plural pronoun “we,” which links and reconfigures the profile of the enunciating “I” (the Same) and the “He” (the Other). This correspondence is one of equalizing solitude in which the dialectics of their relationship is endlessly repeated: the Same approaches and loves the Other to gain wholeness and total self-comprehension, but rejects it for not being and becoming the Same. Man as subject in Girri’s poetry will adopt a similar stance with the systems of knowledge he creates for and about himself, as we will presently discover.

2.1.5 THE LIGHT BEYOND MY REACH

The last defining aspect of the modern subject has a direct precedent in the foundational assertion of rationalism: *cogito ergo sum*. As he undertakes the central position in the episteme, modern Man conceives himself as an empirical subject that can

only establish his dominion by founding all of his knowledge on his thoughts. More than being the initial stage for the subject's investigations, his ability to think becomes the source for all that there is to know. Girri ironically refers to Man's intellectual activities as "la labor de clasificación,/ rotulado, encasillamiento,/ de nuestras pequeñas construcciones" ("La condición necesaria" 306). By opposition, that which he cannot think, does not exist for the modern Man. Girri's poetry acknowledges this impulse and critically reveals the paradoxical vision of Man for whom modernity is only available within the limits of his intelligibility. Let us consider this image in Girri's following poem, "La condición necesaria":

En la ilusión de que posees
un yo creador, indestructible,
justo y sin deformidad,
fortaleza
en el dominio de las evidencias,
señor absoluto
de tu casa, tu camino,
señor
de los orbes terrenales ("La condición necesaria" 313)

The "illusion" or hope of a subject capable of projecting perfect sense and order to the universe through the force of his empirical cogito is soon challenged. Girri's poetic subject, questioning a second person in the above poem, deconstructs the self-conferred attributes of Man who believes himself to be not only the "indestructible creator," but also the "absolute ruler" of the earth. Man's experience, however, is not of complete dominion and understanding. From the ironic inflections addressing the imaginary second person of this poem, Girri redirects his critique to a first-person subject in a poem in which he articulates the basic "truth" of Man's state: "...esta sola verdad:/ el orden, orden

de lo que sea,/ ¡ay!, me está vedado” (“Playa sola” 33). Girri evidences what Foucault describes as the crisis of the cogito facing “the unthought”: the realm of epistemic knowledge that is not breached by the modern Man’s reasoning. As pure negativity, the unthought imposes, nevertheless, the boundaries for the positive empiricism of modern Man. As in the conflicting dynamic of the Same and the Other, modern Man’s cogito is determined not only in its positivity, but in the insurmountable negativity of the unthought. In other words, the modern subject is defined not just by its self-given epistemic centrality, but also by the very impossibility of maintaining such a position. In order to *be* modern, Man has to embrace his crisis. In Girri’s poetry, this crisis is acknowledged and immediately confronted. As we will discuss in the second part of this chapter, however, Girri’s poetic “I” will later reconsider his relationship with reality and Girri, the author, will seek to abolish its centrality and presence in his works. At this stage though, the “I” is the only possible knower —the main subject of this world— and it attempts to overcome its empirical limitations by resorting to magic, a strategy through which the obscure regions of reality may be finally accessible.

Girri dedicates an entire book to exploring “magic’s properties.” The opening epigraph argues that magic: “...es el poder, la cantidad, la sustancia, las virtudes, las semejanzas, las diferencias, el arte de unir, de separar, de componer...” (“Propiedades de la magia” 265) — in other words, its power lies in unveiling and harnessing the hidden order and relationships between things that are not discernable through Man’s faculty of reason. From this collection is the following poem, “Bastón”:

Oh Potencia,

gobierno de las regiones límite,
ayúdanos
a que sobre ella,
rama de nogal,
modesta vara sin retoños
menos singular que la felicidad
y que el trébol que jamás florece,
se extiendan
la virtud y la gracia,
concede transparencia
a las veladas aguas de la fuente
donde bañaremos sus nudos,
hazla obediente.
Amén ("Propiedades de la magia" 268).

Presented in the form of a prayer or an invocation, the poetic voice calls for a supplemental artifact, the “bastón,” to act as the key to subdue reality to the will of the knowing subject. The poetic voice appeals to a “power” beyond himself so that the staff’s properties, as well as those of the water that will sanctify it, will have the qualities that he himself desires. The staff’s potential abilities do not emanate from Man’s cogito; in fact, the poem is an admission of the subject’s limitations. Man, here a collective subject, still harbors hopes of governing the “outer limits,” but in order to do so, he is faced with the unknown that dwarfs him. In other poems, such as “El Sueño” (“El tiempo que destruye” 104) or “Bocanadas de adios” (“Examen de nuestra causa” 197), the poetic subject invokes dreams or memories as other means of accessing that unknown region that haunts him with its inaccessible presence. As in the poem “Bastón,” these strategies only reinforce the fact that the scope of Man’s knowledge is restricted and that his centrality in the episteme is precarious, at best.

In addition to exploring the problem of the “unthought” in his poetry, Girri also struggles with an even more basic aspect of the empirical subject: the correspondence of things and words. Language’s power of representation is what Man utilizes to be able to “capture” and communicate what he establishes as the known. As we have seen in the first chapter, the modern episteme operates within the assumption of the arbitrary relationship between sign and signifier. It is precisely this arbitrary relationship —and not an essential and hermetic bond between words and things— that allowed the infinite classical taxonomies to develop that characterize the previous episteme. In the modern episteme, the simple pairing of a thing and its representative word is no longer so transparent, as language itself experiences two radical changes: 1) the need to historicize its grammatical structures and to search for the etymological root of each word launches a complex and permanent analytical task; 2) the acknowledgement of a literary discourse that no longer operates under the imperative of *representing* the world provides the foundational possibilities, according to Foucault, of what will be known as literary modernity. Under these two premises emerge what thinkers like Foucault and Heidegger consider the major challenges in modern Western epistemological thought: the analytical force of Nietzschean philosophy and the emergence of modern literature and its exceptional epistemic status, in which the paradigms of modern subjectivity are put into question.

Girri’s poetry is a timely manifestation of these concerns, producing a literary discourse that is uneasy with the function of language in relation to the world. As critic Enrique Pezzoni explains of Girri’s poetry: “La palabra es mero conato de llegar a la

realidad, pero la realidad está siempre más allá de la palabra” (“Prólogo” 10-11). He quotes from the poem “Semántica”: “Nunca conseguiríamos/ llegar a la médula, atrapar/ qué significó, exactamente,/ Dante con amor,/ qué quiso Sócrates con arête.” The poem is included in *El ojo* (1963), a book that we will consider as transitional from what we have termed the first and second periods in Girri’s poetry. The crisis of modernity is in full view at this stage of Girri’s works. The ability of the poetic I to make sense of his world is compromised, as we have seen, by the impossibility of overcoming the shortcomings of his cogito and the historical density of his language. To express these phenomena, the poetic discourse enters into a crisis that questions the validity of our epistemic knowledge. Horacio Castillo summarizes Girri’s position:

La primera etapa se caracteriza por su indefinición, por la insuficiencia expresiva, la imposibilidad de conciliar fondo y forma, vida y arte. [...] El lenguaje tantea entre la ruina, entre tanta desolación; busca afirmarse, rescatar esa material de la nada, insuflarle nueva vida, perdurabilidad (Castillo 19-20).

The lack of definition to which Castillo refers, as well as the desire to affirm oneself through some form of permanence despite the subject’s incapacity to do so, comes to a head in poems such as “Palomas.” Here, the first-person subject reveals his unstable condition, his desire and his doubts, summarizing what we have discussed so far. The poem begins with an epigraph from the sixth book of the *Aeneid* that reads: “Guiadme, oh, si hay un camino,” the words that Aeneas utters to the two doves that lead him to the golden bough that is presented to Proserpina, allowing him to enter the underworld in life. In this poem, the first-person poetic subject also seeks to connect with doves that are just beyond his arm’s reach:

Casi en la extendida mano,
extraños y a la vez subrayando
mis diluvios más secretos,
los cuellos multicolores, hinchados,
cargan balcones y arquitrabes
con la última fuerza del día,
verano que se desploma,
luz fuera de mi alcance.

Continuo y férvido,
ceremonial y tembloroso,
el arrullo de dilectas
bestias de lujuria
me acosa, retumba,
como realidad intermedia
entre lo natural y lo divino,
y como Eneas imploró, suplico
que en sus vuelos me señalen
allá abajo, detrás de las paredes,
en la espesura del asfalto,
quién oculta, dónde languidece,
la dorada rama, amor y sésamo,
para arrancarla de cuajo
y azotarme hasta aventar la borra,
las emanaciones que el espejo devuelve,
figuras y arbitrios
de mi buscar certezas
y no querer posarme en ellas,
de mi dejarme consumir apeteciendo
retener algo que supere todo cambio
aunque sólo en lo que ya no es
se demore lo mejor de mí ("Examen de nuestra causa" 169).

In the first stanza, the doves evoke various thoughts for the poetic speaker. The birds are representative of the enigma of the world: they are there almost at hand, but remain impenetrable, swollen in their own strange and secret being. They remind the subject of his own internal conflicts, perhaps of the parts of himself that he cannot understand or dominate. Aware of his place in the passage of time and inscribing himself within a

cultural and literary tradition, the doves are symbolic of a light of understanding that he, unlike Aeneas, cannot reach. The second stanza reaffirms this idea: the doves' cooing belongs to a place between the "natural and divine" that "harasses" him because of its incomprehensibility. Man has separated and elevated himself from the natural world in articulating its meaning and seeking to dominate it; he also has attempted to usurp the place God. In these verses, it is evident that both attempts have failed: nature and the world remain closed to him, and unlike a divinity, the poetic subject does not hold the secrets to the universe. Alone in the episteme of his creation, the poetic subject implores that the birds reveal to him the hidden key to resolve his existence.

The symbol that Girri invokes and invests with this power is the golden bough, an object that has fascinated scholars for centuries and has been the inspiration of exhaustive books, such as the now classic *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1922) by Sir James George Frazer. Relying on folk beliefs, Frazer identifies the symbolic golden bough as mistletoe. In Girri's employment of the golden bough in his poem, however, the interpretation of Robert A. Brooks is more insightful. He writes that Virgil:

has presented life and death, both as opposites [...]. The human actors have reached the impasse of inner experience and outward observation, two irreconcilable aspects of reality. The golden bough is the necessary and external sign demanded to resolve the antinomy, and bears a fundamental relation to it. [...] The gold takes its meaning from the tree on which it grows, and the essential purpose of the image, [...] is to create a contrast between living and dead which is at the same time a vital union. [...] The significance of the bough as death, or rather as the tension between life and death in a single unit of being (271-74).

The golden bough allows Aeneas to pass from the realm of the living to that of the dead, and back again. Its very constitution unites the irreconcilable spheres of being and non-

being that subsume the categories of sameness and otherness, the ultimate origin/finality and temporal existence. Girri's poetic subject announces that he would use the bough to whip himself in order to go beyond the boundaries and structures of Man. He wishes to be rid of the emanations of the mirror that only serve to reflect and reinforce the notion of the self as the center of the "certainties" that he seeks and on which he wishes to rest, as that thing that "surpasses all change." The golden bough represents an attempt to create a different order, to arrive at a new understanding of the self that is removed from the center, which embraces its own antimony and strives to move beyond the confines of the "I." Luis Alberto Vittor in his monographic book-length study about the hermetic gnosis in Girri's poetry, remarks that "el sufrimiento que le ha originado ese desgarró que se produce cuando el yo externo descubre que lo que en él parecía ser algo permanente no es más que una 'ilusión', una 'apariencia'" is also "lo que llevará al yo poético, aunque parezca paradójico a primera vista, a conseguir la ansiada prenda de su conquista espiritual: la 'Rama Dorada'" (64-65). Girri's next "spiritual conquests" will also be due to a questioning of the role of Man —explored here principally through the first person subject— both as a figure of knowledge and as the optical lens for poetry.

2.1.6 MAN HANGING FROM THE BARS

Girri's first poetry, as we have discussed in these pages, grapples directly with the terms of being a modern subject, and in particular, the doublets that Foucault uses to describe the figure of Man: the retreat and return of the origin, the Same and the Other, the cogito and the unthought. It should be understood that Foucault does not write of the

modern episteme as a system that in its genesis was free of contradictions. On the contrary, modernity was born in crisis, and Man's centrality and capacities have always been defined by his finitude. Girri, likewise, begins his poetic explorations by directly confronting the conundrums inherent to the subject as it seeks to establish its dominion of empirical knowledge and identity. In the first phase of Girri's writing, his poetic subjects never realize their goals of finding an origin, making the Other part of the Same or overcoming the unthought. Girri's poems serve in part to denounce Man's existential condition and to highlight the failure of the routes to which Man turns in an effort to overcome these obstacles.

Girri has often commented on this period in his literary career, offering analyses of the thematic and poetic style that predominate in these works. Of his observations, one that adds dimension to our discussion is his remark about the role of irony in these poems. In an interview with Danubio Torres Fierro, Girri elaborated on his first books and why irony is an important lens through which to study the modern western subject as it faces the world:

Si en los primeros títulos asoma [la ironía] con claridad se debió a que era una de las pocas armas de que disponía para poner en evidencia, o para señalar, esa presencia constante del yo en el hombre occidental. Es curioso lo que sucede con ese yo. Por un lado, significaba o significa una voluntad de poderío, de dominio sobre la naturaleza, sobre la cosa, sobre sí mismo, y, por otro, es una manifestación de la notable inferioridad o invalidez del hombre, para defenderse de las cuales no hace sino dorarse la píldora con este yo (18-19).

Modern Man's exertions to control all aspects of himself and the world that surrounds him in order to be able to affirm the "I's" predominance are met with a critical eye. Girri's early poetry is a denunciation of the figure of the "I," deconstructing those

elements that form the base for its erection. Enrique Pezzoni opines that the employment of irony is a form of distancing to demonstrate the “[d]uelo entre la subjetividad y una objetividad que sólo corrobora la condena y la muerte” (“El hacedor en su crítico” 156). Girri’s poems implicitly reject the figure of Man as the form of being in the world, demonstrating that his very structure is at “duel,” and that for all of the subject’s efforts to resolve its crises, it is condemned to defeat. One of Girri’s earliest poems published, “El testigo,” already pronounces this judgment:

Con el rostro enlodado, en un rapto de furia celosa
levanto el acta de mi piel.
esta piel mía, fantasmal y tensa,
que envejece sola.

Hay respuestas, condenas, hay nacimientos
y heridas de clavos que algo significan.
Mas ni eso, ni la elevación del cáliz encendido,
muerte y muerte del hombre por el hombre
anuncian paz.
[...]

He tratado de decir
que el occidente está enfermo de materia y de ironía (“Playa sola” 23).

In these verses, the poetic voice speaks to chronicle his existence: one of time, change and suffering in which the attempts to make sense of his being and to control his destiny fail. None of Man’s explanations —be they religious or secular— brings peace or comprehension to him. The final couplet urges the infirm Western world to explore different courses of being and thinking that break the mold of subjectivity in which he is locked. Girri portrays the modern Western subject as a prisoner, trapped in the “I.” In another poem laden with irony, Girri writes of Man’s reaction to a tiger in a zoo which

leads him to the following reflection: “qué será de nosotros que aceptamos/ depender de una verdad/ y no adivinamos en su jaula/ permanentemente,/ al Hombre colgado de las rejas” (“La penitencia y el mérito” 258). Man, bound by the truth that he establishes in and through himself, is stuck in a cage of his own making, what Foucault has termed the “*sommeil anthropologique*.”

The strategies and discourses of “el Hombre” form the basis of the modern episteme that Foucault describes and, parallelly, the “technology” that Martin Heidegger terms Enframing (*Gestell*) —the manner in which man reveals the real to himself as to set upon it and to have it present at hand for his use and control. Girri’s early poetry can be read as participating in this very modern philosophical exploration and critique of Man. Foucault, we should recollect, foretells the proximate erasure of the figure of Man and the dawn of another manner of approaching the world, the word and knowledge, already perceiving in certain literary experiences an alternative outside of the epistemic framework of Man. In abandoning Man as the figure through which all knowledge and experience is configured, both Foucault and Heidegger intimate a manner of being and knowing for humankind. Girri shares this opinion, and the second phase of his writing is dedicated to articulating a poetry of knowledge that moves beyond Man and the domineering presence of the “I” so that literature itself can speak. In an interview with Raúl Vera Ocampo, Girri elaborates on the goals of his literature, which go against the grain of traditional Western thought: “Vivimos dentro del mundo occidental y lo real es que la presencia del yo que impone el mundo occidental, la autoafirmación a través del yo, produce todas esas fracturas y esa esquizofrenia. En realidad el ideal último de la

literatura debiera ser el anonimato” (58). The subject of the second half of this chapter focuses on the form and content that his “anonymous” literature takes, as well as its points in common with the philosophical project of Heidegger and other thinkers. Let us preview this process through the words of María Victoria Suárez who writes that Girri proceeds:

del andar despojándose de cuanto tomó por propiedad y estuvo contenido en su decir ‘Yo soy’; saber que le adviene con la conciencia de que el tiempo es ilusión y, por lo tanto, ilusorio el individuo singular e histórico, el yo aferrado de la memoria; certidumbre de que sólo el presente y su vivencia *son* en el acto impersonal y universal de generar una forma (“Una poesía en pugna consigo misma” 7).

In the following sections, we will trace Girri’s new positioning of the human being in the world —its relationship to words, time, the real and Being— without the bindings of Man.

2.2 The Path of the *Hacedor*

2.2.1 NOT KNOWING HOW TO SAY “I AM”

In what we are calling the second half of Girri's works, the question of the metaphysical subject does not disappear, nor is Man's centrality immediately exchanged for some felicitous solution. Girri, like Martin Heidegger, views Man in his current state as an obstacle to an authentic relationship with the real, one that is not scripted by the configuration of his Enframing. While Foucault predicts Man's erasure, he does not foray into this uncharted territory, preferring to maintain his analysis within the limits of the historical. Heidegger, on the other hand, does venture to trace a role for the human being that does not signify his elimination, but his ontological repositioning and re-appropriation to the world. Girri, likewise, explores new roles for the human being that resonate with Heidegger's thought. In his prose reflections, Girri contemplates the possibility of achieving “autoanulamiento” and “impersonalidad” as an alternative to modern subjectivity.

To write from the “I” impedes contact with the rest of reality, as the subject that faces any object inherently assumes the stance of duality when it attempts to gain knowledge of it. Sergio Cueto rightly comments that “La pregunta por el *qué* señala es distancia, esa disociación entre el sujeto y el objeto del preguntar, entre lo interior y lo exterior, la persona y el mundo que se abre con la representación” (Seis estudios girrianos 44). Knowledge through Man's representation inevitably is undermined by the fact that he cannot really grasp *what is*, and therefore the modern episteme is structured through

the three doublets we have discussed in detail in the first half of this chapter. Girri ponders the dual nature of modern Western thought that is erected through affirmations and denials and never the neutrality of emptiness: “Porque siempre hay afirmaciones y negaciones. Porque ninguna de ellas ha construido dentro de sí un vacío. Ese que concede trascender cualquier afirmación, negación” (“El motivo es el poema” 254). Man’s use of language is also defined by the rigidity of subjective representation in which all thought is articulated through him and for his use, attempting to overcome the unknown and language’s ambiguity in order to assure the total objectification and unhiddenness of all beings. This manner of speech and writing is what characterized the poetic subjects of Girri’s first poetry —what he has termed the “vía de la representación” (Torres Fierro 41)— and that which he attempts to overcome in his later works. Girri illustrates the two possibilities through the following words: “el ojo izquierdo en efecto es el que mira al tiempo, mientras que el derecho mira a la eternidad. Y demostrar que el ojo izquierdo es el que engaña, armando una representación tras otra, y provocando así un deseo insaciable de propiedad” (“Diario de un libro” 54). To move beyond the “I” while *being* and writing is a difficult task, as the “I” is stuck in its habitual discourses, psyche and biological condition. Girri elaborates:

Especie de absurdo, porque todo proviene de la obsesión por identificarse con lo que sea, en lugar de la autoanulación. Hacer y moverse, cuando lo que más importaría es no hacer, no moverse, ser (abandonarse), poseídos del llamado a la inexistencia (“El motivo es el poema” 278).

Girri struggles with the natural tendency to approach the world from within the parameters of the episteme in which he was born —one defined by the contradictions of

historical and subjective existence— and the necessity to disband the “I” and renegotiate the concept of self in order to achieve different truths, meanings and experiences. To question the legitimacy and truth of the first-person subject is anguishing, as what one is or could be is, therefore, not known. In the second part of the poem “Cuatro ángulos, idéntica certidumbre,” Girri explores this possibility:

Mirar y observar
con la congoja de reconocerse
en la perspectiva de que no
se es dueño de un yo permanente,
y lo dudoso, al no haberlo,
de contar con un yo hacedor
de nuestros actos,
un actor detrás de ellos, un receptor
detrás de nuestra percepción ("Quien habla no está muerto" 172).

Despite the anxiety of conceiving of oneself without a certain identity, not even as a unified consciousness behind one’s actions, Girri has discovered that assuming a fixed subjective identity is a greater danger. All writing done from posture of subjectivity, he realizes, will ultimately be controlled by what he terms the “Demonio de la singularidad,” which he explains: “Va petrificando al que lo padece, exaspera al lector de lo que engendra. Textos aplastados por un peso en definitiva extenuante” (“Lo propio, lo de todos” 74). Man that insists on his singularity as subject encumbers himself, his reader and his writing with the burdensome weight of the “I” that overwhelms and squelches all other thoughts and perspectives through its representation of the world to himself: “Nos individualizamos por la enfermedad, no por la salud” (“Diario de un libro” 29).

Girri has arrived to: “La etapa en que el creador de literatura empieza a calmarse de sí mismo, de opiniones, prejuicios, obstinación, egoísmo” (“Diario de un libro” 32).

Such a task requires that one ask oneself, as Girri does in the poem “Preguntarse, cada tanto”: “Qué hacer/ del viejo yo lírico, errático estímulo,/ al ir avecinándonos a la fase/ de los silencios, la de no desear/ ya doblégnos animosamente/ ante cada impresión que hierve [...]” (“Quien habla no está muerto” 188). If Man as subject is to be abandoned, the question remains as to how to redefine the human being. María Victoria Suárez speaks of an “antiyó” that gains predominance over time in Girri’s works that she defines rather circularly as “universalidad instalada en la carne y el hueso despojados de ilusiones, esto es, de la idea del yo” (Alberto Girri: Existencia y lógica poética 118). To transform oneself into an “antiyó” requires an abandonment of the traditional modes of thought and self-conception. Girri conceives of this process in the poem “Cuando la idea del yo se aleja” which reads:

De lo que va adelante
y de lo que sigue atrás,
de lo que dura y de lo que cae,
me deshago,
abandonado quedo
[...]
abjurando de armas, faltas,
de oraciones donde borrar las faltas,
blando organismo, entidad
que ignora cómo decir: “Yo soy”, (“El ojo” 46).

Here the poetic subject is still the center of articulation, but it proposes a regulated course intended to achieve a new mode of comprehension and experience, free from the domination of the “I.” As these verses suggest, such a process entails rethinking notions of time, of the function of language and the conception of self. This new poetic voice comprehends the dangers of Man trapped behind the bars of his self-made prison that

“enframes” him along with the world that surrounds him. A new image is proposed for the human existence —a “soft organism” or “entity that does not know how to say ‘I am’”— one of flexibility and softness and free of doctrines and divisions designed to assure Man’s dominance.

If we take our cues from Heidegger, the “antiyó” is an approximation of a position that the subject attempts to adopt in which the self becomes a place of reception. The loss of subjectivity does not equate self-annihilation but rather *Gelassenheit*, a posture of sheltering that permits things to reveal themselves in their own terms, respectfully guarding their core of mystery. Removed from the center of representation, the human being (Heidegger’s *Dasein*) is re-appropriated to the world through his attentive disposition, opening himself up to listening and seeing in such a way that he achieves an emptiness both temporally and spatially for the manifestation of other things and beings in their unconcealedness and hiddenness.

As a routine practitioner of meditation, Girri cultivates a new awareness of the self in relationship with the world. In conversation with Pablo Ananía, Girri says that his meditation simply “consiste en buscar mi reubicación en el mundo...es como abrirse al hecho de que ha aparecido un nuevo día, esto es de alguna manera un milagro frente al que hay que ubicarse” and that “cualquier otro instrumento, puede ser un objeto de la meditación” (Ananía 223-24). As these unaffected words indicate, the subject accommodates himself to his world —and not the world to the subject— so as to experience them freshly, as a “miracle.” In the interview with Danubio Torres Fierro to which we have referred previously, Girri similarly recommends:

quien escribe piense en sí mismo con una intensidad tan absoluta que lo lleve a trascenderse, a colocarse más allá de ese interlocutor [...] En otras palabras, [...] estar en un estado de atención casi absoluto, o absoluto en la medida en que cada cual pueda estarlo. Y ese estado de atención genera una situación interna que nos obliga a meditar sobre aquello que lo ha provocado. Esa meditación traduce en una visión donde las palabras son un complemento de la cosa (14-15).

Although such comments may seem facile, Girri is by no means glib in his thoughts about this process. On the contrary, the inability to articulate a specific method to abolish the “yo” is often aggravatingly frustrating. Heidegger and Girri coincide in their opinion that to specify a particular path to dismantle the “I” would be a form of participation in the episteme of Man by transforming experience into representation thought for his use. Instead, each subject must embark on his own ascetic journey: “Trabajar sobre sí. El recurso de intentar ver y avanzar en la oscuridad, antes que por regiones que de tan iluminadas se convierten en tierra de nadie” (“Diario de un libro” 110). In other words, each person’s path of discovery is dark, requiring the individual to work on himself. If everything were already illuminated to Man, then there would be no reason for him to modify the self or to challenge his central position: such “illuminated regions” would only be added to the field of his control.

This path-making without guidance is an arduous and uncertain process, as there are no definitive answers or markers to which to refer. We should recall Heidegger’s own metaphors for his philosophical thought process: the *Holzwege*, *Feldweg*, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (wood path, the path across the field, on the way to speech) cut by “indefatigable walker in unlit places” (Steiner 18). Girri also treads uncertain territory and he acknowledges this often, as in the following contemplation:

Prédica fácil. Impersonalidad personal, impersonalidad sinónimo de distanciamiento, distanciamiento como impersonalidad. En la práctica, no tan terminante. ¿Quién establece la distancia correcta, nosotros, los que estiman nuestra capacidad de distanciamiento? ("Lo propio, lo de todos" 77).

How is it possible to ascertain if the "I" has been extinguished and that an impersonal universality has been achieved? Girri does not seem to know. However, sometimes just losing oneself without knowledge of the way is, in itself, the optimum form of advancing: "El que extravió las propias huellas. El que utiliza esa pérdida para alejarse de sí mismo" ("Diario de un libro" 27).

2.2.2 THE "ONEFOLD" OF THE POEM

If we take Girri's word and seek an understanding of his poetry as pure enunciation —an attentive and thoughtful saying having eclipsed the subject — then further drawing on Martin Heidegger's attentive contemplation about the nature of language and poetry is illuminating. My continued inclusion of Heidegger in this discussion would not be without dissenters; Alberto Villanueva, a careful reader of Girri's work, sees a disjuncture between the Heideggerian point of view of the poet and his work, and that of Girri. This critic summarily writes off Heidegger's thought as a means of expanding our understanding of Girri's poetic stance because he attributes to the philosopher the opinion that the poet is the sacred protagonist, and not the poem or language itself (Villanueva 50-51). Instead, Villanueva sees a kinship in literary philosophy between Girri and Wallace Stevens, in regards to the conceiving of the poem. Such an interpretation is unfortunate, as Villanueva clearly has overlooked many of Heidegger's later essays such as *On the Way to Language* (1959) and those collected in

Poetry, Language, Thought that meditate on the preeminence of the word and the very humble, but integral position of the human writer. This is not to imply that Villanueva's observations about the commonalities of Girri's and Stevens's works are imperceptive, for Girri himself makes them evident in his commentaries included in *Poemas de Wallace Stevens* (1967), his Spanish translations of a selection of Stevens's poems. What should be noted, however, is that these similarities share ground with Heidegger because of his transformative approach to language and poetry that coincide with Girri's search for a poetry that eclipses the subject and simply *speaks language*.

Girri's comments about Stevens's poetry are particularly eloquent in revealing his own conception of the poetic endeavor, which, in turn, will be related to Heidegger's. Among the twenty-some textual commentaries that illuminate his translations, Girri addresses three points that I would like to highlight as germane to this discussion. The first is the fundamental relationship poetry maintains with the "real," a precept for Stevens that Girri adopts as his own: "lo real que es 'sólo la base, pero es la base', y hacia lo cual debe 'volar la imaginación para dar cuenta de las cosas tal y como son', pues la imaginación 'pierde vitalidad en cuanto deja de adherirse a lo que es real'" (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 66). This "real" is defined by Girri as the "campo donde opera la poesía, entendiéndolo por ello no solamente el mundo físico sino las cosas como son, *as they are*, y el proceso incesante que las mueve" (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 36). This real is the world in its immediate persistence of presence as being, as existence in constant transformation. Poetry explores the relationship between the reality of things and the

human being's "imagination" or dynamic perception that opens itself to house the "*nada que no está allí y la nada que está*" (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 24).

We should recall from the previous chapter our review of Heidegger's appreciation of the "thing" and the manner in which poetic language respects and enlivens its being. Unlike the language of "enframing" and technology that strives to "grasp" a thing through the act of representation, thus rendering it an object or equipment for Man's use. Heidegger writes: "It is no longer just a name-giving grasp reaching for what is present and already portrayed, it is not only a means of portraying what lies before us. On the contrary, the word first bestows presence, that is, Being in which things appear as beings" ("Words" 146). Poetry restores a thing to itself as autonomous, ungraspable, both revealing and concealing its being. "To say," Heidegger states, "means to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lighting and concealing it. This lighting and hiding proffer of the world is the essential being of Saying" ("The Nature of Language" 93). When Girri refers to the poem as responding to the *nada* that *is* and the *nada* that is not, he returns us to the mysterious and ambiguous nature of Being that conserves its no-thingness even as it presences as things.

Heidegger's "world" emphasizes and harbors the interrelationships and mutual belonging of the elements that compose the world. In fact, he defines the "thing" as the site for the "gathering-appropriating staying of the fourfold" (Heidegger "The Thing" 172). Each of the fourfold —earth, sky, divinities and mortals— has its own nature and particularity that simultaneously stands forth in presence and remains concealed and unfathomable. Likewise, each of the four is, of its own accord, appropriated to the others

and, in turn, appropriates and “mirrors in its own way the presence of the others” (“The Thing” 177). This mutual betrothing, appropriating and radiating selflessly back forms a “onefold mirror-play” that Heidegger terms the “world.” Only in facing each other and belonging to one other does each presence come into its own completely. Similar to Heidegger’s vision of poetry as the “onefold mirror-play” that restitutes the “world,” Girri likens his poems to a clear mirror that opens itself non-selectively as an attentive surface where all things may gather:

Y el poema encarnándose,
ni demasiado rápido,
ni la menor agitación ociosa,
un claro espejo
suspendido en lo alto (“Tramas de conflictos” 32).

Of the four, the human being honors his own essence and responds to the world when he gives of himself and his attention, becoming the Open in and through which language speaks. Heidegger writes:

Language, Saying of the world’s fourfold, is no longer only such that we speaking human beings are related to it in the sense of a nexus existing between man and language. Language is, as world-moving Saying, the relation of all relations. It relates, maintains, proffers, and enriches the face-to-face encounter of the world’s regions, holds and keeps them, in that it holds itself —Saying— in reserve.

Reserving itself in this way, as Saying of the world’s fourfold, language concerns us, us who can speak only as we respond to language (“The Nature of Language” 107).

The poetic word grants the restoration of the world, as such speaking sets each thing free into its own presencing and self-concealment, gathering the fourfold together around it. Girri also brings to his reader’s awareness the interlacing of the thing itself, the one granting an opening to the experience of its being through his attentiveness and the word

that preserves this relatedness as truth. He writes that there is “una tensión espiritual a través de la cual el poeta trata de aprovechar todos los recursos que la inteligencia y la sensibilidad ponen a su alcance por expresar una verdad, objeto esencial del poema, y los movimientos sucesivos en la búsqueda de esa verdad” (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 8).

The “successive movements” that are involved in the continuing this search are related to the second point that I would like to take up as it relates to Girri’s poetics vis-a-vis Stevens’s, and in relation to Heidegger. In commenting upon Stevens’s “Anecdote of the Jar,” Girri remarks how this poem in itself demonstrates the dynamic principle of how a thing, the world it is part of, the human poetic imagination and language interact to create a constant flux of interweavings. Girri comments:

Este poema ha sido explicado como un intento del autor de introducir el tema de la interacción mutua, el efecto de un objeto sobre lo que lo rodea y viceversa. En la ‘anécdota’, el objeto es un cántaro, algo que no es solamente una forma en sí misma sino que también crea formas en lo que circunda. La imaginación, actuando sobre la realidad, provoca ese estado. Pero a la vez, lo que funciona es un anhelo de orden, derivado de la necesidad mutua de los elementos en el juego: el cántaro, firme, gris y desnudo sobre la colina, y el yermo, despojado de matorrales y de pájaros (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 62).

Stevens’s poetic rendering of the jar takes place in the confluence of a wild hill, the birds, the air, the human who had placed it there and whose imagination and language open up a new space for all the elements thus gathered by virtue of the writer’s openness and attention. The human being’s participation is not that of the subject that defines the relationships; rather he is also the recipient of the appropriation and “play” of the other parts and his imagination and language create the opportunity for this experience to arise. The result is a mobile appreciation of all assembled, such that the poem restitutes to each

its integral “being *with*” that binds it freely to the world and into its own nature. Girri’s reading of Stevens’s jar cannot fail to remind us of Heidegger’s jug —briefly discussed in the previous chapter— that is the quintessential example of the thing qua “thing,” in Heidegger’s understanding of the word. The jug, like the jar, when housed in thought and poetry, becomes the holding space for earth, sky, divinities and mortals to “dwell *together all at once*” (“The Thing” 173), creating an “outpouring” that is the knowledge that only such attention and speech can produce. Girri contemplates this movement in his commentaries to the translation of other North American poets:

es importante expresar el choque y abrazo de la imaginación con la realidad, realidad que se convierte en poesía en el instante en que el poeta toma nota de ella. [...] *hay algo no conocido en el conocimiento*, con lo cual no sólo manifiesta esa duda, pero también que la realidad debe ser observada mediante vías que no son las del conocimiento habitual, y que el hombre se enfrenta con más de un mundo. La poesía puede ser un medio de acceso a tales mundos (Quince poetas norteamericanos 36).

Poetry’s enunciation grants access to a non-habitual, more *essential* knowledge of the self and the world that Heidegger and Girri would term moral, as it attends to and draws to nearness the ontological experience of *Being*, allowing for that “something that is not known by knowledge” to issue forth. I turn, apropos, for a third and last time to Girri’s interpretation of Stevens’s *ars poetica* as a window into his own. Recalling Harold Bloom’s assessment of Stevens’s poetic ideal as a “supreme fiction,” Girri adds: “Llegar a esa ficción como tal significa despojarnos de todo factor histórico, antropomórfico, llegar a la idea primigenia, sin superposiciones mítico-religiosas, a una suerte de contemplación platónica que ‘recoge el fuego de la idea primera’, que nos conduce a la integridad originaria del Ser” (Poemas de Wallace Stevens 116). We can see this ideal

2.2.3 TO BE, TO HAVE, TO BE ON THE PATH

In forging a path of impersonality, Girri finds inspiration for his transformation and examples of non-subjective being outside of traditional Western metaphysics, which maintains its base in Man. Girri critiques modern Western thought and alludes to other possible paths when he comments:

Pienso que una de las fallas de Occidente —y son palabras excesivas para decirlas tan a la ligera—, es haber desdeñado, devorado por la omnipresencia del yo, el concepto oriental de que, a la larga, toda literatura, todo texto que lleve una mínima intención o carga espiritual tiende a tener carácter anónimo (Cuestiones y razones 74).

The omnipresence of the “I” in Western thought presents itself as a failing for both literature and the general conceptions of knowledge that inform our ways of approaching the world. Girri stresses here the idea that Oriental writings with a “spiritual intention” favor anonymity in that the words or characters of a text are not written (or later read) from the stance of overt subjectivity. The wisdom expressed in such literature invokes the human being, including him in its breadth, but is not read as issuing from Man or pertaining exclusively to him.

In developing a poetics that eclipses Man and the “I,” Girri finds in Oriental philosophies, elements that aide him in thinking and writing outside of the center of the self, much like Heidegger found inspiration in Taoist and Zen texts. It should be reiterated that Girri does not subscribe to a particular religious philosophy. As María Victoria Suárez correctly states, “Girri no intenta exponer un sistema en sus poemas sino objetivar en ellos su itinerario existencial” (Alberto Girri: Existencia y lógica poética 82).

This existential itinerary perhaps begins with the Taoist and Zen conceptions of the

human being. D. T. Suzuki, in introducing Zen Buddhism, draws from Chuang-tzu, a Taoist whose teachings resonate in later Zen texts, to explain the concept of the “perfect man.” He quotes various excerpts of Chuang-tzu in explaining:

‘the perfect man as living when time has not yet come to existence,’ ‘abiding with the reason of endlessness,’ ‘attaining the formlessness of things,’ ‘in unison with Heaven.’ Further, ‘the perfect man,’ says Chuang-tzu, ‘holds his nature in complete unity, nourishes his energy (*ch’i*) in full vigor, keeps all his activity in harmony’ (Zen and Japanese Buddhism 54).

These attributes are radically different than the defining characteristics of Man and of the first-person Western subject. Chuang-tzu’s enumeration of descriptive features expresses a concept of the human being that is not determined by historical time, whose reason is not based on Man’s finitude, whose identity is founded on an expansiveness that seeks unity and not division, and whose actions spring from a spontaneous, ego-less intelligence without a center. When assumed as the grounds for thinking, such concepts allow the writer to approximate the ideal of an anonymous literature to which Girri aspires. In addition, this Taoist conception of the ideal man is a model of being in the world that inverts the structure of Western Man and subjectivity that Girri has found to be unsuccessful.

Many poems of Girri’s second period engage in articulating a new experience of the self that at times finds a direct parentage in the Taoist model, such as the poem “Tao” that was published in 1963. I quote the poem in its entirety, as it will serve as a springboard to other poems that focus on particular elements touched on in this text:

Forma sin forma
que carece de tiempos
entra en lo que llamo

mi persona
(cuerpo y no cuerpo,
opuestos,
alternantes fases),
y por los pulmones
grises como piedras,
por el hígado, los ojos
y otra vez el hígado,
me hace flojo, mustio,
abandonado de la fortuna,
ajeno a las matanzas
y su dolor,
dejándome entrever
qué virtud
es ablandarse
y desechar lo pródigo
y exuberante de los sentidos,
disolución, pilares de sal,
obsesión del presente,
y qué venenos
destila cualquier rígida, terca
ansia de singularizarnos.

Desde este instante
sé (sé, pienso),
que nada podría derribarme,
y aun muriendo
no perezco; soy, tengo,
estoy en el Camino ("El ojo" 32).

Girri's interpretation of "Tao" emphasizes a conception of the self that abandons the singularity of the subject as a being defined by rigid physical and temporal limitations. The duality of existence —form and formlessness, self as body and not body, death and life— is not a motive for anxiety or for the rearing of the "I" in an attempt to overcome the Other: that which it feels it is not. A broader notion of being approaches individuation as a phase that is no more or less true than one's dissolution. Even death is incorporated into a universal presence which simply *is* each instant. Taking a cue from

French philosopher and historian Paul Ricœur's *Temps et récit* (1983), we can say that the human experience of time traditionally gets ordered by the subject through language as a narrative capable of forging a stable identity for Man that can carry him from the past to the future, overcoming the discordance between memory, present experience and the unknown future. For Ricœur, narrative is the means to comprehending or making intelligible human temporality and to permit the re-identification of the individual as the "same." In this poem, however, time is approached as a present of continuous change in which singularity and permanence are a hindrance to an experience of being that is based not upon prodigious individuality and self-preservation but upon a soft fluidity of the self that grasps nothing. Knowing the Tao alone also repositions one's own sensorial experience in relationship with a greater, atemporal form of knowing. Girri heeds Lao-tzu's warning that: "The five colors blind the eye/ The five tones deafen the ear/ The five flavors dull the palate/ Racing, hunting, and galloping about/ only disturb the mind" (L. Tzu 25) when he reprehends the senses as another form of grasping that convert one into "pillars of salt."

The proper way of *tao* for the human being, Lao-tzu writes, is "Emerging, flourishing, dissolving back again/ This is the eternal process of return" (L. Tzu 29). And later he adds: "To know Tao alone,/ without trace of your own existence,/ is the highest" (L. Tzu 30). The last two verses of Girri's poem summarize this new conception of existence. The basic characterizations of man are *being* as an essence or identity ("ser"), what one possesses ("tener") and one's position in space and time ("estar"). The poetic speaker's final words unite these three actions through an all-embracing identification

with the “Path” (*tao*) representing the impersonal, indivisible and attributeless Supreme Reality. Paradoxically, by maintaining the “yo” as the center of articulation and the subject of the actions “ser,” “tener” and “estar,” Girri’s poetic voice, however, has yet to disband the “I,” even as it speaks of its own death and dissolution. We could thus read the word “*tao*” in its lexical acceptance as “the way one conducts oneself” or in its most literal meaning as “path, way or road.”

Girri strives to go beyond the enunciating “I” by following the Taoist directive that gives title to a poem: “Al consejo de Lao Tsé: Salir a la vida y entrar en la muerte” (“Envíos” 86). Here, the anonymous poetic voice accompanies a second person through its personal “disolución” in which “vas dejando/ los últimos puestos/ y pierdes los primeros.” The physical death of man or the metaphysical annulment of the self as subject leads “you” to abandon all of the places and stances that served to found a subjective identity. Renouncing them precludes the unparalleled “plenitud/ de que nadie te dispute nada” because there is no “mine” or “yours” to divide reality. Girri borrows directly from the *Tao Te Ching* when he concludes: “el apogeo/ de endurecerte y volver/ a ser tronco en bruto,/ reposo/ que es retorno a tu destino,/ destino que es perpetuidad.” The metaphor of the “tronco en bruto” appears in Verse 18 of Lao-tzu’s original text which reads: “Flowing through everything/ It returns one to the First Breath/ Guiding everything/ It returns one to No Limits/ Embracing everything/ It returns one to the Uncarved Block” (L. Tzu 41). The “uncarved block” is one of the many images Lao-tzu gives to illustrate the human being’s true nature in its pristine state of return, representing the limitless potential out of which anything can become.

Another poem from the same decade offers a clear example of the path that Girri follows in moving away from individual identity to a form of anonymity that allows an experience of *tao* as absolute reality. “Desnudo al sol” published in 1970 is a poem written as through the lens of a camera that is focused on a naked woman lying in the sun. The third-person poetic voice commences by emphasizing the specific features of the woman, —“las piernas,/ alargadas y tersas, todavía/ esbeltas en la pasividad,”— relishing the sense of sight that evokes a particular identity through the image of a “zorra superior/ y codiciosa, pelo y dientes,” (“Valores diarios” 169). This initial literary treatment of the human object of observation follows the lines of traditional Western approaches to the Other: although the poetic voice is not that of an identified subject, the elements that it records attempt to pinpoint a particular identity for the woman, rendering her knowable and seeking to “capture” her through a fixed image as both a photograph and verbal portrait. This attempt admittedly fails, as the poetic voice recognizes that this body and person seem to have already traversed the ups and downs of personal existence and have achieved a serene state of equilibrium and release:

pero si lo captas
partiendo de que ese cuerpo
extendido y lustroso se abandona,
abdica y demuestra comportarse
como de regreso, sin escepticismo,
tras haberlo pasado muy bien y muy mal
resulta una proyección
ajena a rasgos individuales, (“Valores diarios” 169)

The woman photographed is in an open posture, one of extension and abdication in which she simply lets be both herself and the world she belongs to. She is shown to have

personal knowledge of the “bad” and “good” —one of the infinite pairs of opposites that Man employs to understand and organize his reality— but her attitude is that of acceptance of both without skepticism or a compulsion to control her experiences. Having also shed those traits that the subject generally grasps as the foundation for its individual identity, the woman lying in the sun has arrived to a Zen-like state:

el nítido
arrobo de un objeto bajo el sol,
calma anónima, serenidad que a nadie invita,
un bulto más
exaltando el espacio, presintiendo
la zona que late detrás del espacio,
vacía, incólume por no tener
origen, crecimiento, sucesión ("Valores diarios" 169).

The poetic voice brings the reader’s attention and his own to the fact that in this position, the woman is like any other illuminated, anonymous object that occupies space-time. By simply being, she serenely exalts the space she inhabits and brings to the consciousness of the one who observes her a new perspective of the image before him — one of a pristine and timeless openness. The woman resides in an “emptiness” which is similar to *tao* in that it is formless, nameless and beyond time, but is concurrently that from which spring forms, names and succession: “Tao is empty/ yet it fills every vessel with endless supply/ Tao is hidden/ yet it shines in every corner of the universe” (L. Tzu 17).

The Taoist ideal of emptiness is further exemplified by the poems “A lo que el mirar con atención revela” and “Magnitud cero.” The first of these two, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, turns to the reflective nature of the mirror as an analogy for the posture the human being should assume in order to experience and

understand emptiness. A mirror retains nothing and gives equal and undifferentiated space to all things placed in front of it; a mirror itself contains nothing and is empty of “self,” but it allows all to manifest on its surface; a mirror always is in the spontaneous present, and it seeks no past or future. It is thus that Girri writes:

Los espejos reflejan,
no retienen,
 es imposible
meternos en el cuerpo de un espejo
o hacer que el espejo entre en nosotros,
y percibimos vacío,
vaciados de los penosos
instantes de inhabilidad
para retener, conservar, ("Envíos" 87)

These verses “mirror” Chuang-tzu’s words that speak of emptiness and stillness as the necessary attributes for approaching creation.

Still water becomes a mirror that gives back a clear reflection of the beard and eyebrows. Reposing at a perfect level, it becomes the standard for a great carpenter. If water gains such clarity from stillness, how much more so one’s own mind? The mind of the Sage, reposing in perfect stillness, becomes the mirror of the universe, and the eye that sees all creation (L. Tzu 283).

These qualities do not imply apathy or inaction, but a new center and measure for being and doing that is not defined by attachment, singularity or “la aprensión de recibir favores,/ aprensión en la desgracia.” Instead, the human being achieves a state of “Quietud y vacío,/ como navegar el océano/ sobre una sombra,” (“Envíos” 87). Chuang-tzu writes, “For the perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing: it refuses nothing. It receives, but does not keep. And thus he can triumph over matter, without injury to himself” (C. Tzu 97-98). Man, alleviated of the bonds of the self, is afforded the universe and a harmonious mode of being that follows the movement of *tao*.

It is helpful here to recall the central Taoist term *wu-wei*, introduced in the previous chapter, which means “non-doing.” In other words, it is a nondual, non-purposive, harmonious and spontaneous “doing” without effort, desires, distinctions and names. The human being participates in movement and change, but as a shadow floating over the mirror-like sea, without the notion of the self as the subject of this action. David Loy intelligently writes, “if consciousness of self is the ultimate source of unnatural action, then natural action [*wu-wei*] must be that in which there is no such self-consciousness -- in which there is no awareness of the agent as being distinct from "his" act” (76).

The universe in its infinite manifestations is the outward impulse of the essential unity that *tao* expresses. If the human being acts through *wu-wei*, his subject-less experience of creation will be that of an underlying unity in diversity. Lao-tsu writes of this complementary movement: “Become totally empty/ .../ Only then will you witness everything/ unfolding from emptiness/ See all things flourish and dance/ in endless variation/ And once again merge back into perfect emptiness —/ Their true repose/ Their true nature” (L. Tzu 29). “Magnitud cero” is Girri’s attempt to speak about the void or “perfect emptiness.” I write “attempt” because this poem, structured through anaphora, opens each stanza with an verse that begins with the word “como.” The stanzas’ elaborate analogies endeavor to articulate “magnitud cero,” a metaphor itself for the *tao*-inspired void, by providing visual and conceptual images to illustrate the nature of this “nothingness.”

Girri first imagines the void as an “orificio” or “punto” acting as the passive center of a wheel that “hace posible la rotación” (“El ojo” 40). This stanza follows Lao-

tzu's explanation of *wu* or "nothingness, emptiness, non-existence": "Thirty spokes of a wheel all join at a common hub/ yet only the hole at the center/ allows the wheel to spin" (L. Tzu 24). The spinning wheel can be understood as the ever-flowing manifest universe, endlessly cycling from life to death. The movement of creation and destruction is only possible because of that empty center that joins all things and from which they come. The second stanza inverts the image of the first one; instead of a small point from which all springs and to which it returns, now the void is visualized as sky and space that contain the universe, thus emphasizing the same common essence of all things and their ultimate truth as emptiness. Girri then speaks of the void as an instrument, process or cycle in order to redefine man, "hijo de vacíos resultantes," as also simply a part of a greater order of manifestations and disappearances. In the final stanza, the void is an infallible cipher that explains the ever-changing "trama de la verdad,/ porque en el cero no existe error."

2.2.4 SAMSARA AND NIRVANA INTERCHANGEABLE

The "zero point" or void as a way of conceiving of the universe and experiencing it, stands in stark opposition to episteme of Man that dominates modern Western thought. As we have seen, Girri is drawn to Taoist principles as an antidote to Man's centrality and domination. The Taoist void or emptiness, affords a completely new appreciation of reality, its underlying unity and the human being's appropriation to a whole greater than himself. To internalize and act from the void, thus uniting with *tao*, is the "perfect man's" goal and the culmination of his enlightenment. Zen Buddhism, as we discussed in the

previous chapter, draws on Taoist texts, sages and traditions in its formulation of the epiphanic perfection of consciousness, or *satori*, which is the experience of *sunyata* or the void. This sudden awakening erases all divisions, even between the notion of the one and the many to afford an unmediated experience of being. Zen warns its followers that no amount of practice or preparation will lead them to *satori*, which is spontaneous. Girri agrees, “No se da el vacío voluntario ganado por el esfuerzo. Está el vacío espontáneo, fuente de energía y expansivo, el vacío como Gracia, por sorpresa” (“El motivo es el poema” 257). The spontaneity of achieving the empty state reinforces the dictum shared by Taoism and Zen that emptiness and *satori* do not belong to an “other worldly” experience, but to the “here and now,” within the space and time of the present. C. Lawson Crowe summarizes that “The end is ‘to see’ into one’s own nature and thus attain *buddhahood*. This state can be achieved in the midst of ordinary daily activities” (32), and he quotes the account of enlightened Zen master Hakuin (1685-1768) who said “We need no escape from the cycle of life and death” (34).

We may remember that Zen derives its understanding of *satori* from the Mahayana branch of Buddhism that, unlike the Theravada perspective, understands enlightenment or *nirvana* within the context of the empirical world. Mahayana Buddhism expounds the view that all is *sunyata*, and that there is no perduring, discrete and unchanging self or objective entity. The insight that the sum of *being* is in its essence ultimate reality, allows the following conclusion to be drawn:

All of *samsara* is *nirvana*. The critique which the Mahayana perspective exercises is directed against the way men understand or interpret their world, not against the human and natural phenomena which constitute the world. Consequently, the

ultimate solution which is proffered is not a new world or even a new self but a new point of view (Rupp 60-61).

Girri clearly adopts this point of view in the poem “Versión abstracta, impráctica”, rejecting the notion that the phenomenological world is strictly *samsara* and should solely be considered “irrealidad” or “juego de apariencias” (“Árbol de la estirpe humana” 300-01). He is fascinated and tempted with the idea “que nada de lo que uno contemple/ ahora, ya, aquí,/ existe por sí mismo,/ nada que logre/ existir fuera de la subjetividad,/ *samsara*/ elaborando para la visión del ojo/ un continuo de objetos” but he cannot ultimately accept that his own body which is continually “afirmándose en un ritmo” is something that must be annulled in order to be “liberado.” Zen Buddhism and Taoist thought seek no “outside” or abolishment of man or the world as a means of achieving *nirvana*. On the contrary, they embrace the notion of “being-in-the-world,” to borrow a phrase from Heidegger, in which the human recognizes himself and the sphere in which he find himself as “no-self” — liberated from the illusory drive to possess and define a self and, from this vantage point, attempt to control one’s experience and knowledge of the world. Girri shares this understanding of the present world as the arena for *nirvana*, achieved through a shift in attention and experience of man. In one of the many prose reflections he penned about his vision for the proper disposition of the human being, Girri observes: “De los estados (por demás escasos) de atención sobre uno mismo. Entonces, asistimos al hecho de que todo se aclara, se deviene indistinto (*samsara* y *nirvana* intercambiables), y se nos despierta” (“El motivo es el poema” 253).

The awakening of the human being to the experience of *nirvana* in *samsara* allows Girri to accept a non-discriminating posture in relationship with himself and the things that make up the world. In rare moments of attention, man is afforded a change in perspective through the emptying of the self and the abandonment of the habit of reifying the world for the purpose of possessing and mastering it. In such instants, the human being “is woken up” (*nirvana*) within the context of his daily existence (*samsara*). From such a vantage point come observations such as those found in the poem “Res extensa.” Employing a Judeo-Christian vocabulary, Girri describes the interconnectedness of all things and the manner in which all singularities are actually manifestations of the same:

Aceptas
que la tierra y el aire,
el agua y el fuego,
son como fibras
de una cuerda única
a cuyos golpes fluye,
lo vivo de lo muerto,
lo mortal de lo vivo,
fugacidad y cambio,
apariencias que alaban al Padre ("El ojo" 31).

The conceit of self-centeredness having been laid aside, the human being can accept and appreciate how all beings and things flow from the same emptiness and back to it again. In constant motion, each form, or lack thereof, essentially serves to “praise” the *Being* that they are, from which they spring and to which they return.

Through emptiness and the asceticism of the self, the human being can cultivate this new experience and perception of the world and his own person. The total realization of *nirvana* within the realm of appearances of the here and now (*samsara*) may not be

immediate. Nevertheless, the open disposition of man to receive and presence *Being* through his attention to reality becomes his means of living that eschews self-centeredness and becomes his path toward a fuller experience. Girri's poem, "Que tu mirada vaya" offers a demonstration of this type of perception:

Y más aun haría patente
un empezar a abandonarte
a lo suelto y espontáneo
como viento, como corriente,
 viento y corriente,
no ya situaciones fijas, inmovilidad objetiva,

no ya dilemas
 sino un calmo estar
en el que te permitas verte
cazando pájaros con redes,
liebres con gestos,
 irreflexivamente ("Lírica de percepciones" 196).

These stanzas are directives for an exercise in observing, inhabiting and attending to the world with lucid attention devoid of ambition and possessiveness. The human being's role is not to seek "objective immobility" or to attain a "fixed" order for himself and his world. On the contrary, the similes chosen to illustrate the abandonment of Man's will for dominion are taken from the dynamics of nature's most basic "free and spontaneous" elements, wind and water. Lao-tzu refers to both in his writing as examples of behavior in harmony with Tao, a detached form of being that Zen Buddhism also teaches: "The best way to live/ is to be like water/ For water benefits all things/ and goes against none of them/ [...]/ One who lives in accordance with nature/ [...]/ moves in harmony with the present moment" (L. Tzu 21). In following the natural flow of life, the human being attains a calmness of being that allows actions to be spontaneous and "irreflexive," not

mandated by human purposefulness for the obtaining of a predetermined goal. This does not mean the disengagement of the human being from the world, but his complete presence and attention to the present through detachment. Man can thus observe himself “catching” “birds” or “hares” or anything else effortlessly, as the “thing” itself is not of issue. There is no drive to determine, possess or apprehend the world; to simply experience oneself with and in it as all undergoes a constant flux is enough.

“Enseñanza ignorada” revisits this idea through negative examples. Divided into four parts, the each of the first three sections of the poem correspondingly examines existential postures of man to demonstrate that nobody has learned yet how to *be* in relationship with “lo real” or “todo objeto lo mismo que a seres” or “la vida.” In the examples proffered, Girri illustrates different manners in which people attempt to impose their perspective on the world, not

aceptando
que la realidad se complace
en que nadie haga lo que pretende
con ella;

que nada se hace, Todo Sucede ("Homenaje a W. C. Williams" 125).

This “forgotten” or “ignored teaching” is not lost on Girri. In breaking away from the Western metaphysics of Man, Girri’s own attention is gathered and brought into the fold of “Suceder,” the unmediated, neutral simplicity of “Happening” or *Being* in which all things are empty of value and simply are *being empty* — another formulation of *nirvana* in *samsara*. To attend to the reality through the understanding of “Todo Sucede,” Girri writes of a particular type of hearing and listening that is open to the spontaneous happenings of existence and affords him greater perspective and insight into his own

being. A poem titled “Enéada primera” exemplifies the type of attention that Girri espouses as conducive to an enlightened understanding of being:

Ve lo que ve
tornándose afín
y parecido a lo visto
en beneficio de la contemplación.
Mientras ve el sol es semejante al sol,
y verá la belleza
luego de que el alma
ella misma se haya tornado belleza ("El ojo" 53).

These verses reveal how the openness of the human being allows for great reciprocity with the world. By emptying himself of “self,” man can become the site of receptivity and a type of communion. He can recognize himself as that which he observes. His attention is in the “benefit of contemplation” and not for his own self-aggrandizement. One of Girri’s prose observations reads: “*La realidad es el motivo*. Contundencia de la frase, comparable al empeño puesto en identificarse con ella, convencerse a medida que se escribe” (“El motivo es el poema” 246). By giving himself to attention, both the human being and the world come into their own, realizing their fullness through each other. Man thus experiences himself as “beauty” while revealing the world in its fullness.

We can now return with much greater understanding to an aphoristic statement of Girri’s, quoted in the previous chapter: “Lo absoluto como presente. Un alejamiento impersonal hacia el ‘aquí y el ahora’” (III, 270). Girri’s “absolute” is conceived not in Man’s terms, but as an inclusive present to which the human being belongs. If Man is granted a particular role, it is that of presencing reality as the place for its manifestation as *being*. To add to the layers of sources that shape Girri’s understanding of the human

being's correct "Relationship with the World" (Krishnamurti 289), J. D. Krishnamurti's writings reinforce the goal of a present, choiceless awareness "empty [...] of time, direction, and movement" (285) which, Krishnamurti instructs, can be attained through true *observation*, a coming "upon that space in which there is no center; therefore, no direction; therefore, no time" (288).

The "center" to which Krishnamurti refers, is the "me" and its attachments. All thoughts and observations stemming from "me," Krishnamurti explains, are conditioned and rooted in the past, pre-establishing a direction for Man's actions and observations through his will and previous experiences and creating duality in his perception of the world. Krishnamurti attributes fear, the impulse to grasp and anxiety to Man's memory and his accumulated thoughts through time that stake out a vulnerable and precarious "me" that must be reaffirmed and defended. In contrast, by becoming the space for complete attention to the world, the human being gives himself to observation and the present, in its constant regeneration and "total freedom" *to be* exactly as it is. Girri's poem, "No sabes cómo librarás" corresponds with Krishnamurti's teachings:

concluir
que esperaste y buscaste
el punto de coincidencia
de lo que abarca el pasado
y lo que depositó el futuro,
hasta situarte, ya,
en el exacto instante
donde cualquier dirección
será meta, el allá
alrededor del aquí ("Valores diarios" 155).

The present as the goal signifies the plenitude of *being* here and now and the human being's indivisible relationship with the world. Girri views his poetry as the space for the present to be gathered and made manifest. He comments: "Y no es poco lo que recogemos, el sentimiento de que la única eternidad a la que se tiene acceso es la del presente, la sensación de palpar el tiempo, lo material, la materia del poema" ("El motivo es el poema" 260).

Through his caring attention to reality, Girri seeks to reveal the present in its material and temporal completeness, a task that Krishnamurti also urges of his readers through their attention: "That attention is a flame and that attention is not something that you come to; it is attention *now* to everything, every word, every gesture, every thought [...] When you are completely attentive there is no self, there is no limitation" (360). Krishnamurti conceives of the human being's "total freedom" within the present of the manifest world, echoing with the words "*Enlightenment is where you are*" (286), the dictum "*Nirvana is samsara*" that we have visited earlier. Girri concurs when he writes that there is no "órbita individual, autónoma, mientras que en rigor lo que efectivamente actúa es *el poder creador que es el mundo*. Hacedores de poemas ocupando sus respectivos, prefijados lugares; sólo instrumentos" ("Lo propio, lo de todos" 69).

2.2.5 THE "HACEDOR"

This last sentence, brings us to two questions that have been alluded to continually in the course of this chapter, but have not been addressed directly: In what ways does the poet come to embody the human being who has moved beyond the

protagonistic role of “Man” in the modern episteme to represent a new form of knowledge and a unique manner of being in the world? Concurrently, what are the explicit or implicit ethics of the poet and his poetry?

Alberto Girri addresses the role of the author in both his poems and works of prose. We can begin to understand his profile of the “poet figure” through his appreciation of one of Keat’s often-cited letters from October 1818, addressed to Richard Woodhouse —coincidentally, the same letter that inspires a long essay by Rafael Cadenas, *Realidad y literatura*. Girri muses:

Keats, concepto de que el poeta carece de identidad. Tomarlo, acaso, como referencia indirecta al sentido interno de su labor: despojarse, mientras el poema progresa (esto a expensas de aquello), de los incontables yoés que en él conviven, y cuya fase última, el sentimiento de nulidad, coincidiría con la culminación del poeta (“Lo propio, lo de todos” 71).

Inspired by Keat’s declarations such as, “A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity: he is continually in for, and filling, some other body” (Houghton 159), Girri considers the poet to be the reverse of modern Man, understood as the subject and object of knowledge. For Girri, the poet’s labor is only possible when he has rid himself of all sense of protagonism, favoring an impersonal and anonymous stance that allows language to inhabit *him*. Girri prefers the humbler term “hacedor” —a deliberate nod to Borges and Girri’s preferred title, *El hacedor*— to the title of “poeta” because the latter word connotes, for many, the superior status of the individual and the compounding of the “I,” when the poet is heralded as a chosen clairvoyant, “small god” or a modern visionary, following the Romantic tradition and its reformulations in the historic *vanguardias*. The “hacedor,” on the other hand, is an artisan

who offers himself to his craft and to the creative power of the world to be used as an instrument. Girri explains the two “alternatives” in his own words: “Ser el artesano que día tras día gana en destreza, o el actor volcado a una interpretación donde mucho intervendrá su carácter personal, y lo que los accidentes exteriores le exijan, y de lo cual persigue el extremo provecho en *cuanto a efectos*” (“El motivo es el poema” 257). Girri develops a similar, clear distinction between what he terms the “professional” writer and the “aficionado,” the latter term being almost synonymous with “hacedor” and the former an extension of his definition of the “poet.” The aficionado seeks to exhibit himself and affirm the poem as the paradigm of his own personality. He aspires for his poem to compete with the world and he claims to be able to discern between “noble” and “ignoble” poetic material (“Lo propio, lo de todos” 74). The professional, on the other hand, “[p]ermanence quieto, exteriormente se conserva metido en sus propios límites,” without approaching the poem as the product and extension of his ego (“El motivo es el poema” 283).

Girri believes that the poem is not the realm for the aggrandizement of the author’s personal character or of the sphere of his power as a writer by seeking to influence the experience of his reader. The prose texts that are interspersed in Girri’s six-volume *Obra poética* reiterate this conviction in analogous statements such as these, from *Diario de un libro*: “El creador legítimo tiende a ponerse a un costado de lo creado” (31); and “*Creador*. La etapa en que el creador de literatura empieza a calmarse de sí mismo, de opiniones, prejuicios, obstinación, egoísmo” (32); and “Oculto en la obra, contestando como en el episodio de los cíclopes: ‘Soy Odiseo, *nadie*’” (66). Likewise, various poems

address the participatory —not protagonistic— role of the artisan. “Dormir que hace el poema” exemplifies the relationship between the work, the writer and the reality that inspired it:

El poema,
desprendido de la visión,
y del que no podrías
explicar, sólo ofrecerlo,
y ofrecerlo
en homenaje a lo recibido
pero no su enigma,
así como
un bebedor no penetra en su vino,
lo bebe,
pero no sabe qué es,
además de áspero y seco,
subido de color ("Existenciales" 99-100).

In these verses, the poem is described as also being “separated” or “disjoined” from the vision that inspired it, having its own existence. The verses “ofrecerlo/ en homenaje a lo recibido” are of particular significance in gaining a greater understanding of Girri’s perspective of his craft. Poetry is not the stage of Man’s domain or possession; it is first “received” through the undivided attention of the “hacedor” and then offered back to the world in its homage as a thanking. Girri brings to the reader’s attention the autonomy of the poem and its central inscrutability, which cannot be *explained* by the “hacedor” who wrote it. The “hacedor” partakes of the poetic experience, as writer and then as reader, but he recognizes his fundamental ignorance as to the “*qué es*” of the work. The poem conserves its enigmatic *being*, renouncing any claim the “hacedor” may have staked in having words under his control.

In “El poema como inestable” Girri furthers this understanding by writing:

aesthetic, sonorous and musical means. While denouncing the compulsion to promote himself as the poem's protagonist or word-master or to read in its words the projections of the self, the "hacedor" adheres to an ascetic enunciation because "en la medida en que la palabra es aparentemente más pobre, más seca, menos metafórica, menos cargada de contenido y de imagen –digamos así-, más posibilidades tiene de renovarse en cada lectura" (Torres Fierro 16). This language is flexible, and its polyphony is like that of aphorisms –mountain peaks addressed to those who are "tall and lofty," as Nietzsche's Zarathustra said (42) – whose directness and pithiness invite the reader to return to them once and again, in the sober insistence of its enunciation. Girri calls such writing "moral," and extols the virtues of prose-like enunciations whose diaphanous, efficient and clear expression responds to the necessity of what is said. Sergio Cueto explains that for Girri, "El poema es lo que *es así*, lo *que es*, simplemente: pura afirmación que no afirma nada sino la afirmación, el vacío sin contenido, y por lo tanto irrefutable, del afirmar. El poema emite la multiplicidad de los caminos, pero él permanece en el recogimiento de la encrucijada" (Cueto Seis estudios girrianos 22). This mode of expression radically differs from Girri's initial approach to writing and language. In reviewing his own production, as well as his philosophical comprehension of his own existence, Girri recalls that "Primera, expresar exagerando. Segunda, expresar pendientes por completo de las variantes combinatorias. Tercera, anulación de las modalidades anteriores, y sólo *Enunciar*" ("El motivo es el poema" 273).

2.2.6 THE PARADOXICAL PATH

Girri's literary trajectory originates from a mode of writing that responds to the demands and restrictions of the modern episteme with Man at its center as the articulator of knowledge and the wielder of language. His early poems denounce as failures the strategies of Man —as diagnosed by Michel Foucault— that attempt to bring under his dominion as subject the unthought, the origin of himself and his knowledge and the language that he uses but is not transparent to him — in other words, all that which constitutes his "Other." Girri then consciously shifts away from the mode in which the subject is edified as the articulator of knowledge with language as the medium for his expression and the representation of the world for his use. Seeking new paradigms for the self in relationship with the world and language, we can read Girri's project through its kinship with those of Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, John Keats, Martin Heidegger, Chuang-tzu, Lao-tzu, D. T. Suzuki, and J. Krishnamurti. Girri cultivates a poetic attitude that is, in itself, a moral and ethical stance. He approaches the "I" ascetically, defining the "hacedor" as the open space for language to speak and the world to presence. Such attentive care allows for new genre of interactions of the human being and his world and for a non-dominating understanding of reality.

These last statements are not without their caveats. Girri reminds his readers in both his prose comments as well as his poems, of the intrinsic paradoxes of his craft that cannot be overcome. For as much as the poem distances itself from the language of technology that serves the edifying of Man, its articulator, Girri's hacedor must

unceasingly be vigilant in his attention so that his saying remains faithful to that happening which seeks its expression. Girri writes:

Pasos en que la Atención es especialmente puesta a prueba. Cuando en el desarrollo del texto hacia su culminar, cierre, el equilibrio está a punto de romperse. Lo emocional, que quiere arrastrarnos, dominar, y es preciso distanciarse, enfriar la mirada; o al revés, cuando somos llevados, en exceso, de abstracción en abstracción, y apelamos entonces a arranques emotivos, inmediatez que aligera el curso del texto ("1989 / 1990" 128).

The poem does not require the extermination of the human being, but rather his meditative presence which grants the “hacedor” a fresh experience of himself through language that is not bound by subjectivity and emotion, nor the abstraction of the intellect. Such a balance is often fortuitous, for the “hacedor” must be engaged in his attention, but simultaneously abandon the habitual structures of the self. Without the “hacedor,” the poem would not come to fruition, but the poem itself is not of his dominion. A second quote is illustrative of the fine line the “hacedor” must tread:

En vez de ser edificada con lo recordado, que la escritura, sin memoria y sin yo, se convierta en construcción del presente.
Que el escribir sea mecanicidad, estado en el que no se dan líneas ni de mayor ni de menor resistencia. Como en la reiteración de mantras.
Que el ser siempre lo mismo, el escribir ya no tenga un objetivo, y que de haberlo sea el vacío; o el silencio, versión más suave de ese vacío ("El motivo es el poema" 287).

The last sentence leads us to a second major paradox that Girri’s *ars poetica* comes to embrace. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the ultimate goal of poetry is to reach emptiness and silence, also called sunyata, “vacío,” zero magnitude and Being, but the means to achieve this goal are words themselves. The words of the poem hint and motion to the undifferentiated, unspoken whole from which limitless saying can arise.

The poem convokes the reader's attention and demands a thoughtful listening that leads one away from a form of speech that seeks to define, capture and apprehend the being of things through language, and back to that area of ambiguity, of pure being to which words hint. Girri writes: "*Las alternancias naturales tienen, para ser percibidas claramente, que traducirse en el juego constante de los vacíos y de los llenos*" ("El motivo es el poema" 265).

Likewise, a third contradiction is evident in the relationship between words and things. Girri does not wish to fix things in immobility through poetry. Rather, in the interstices of the verses, things that are brought to presence demonstrate themselves to be both revealing and concealing, in a dynamic relationship of the present. Words will not substitute for the real nor render it transparent to man's knowledge, but they can bring us back to the neighborhood of experience, of co-existence and of selfless marvel. A poem that speaks eloquently of this is six-part poem, "Eco múltiple: nombres," from which I will quote verses from the final two sections:

lo real,
una simplicidad sin nombre,
o estado intermedio
inaprensible mediante nombres,
puros fenómenos.

6
Y en su inmaterialidad de nombres
más dura que las cosas que las cosas que nombran
y por encima
de los sentidos, evidencias
como la de que el nombre agua
no apaga la sed
meramente el agua, límpida,
sucia de tierra, gota congelada,

la mitiga ("Tramas de conflictos" 44).

The conundrums evident in the heart of Girri's lyric are embraced and made evident within his works as a sign of modesty, resolve and discretion. They require that the "hacedor" refine his attention, return obsessively to the limits of his craft and to confront selflessly the real before him. Girri makes of these apparent dead ends his poetic path of thinking, an endless exercise of embracing what *is*, of persevering in the way things, the real, language and oneself *are*, without the filters of judgment, will or subjectivity. Poetry's paradoxes exhort the "hacedor" to abandon the notion of a finality for writing and to elect this activity as ascetic movement and displacement, as a meditative exercise in being. Girri exemplifies the difficult, honorable and exemplary choice of renouncing the "representational rule of the word" (Heidegger "Words" 151) and dedicating himself, through his craft, to the poem's happening: "Se habló de que el poema *sucede*, pura presencia, condición de la que extrae su idoneidad; tanta, que sujeto poema y objeto poema, espíritu y material del poema, son lo mismo" ("Tramas de conflictos" 136).

CHAPTER 3: RAFAEL CADENAS

3.1 The Chronicles of Exile

3.1.1 POETRY AS EXISTENCE

In his latest extensive essay, *Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística* (1998), Venezuelan poet Rafael Cadenas quotes the turn-of-the-century French critic Charles Du Bos who writes that the spirit of Thomas Carlyle “se reducía a la ‘afirmación insistente y bastante monótona que consiste en declarar que el mundo es un misterio y un milagro,” (“Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística” 701). This opinion could be formulated about the work of Cadenas with the addition of the following: “Solemos hablar del misterio del universo sin incluirnos, como de cosa ajena, como si no formáramos parte de él” (“Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística” 699). That the human being should be regarded as one of its integral elements in the “mystery” of the universe is a more recent conceit in Cadenas’s oeuvre, but one to which we will attend by means of this introduction to the author.

The most complete biographical information about Rafael Cadenas is included in the introduction to his *Obra entera: Poesía y prosa (1958-1995)*, penned by José Balza, a literary compatriot and fellow recipient of the Venezuelan national prize for literature. Without repeating Balza’s prologue, I would like to highlight the most salient information about this author’s very private life. Cadenas was born on April 8, 1930 in Barquisimeto, the capital of the state of Lara, in the central western region of Venezuela. Balza recounts, in loose terms, of a provincial family composed of a former military

general grandfather, a merchant father, an indigenous nanny, a collection of siblings and a large extended family. In Barquisimeto, Cadenas was accompanied in his burgeoning literary interests by Salvador and Hermann Garmendia, the former an accomplished author, as well as Elio Mujica (Yepes Azparren 191), composing his first poems, *Cantos iniciales* in 1946 (Dorante 89).

Cadenas came of age during a moment of great political upheaval and change. In 1945, a coup by the Acción Democrática party unseated the military dictator Isaías Medina Angarita and instated Rómulo Betancourt, who governed for 28 months. The central-left Acción Democrática party instated a reforming agenda, but did not ally itself with the Communist party of Venezuela, founded clandestinely in 1931 and legalized in 1945. Under the new constitution of 1947, Rómulo Gallegos was elected and sworn in as president in 1948, a term that lasted less than a year. A new coup headed by conservatives Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, Germán Suárez Flamerich and Major Marcos Pérez Jiménez overthrew Gallegos in November 1948. Of the three junta leaders, Pérez Jiménez's leadership lasted the longest, from 1952 until 1958. His authoritarian rule silenced oppositional forces, outlawed the principle political parties, imposed strict censorship in the media and jailed, exiled, tortured and assassinated many of his detractors. Civilians, with the backing of the navy and air force, overthrew Pérez Jiménez in 1958, and the subsequent year, Rómulo Betancourt was elected president (1959-1964).

During this time period, Cadenas moved to Caracas in order to study at the Central University of Venezuela. From 1947 to 1951, he was an active member in the

Communist Party and the Juventud Comunista (Communist youth). His opposition to the military junta landed him in the Cárcel Modelo, a Caracas prison, in 1952, and led to his exile in Trinidad until 1956, when he was allowed to return to Caracas. Reflective of this experience are *Una isla*, a collection of poems composed in 1958, and the extensive poem in prose, *Cuadernos del destierro* (1960). In an interview for the Spanish magazine *Espéculo*, Cadenas comments:

Los cuadernos del destierro es un poema en prosa sobre mi experiencia como exiliado en Trinidad (1952-1956), isla muy próxima a la costa oriental de Venezuela. Era entonces todavía colonia inglesa, de modo que durante cuatro años fui súbdito involuntario, pero gustoso, de la reina Isabel. A este periodo le debo un idioma que leo mucho, pero que hablo sólo cuando viajo a Estados Unidos o a Inglaterra. El libro recoge también mi situación íntima de los años 60 que te mencioné. Hoy no me encuentro en “Derrota”, pero no porque crea tener éxito, esta palabra no forma parte de mi vocabulario, lo que ocurre es que ese poema lo escribió un joven con quien ya casi no hablo, es decir, yo hace 40 años (Posadas).

It is useful to contextualize these lines within the sphere of Cadenas’s activities from the late 50s to the 60s. As Elena Vera explains in her study and bibliography of Venezuelan authors from 1958 to 1983, the overthrowing of Pérez Jiménez incited a boom of *engagé* literary projects, groups and magazines (31).²³ Upon his homecoming, Cadenas joined other politically critical writers and intellectuals in producing the magazine *Tabla Redonda*, founded by Jesús Sanoja Hernández and Manuel Caballero²⁴. Although many of its members were Communist Party affiliates, *Tabla Redonda* eschewed the dictates of

²³ Such groups include *Sardio*, *Tabla Redonda*, *El Techo de la Ballena*, *Trópico Uno*, *En Haa* and *40 Grados a la Sombra*.

²⁴ The magazine *Tabla Redonda* was produced by Arnaldo Acosta Bello, Jesús Enrique Barrios, Rafael Cadenas, Manuel Caballero, Enrique Izaguirre, José Fernández Doris, Jesús Sanoja Hernández, Ligia

social realism, seeking artistic freedom and the attentive use of the poetic word (Vera 45, 53). The poem “Derrota,” (1963) to which is referred in the above quote, is emblematic of Cadenas’s “intimate situation” during those years, and became an anthem of the youth of his generation, voicing through irony, an acerbic critique of bourgeois individualism and hypocrisy.

As Cadenas acknowledges, the public and more politically defiant tone of “Derrota” was not cultivated throughout his writing career. Renouncing all affiliations to political parties, Cadenas focused his energies on teaching literature in English and Spanish at his alma mater, translating his preferred poets and furthering his own poetic development. His ensuing books, *Falsas maniobras* (1966) and *Intemperie* (1977), initiate his search for alternative, personal and philosophical solutions to a more essential rejection of the modern subject on epistemological and ethical grounds. *Memorial*, also published in 1977, gathers together the poems Cadenas composed between 1970 and 1975, and furthers the exploration and extirpation of the various facets of the “I” and its relationship to reality. With *Amante* (1983) and later *Gestiones* (1992) the poetic voice seeks the acceptance of the self, but repositioned in a humble, participatory relationship within reality.

Like Alberto Girri, Rafael Cadenas has threshed out in prose form, many of the recurring ideas that inform his poetry. His first such text, “Juventud, historia y cambio” was published in 1973 in *Zona Tórrida*, a magazine of the University of Carabobo (Isava

Olivieri and Darío Lancini. It was published from 1959 until 1965, when several of its participants joined integrants from *El Techo de la Ballena* to produce *En letra roja*.

Briceño 55), and since this time, the personal essay has afforded him the forum for articulating in more direct terms his conception of language, its relationship to the human being and reality. Included in his *Obra entera: Poesía y prosa (1958-1995)*²⁵ figure *Literatura y vida* (1970), *Realidad y literatura* (1979), *Anotaciones* (1983), *En torno al lenguaje* (1984), *Dichos* (1992) and *Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística* (1995). A constant in Cadenas's literary endeavors is also his contributions as a translator. In 2006, a compilation of his translations into Spanish was published in book form under the title *El taller de al lado*, featuring selected works by D. H. Lawrence, Whitman, Cavafy, Segalen, Graves and Creeley, among others. As in the analysis of Girri's poetry, Cadenas's essays and his translations will be drawn upon to supplement our reading of his verses.

In approaching Cadenas's poetry, an acknowledgement must be made of the contributions to this field of study of critics such as Luis Miguel Isava Briceño, Ilis Alfonso Luis and José Balza. Of the three, Isava Briceño's *Voz de amante* offers the most complete analysis of Cadenas's works. In it, he chronologically traces the dialectics between the self and the "you" in Cadenas's poetry, while simultaneously reconstructing the "intellectual biography" of the author's sources, readings and affinities (12). Ilis Alfonso's *Rafael Cadenas o La poesía como existencia: Ejercicio de aproximación a Los cuadernos del destierro, Falsas maniobras, Intemperie y Memorial* is less methodical in its approach, focusing on the relationship of the self and the "other," the notion of

²⁵ Other essays not included in his collected works are: "La barbarie civilizada" (1981), "Reflexiones sobre la ciudad moderna" (1983) and "Sobre la enseñanza de la literatura en la Educación Media" (1998).

emptiness and the role of memory. Although intuitive in her readings, Alfonzo lacks precision in the employment of open-ended terminology and summarily draws conclusions that seem to contradict her own analysis. Finally, the collection of articles, reviews and interviews related to Cadenas that was compiled and edited by Omar Astorga under the title *En torno a Rafael Cadenas* is an invaluable resource.

This chapter seeks to contribute to the study of Cadenas's works by situating his poetry within the greater discussion of modern epistemology. In the following pages, I wish to focus on Cadenas's poetic response to the construction and situation of Man as the subject and object of knowledge, the subsequent rejection of this model, and the repositioning of the self in relationship to reality. As in the structuring of the analysis of Girri's writings, Cadenas's poetry is read in two "movements," the first spanning the from *Una isla* (1958) until *Intemperie* (1977), and the second, including the work written from *Memorial* (1977) until *Gestiones* (1992). Such a division is not derived from an artificial pursuit of symmetry meant to mirror Girri's development. Cadenas himself has reiterated in various interviews the transformation of his poetic voice and the distance he feels from his earlier production, whose "self"-centered focus and verbosity represent the exact reverse of his later aesthetic. Armando Rojas Guardia, who traces Cadenas's "intellectual diary," succinctly summarizes the aim of the poet's second period to be the writing of "una poesía religada (en este sentido, religiosa) a lo Real (familiarizada internamente con la insondabilidad del mundo), la cual desnudada de todo oropel y de todo lujo escénico distractores, se levanta desde una 'sequedad insobornable' hasta la 'exactitud como criterio decisivo': una poesía de la *aletheia*" (98). The process to

achieve such a mode of poetry is anything but formulaic and clear-cut, and Cadenas revisits questions and experiences that appear to have been resolved in earlier poems. Cadenas's circling and cycling of ideas —like a musical theme with infinite variations— is reminiscent of Girri's poetic itinerary and the philosophical path of Martin Heidegger.

In following the route of Cadenas's thought, certain ideas seem to re-articulate that which we have seen in Girri's works. By revisiting these themes in this chapter, we may begin to find a pattern in the manner in which a particular vein of contemporary Latin American poetry problematizes the modern epistemological foundation of man's knowledge and experience and seeks an alternative means of approaching, understanding and interacting with reality. As such, poetry is assigned a limited, modest but crucial role in providing the space and means to come to the radically simple experience of *being* that is rarely otherwise afforded. Cadenas echoes Girri's affirmation of poetry's task and reaffirms its task in modern times.

3.1.2 THE POETICS OF AN ISLAND

Una isla (1958) is Cadenas's first book, a collection of 38 short, mostly untitled poems that were composed in Venezuela, upon returning from his exile in the island country of Trinidad. Epigraphs by two, future Nobel laureates frame this poetry and our reading of the first-person subject that is developed in this text. Cadenas quotes Polish author Czeslaw Milosz as cited by Octavio Paz to perhaps summarize his own feelings about the state of affairs in Venezuela, both during and after the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez: "Infeliz bajo la tiranía,/ infeliz bajo la república,/ en una suspirábamos por la

libertad,/ en otra por el fin de la corrupción.” His second reference, in clear contrast with the first, appears to offer an answer to those unhappy political and social circumstances: “Hablo de una alta condición, antaño,/ entre los trajes, en el reino de girantes claridades.” These verses are excerpted from Saint-John Perse’s “Pour fêter une enfance” (1910), a six-part poem composed to recollect and praise his birthplace: the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. Perse was twelve in 1899, when his family left their Antillean home for France. Guadeloupe came to represent a place of order and sense, not only an exotic and simpler world, but also the distant site of identity and self-knowledge, so different from France, where he felt himself to be an exile. Underlying his verses is also the presence of a female sensuality, of those women who wear “los trajes” and are bathing their luminescent and warm limbs in the verses preceding the ones quoted above.

The verses selected as the second epigraph to *Una isla* appear, in the original French, enclosed within parentheses²⁶. Their omission here is unfortunate because the parentheses themselves add a layer of meaning that contribute to our understanding of Cadenas’s “island.” Graphically, the parentheses form the contours of this “reino de girantes claridades” and its enclosed “alta condición antaño”; in other words, they trace the outline of an island — Guadeloupe, for Perse, and Trinidad, for Cadenas. Before the reader ever arrives at the “isla” of Cadenas’s title, these epigraphs serve to anticipate and

²⁶ The first stanza reads in French:

« Palmes... ! Alors on te baignait dans l’eau-de-feuilles-vertes ; et l’eau encore était du soleil vert ; et les servantes de ta mère, grandes filles luisantes, remuaient leurs jambes chaudes près de toi qui tremblais... (Je parle d’une haute condition, alors, entre les robes, au règne de tournantes clartés.) »

structure our interpretation of his text through the juxtaposition of the oppressive and unsatisfactory political situation on one hand, and the bygone days on the island of swirling lights where people maintained a “high condition,” on the other. Although his time in Trinidad was the result of a compulsory exile, in Cadenas’s verses the island is transformed into a variation of the symbolic *locus amœnus*, a place of plenitude, fulfillment, refuge and earthly paradise.

An inherent tension is soon made manifest, however, in the poetic construction of the island. As Eduardo Saccone has written, a *locus amœnus* is typically conceived as a sanctuary from the historical processes and conditions of time, and its space is enclosed and sheltered. Nevertheless, spatial/ temporal contiguity continues to exert its dominance in the physical and experiential realms of this *topos*, such that the future encroachment of an “outside” is inevitable, as is the distancing from this idyllic experience (5-6). This is indeed the case in *Una isla*. In fact, the poetic subject speaks of the island through memory, already inhabiting a time and a place distant from those he recalls. A sense of fallenness and rupture predominates, with the island presented as a paradise lost that had been sanctified by the plenitude of a female presence; in contrast, the present is distinguished by its uncertainty and the experience of collapse, fear and separation. The protagonist of these poems is trapped between the illusive recollection of self-possession and identity, and a present state of uncertainty, chaos and crisis.

As was the case in the reading of Girri’s first poetry, the broader discussion of the modern subject and its defining role in the modern episteme is illuminating in understanding the first-person poetic voice that speaks from the verses of the initial phase

of Cadenas's oeuvre. Here, again, Foucault's diagnosis of Man will provide us with the analytical framework for situating the crisis of the subject that is predominant in Cadenas's early poetic projects within the context of modernity's system of knowledge, whose foundation of unsolvable paradoxes has been referred to previously as the three sets of "doublets" that define Man's construction. The poetic voice of these poems is a version of Foucault's Man, as it unsuccessfully attempts to stake out and maintain its position as the subject and object of its own knowledge, a project symbolized by the island itself.

There is an anxiety for the conformation of subjectivity in Cadenas's first poetry. In this book, the poetic subject that comes to age, in the Foucauldian sense, is born in the immediacy of a crisis. His evident loss of an origin, unease within his chaotic and corrupt present and his self-described identity as an "other" alienated in his own country, are defining gestures of modernity. In this sense, Cadenas's reference to Saint-John Perse is not limited to their analog biographical circumstances: it is deeply rooted in a common experience of modernity in which the poet cannot find his place in the world. Modernity implies the essential assumption that the subject is never at home in its epoch. As in the great ideological narratives produced after the Hegelian concept of history, the modern subject considers himself trapped between the long-departed past that enjoyed an ephemeral golden age and a *telos* that announces the unfulfilled promise of restored order. Both the lost *locus amoenus* and its always-deferred restoration imply an undesirable present for the modern subject. Cadenas's first-person subject —read here as

a variation of Foucault's Man— through his articulation of the world, attempts but fails to recover, a new sense of order. The first, untitled poem of *Una isla* states as much:

Si el poema no nace, pero es real tu vida,
eres su encarnación.
Habras
en su sombra inconquistable.
Te acompaña
diamante incumplido ("Una isla" 17).

These verses express the poet's slippery understanding of the relationship between author and text. The initial supposition is of the possibility of "the poem": it *is*, this much is affirmed, at least as a future prospect or promise, but its manifestation and "birth" through words, as articulated and captured by the poet, is less certain. Assuming the comforting "realness" of the author's life and existence, however, the poet consoles himself with the idea of being, himself, the incarnation of the poem he was unsuccessful in "birthing." The notion of the conflation of poem and poet would naturally appeal to the modern subject, as the securing of himself as the generator and enunciator of meaning. Cadenas, in evaluating such a position, is straightforward in his verdict: the modern subject is, in fact, never the master of his elusive poem. Man "inhabits" poetry's unconquerable shadow —that particular darkness cast by a body in its play with light. Although perhaps not visible to him, the shadow announces and makes plain to the subject the independent, unfathomable presence of the poem. Unable to wrap his hands around it, the poem is ultimately portrayed as an unfulfilled, omnipresent ideal: the hard, luminescent transparency of a perfectly structured diamond. Cadenas acknowledges from

these first verses that, as much as the subject may so desire, poetry is not Man's dominion through which to render the world to himself.

Despite this awareness, poetry is the medium the subject chooses in an attempt to access an "original," lost experience and to project a utopian, future resolution. Cadenas's island contains the accoutrements of an earthly paradise, some of which he enumerates in another untitled poem: "Muelle de enormes llamas./ Navíos que viajan al sol,/ música de tambores,/ sales desencajadas,/ niños desnudos,/ marineros que descargan plátanos. Ciudad de corazón de árbol, humedades/ temblorosas, juncos que danzan" ("Una isla" 27). To this portrait of simplicity and abundance that appeals to the five senses, Cadenas adds other selective, tantalizing details of Trinidad in subsequent poems: "lunas de bauxita" ("Una isla" 25), "Cielo plateado, subyugadas colinas, plantaciones/ de coco, tren de nubes, olor de viandas," San Fernando, the port "ciudad de madera y su sortilegio" ("Una isla" 32), "mercados donde mujeres/ de piel cobriza venden hojas, a los muelles/ atestado de frutas, a la Savannah donde los/ amantes encuentran la oscuridad para verse" ("Una isla" 49).

An essential element of the island is the an anonymous female lover, often referred to in the second person, whose body and presence constitute the most prominent landmarks in the topography of the subject's memory. This woman is evoked in verses of a more literal diction — "recuerdo el amanecer en tu cabellera negra tumbada/ sobre el lecho o bañándose de ti o dejándote su fragancia," ("Una isla" 34) — and in ever-ascending tributes to her magnificence, such in the anaphoric poem titled "You":

Tú apareces,

ando a tientas./ Claras potestades imperan aquí, ahuyentan ráfagas/ de aniquilación, aúnan lo roto./ Inician” (“Una isla” 41). More than a geographical location, the island represents self-knowledge, security and stability, a time and place when the human being was integrated with the world, before Man was rent apart and erected as subject. The poetic voice speaks of the experience of simply *being* and belonging: “Me entrego a estas arenas donde el brillo rescata./ Aquí soy. Sin pensar” (“Una isla” 40). It is for this reason, that the island and his lover are evoked with such longing and desperation, for they symbolize a state of communion and integration. Cadenas’s poetic subject suspects as much, when he queries: “¿Te busco a ti o busco mi rostro? [...] Sólo sé esto: que al evocarte mi extravío cesa, vuelvo a entrar en contacto” (“Una isla” 51). Ultimately, Trinidad represents the Edenic possibility of a future grounding of the self as pure presence. In his literary treatment of Trinidad, the poetic subject of *Una isla* conforms with the Foucauldian model of the retreat and return of the origin, as discussed in detail in the first chapter. The poetic voice speaks from a present, beyond the eclipse of this idyll, but with the prospect of a possible resolution: “Ahora no me reconozco. Sólo espero que de mí nazca otro hombre unido” (“Una isla” 50).

The subject of *Una isla*, situated within the present from which these poems are articulated, claims to not recognize himself; he calls himself an “exiliado” (“Una isla” 59), for he perceives himself to be “other” than his “true” self. The actuality of this existential crisis is of even greater consequence to the poetic subject than his time of incarceration, previous to his arrival to the island. Even behind bars, he felt free, boundless and self-assured:

Mi libertad había nacido tras aquellas paredes. El calabozo núm. 3 se extendía como un amanecer. Su día era vasto.
El pobre carcelero se creía libre porque cerraba la reja, pero a través de ti yo era innumerable ("Una isla" 23).

The present stands in stark contrast. Outlined in broad strokes, the subject finds himself in a large, anonymous city of “duras calles” and “puertas humilladas” (Cadenas "Una isla" 54). Far from the island, physically unrestrained, he nevertheless feels besieged and trapped, incapable of reconciling his notion of himself and his experience of himself, the situations to which he is subjected and his comprehension of them, or the words he speaks and their corresponding signified:

La destrucción me sitia. Me estanco, en litigio. La claridad se vuelve inútil. Llegué y no llegué. No ando, me desando, en pedazos. Digo estoy y no siento lo que digo. Voy de cerco en cerco. Atestiguo derrumbes. Busco lo que solo no puede encontrarse, y se hace tarde ("Una isla" 58).

With *Una isla*, Cadenas initiates his literary career in the heart of the crisis of Man. His poetic protagonist's present, and its doomed strategies for coping with this crisis are representative of the modern subject.

3.1.3 STRATEGIES OF EXILE

Cadenas's next publication, *Los cuadernos del destierro*, composed in Caracas in 1959, can be read as the continuation and magnification of the poetic experience of *Una isla*. This long poem in prose, divided into thirty-one “episodes” of varying length, has been described in broad terms by Guillermo Sucre as “la expansión del yo a través de una memoria personal y mítica” (304). The affinity of *Los cuadernos* and Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia* (1855) has been noted by Venezuelan critic Ilis Alfonzo (52-54) for the delirium

that defines the first-person protagonist; Luis Miguel Isava Briceño has also summarized other readers' observations of the relationship of the poem with Arthur Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer* (1873) in this manner:

comparte la actitud de rebelión, el sumirse en la ficción y en los desdoblamientos, el precipitarse vertiginoso en los abismos del yo. Así mismo comparte la actitud frente al lenguaje y, en líneas generales, los cambios de tono y la evolución del poema: presentación del personaje; establecimiento de su ascendencia; sumisión en el infierno y los abismos; desarreglo de los sentidos, dislocación del lenguaje; calma final, irresolución y despedida (28).

Los cuadernos del destierro is Cadenas's own "*carnet de damné*," in which his poetic protagonist says: "relataré no sin fabulaciones mi transcurso por tierras de ignominias, dulzuras, rupturas y reuniones, esplendores y derrumbes" ("Los cuadernos del destierro" 65). A confessed non-reliable narrator, the poetic voice's vertiginous account exhibits several salient features: the protagonist's identity and voice are unstable, fractured and multiple; the chronology of the relation is disjointed and impossible to reconstruct with certainty, despite the "I's" fixation with both the past and the future; language's capacity to communicate and convey meaning is thrown into doubt. These characteristics have been interpreted as symptoms of the psychic process of individuation in the Jungian sense of the term (Alfonzo), as a personal variation of the motif of the "fall" —from nature, love, a state of grace, communion with the other— (Isava Briceño), and as evidence of Cadenas's cultivated and destructive poetic neurosis that fuels a particular brand of alienation and impotence for both poetry and men (Russotto). Although each critic, in the course of his or her close reading of *Los cuadernos*, helps the reader to navigate Cadenas's labyrinthine poem, none seems to inquire about the greater

“wherefore” of this book, in other words, the epistemological conditions which allow such a text to be conceived in the first place. Cadenas himself provides the answer that we have already begun exploring in the previous section when he writes: “Todo esto ocurre porque terriblemente la palabra *hombre* nos roe” (“Los cuadernos del destierro” 96). This book is the product of the episteme of Man, and can only “occur” within the context of the modern appreciation of this paramount word.

Los cuadernos can be appreciated as the *mise en scène* of the full-blown crisis of Man and his strategies to overcome it. Foucault’s diagnosis of the modern episteme as an arrangement of knowledge through and around the figure of Man that is intrinsically paradoxical and “born” in crisis is exemplified in Cadenas’s poem. Specifically, the text wrestles with the impossibility of the reconciliation of an empirical and transcendental base for knowledge, of the self and its other, of the present and that which is past or future, of Man’s intended use of language and its ungraspable and unfathomable content. The first-person subject of *Los cuadernos* is an embodiment of “Man,” and his struggles and ultimate failure to bridge the contradictions of his existence parallel Foucault’s demonstration of the unfeasibility of an internal resolution to these quandaries, thus foreshadowing an epistemic shift in which Man “disappears.”

Before Cadenas attempts a disarticulation of Man in his later works, this poem represents the ballooning assertion and linguistic amplification of his presence. Man, Foucault has insisted, is the subject and *object* of his own knowledge. Here, the poetic subject desperately seeks to establish his own identity and to define the parameters of his existence as a means to fix a “transcendental” ground for his empirical experience. This

desire and need to establish an indubitable foundation on which to stand is reiterated throughout the poem, in phrases such as, “Una sola certidumbre ansío. Un sólo lugar que podamos llamar por su nombre, palpar, acariciar” and “quiero dentro de mí un recodo florido, infranqueable, dúctil donde yo pueda reinar sin estorbo” (“Los cuadernos del destierro” 100, 01). To the rhetorical question he poses himself, “¿No habrá cerca un recinto seguro?” (“Los cuadernos del destierro” 95), the poetic voice has already answered “no,” lamenting repeatedly his present state of confusion, doubt, internal division and annihilation. He says that life “me deja solo frente al enorme búfalo de lo desconocido” (91), and thus he “Habitaba un lugar indeciso” (“Los cuadernos del destierro” 95). Because in this state, “Nada se resuelve. Está en pie la angustia de la escisión” (97), the “I” concludes: “Yo no puedo sino girar en la destrucción” (95).

Due to the insecurity of his existential position, the poetic voice attempts to establish an identity for himself by tracing his genealogy and destiny, with the hope of situating his present within the course of a comprehensible history. The first section of the poem is the narrator’s initial declaration of self-definition. In it, he distinguishes himself from the race of his ancestors, whom he characterizes as austere, provincial, misaligned with the earth, incapable of reading the world’s signs, rigid of spirit but elastic of body. His affiliation, on the other hand, is with a people he describes as “un pueblo de grandes comedores de serpientes, sensuales, vehementes, silenciosos y aptos para enloquecer de amor” and his “suerte estaba decidida por sacerdotes semisalvajes” (“Los cuadernos del destierro” 63). By aligning himself with the latter group, the poetic voice seems to privilege an instinctual model of man, one that is attuned to nature and is guided

by a greater destiny than the self. Nevertheless, the narrator is unable to let go and embrace this intuitive approach to variable developments of his existence, finding fault in this manner of being: “Me había tornado primitivo, inextricable y perverso como un niño. Conformaba mis actos con ceremonias simples, igual que un salvaje” (65).

Ultimately, Cadenas’s poetic voice envies the assuredness and “rigideces inmemoriales” (63) of his ancestors and laments his own “mudanza de los rostros” (65). He sums up his experience in a very Foucauldian fashion: “Yo no era el *mismo*” (63, emphasis added). Man’s need to be the *Same* and to eliminate the *Other* is central to his role as the subject and object of all knowledge, guaranteeing his position as its axis in the structuring of knowledge. The protagonist of *Los cuadernos*, like Foucault’s Man, is born with the impossible mission of knowing himself as *the knower*, and his incapacity of doing so precipitates an immediate crisis. Cadenas’s subject diagnoses himself and enumerates his symptoms:

Sólo yo conocía mi mal. Era —caso no infrecuente en los anales de los falsos desarrollos— la duda.
Yo nunca supe si fui escogido para escogido para trasladar revelaciones.
Nunca estuve seguro de mi cuerpo.
Nunca pude precisar si tenía una historia.
Yo ignoraba lo concerniente a mí y a mis ancestros.
Nunca creía que mis ojos, orejas, boca, nariz, piel, movimientos, gustos, dilecciones, aversiones me pertenecían enteramente (76)

Rephrased, these lines speak of an ignorance of the self, from the physical body and its processes to human history and its resolution. The consciousness and immediacy of these “shortcomings” of Man are indicative of the epistemological context that made possible

Cadenas's text. Our present examination of the additional strategies to which his protagonist will turn, furthers this assertion.

Mirroring the symbolic construction of the island of the previous book, the poetic subject of *Los cuadernos* verbally creates an analogous tropical Eden of memory's domain, from which he is exiled. As the temporal order of this text is non-linear, this marvelous realm is mobile, functioning both as an origin and the place of an ultimate resolution. It is here that he posits his authentic, unadulterated and undivided self, as both memory and projection: "Osaré recrearme en la evocación./ Isla, deleitable antífona./ Horma de los cuatro puntos./ Asilo de los vientos sin paz" (67). The poetic subject, through the evocation of this otherworldly space-time, seeks to define himself anew, anchoring his being in and through the island, a word which in itself functions as the center of a private liturgy in Cadenas's poems. The island is given other names, whose compilation here augments its polysemy. It is called the "región delgada [...] la morada donde se depositan los signos de las aguas [...] el huerto de las especias clamorosas, la temporada de arcilla" (70), the "tierra de luz blanda" (72), the "casa meridional del agua" (74), the "lugar de los ayuntamientos sagrados" (87) and "los paraísos que soñé" (87). These descriptors elevate the island to the category of a consecrated myth, a place of light, generation, and sacred unions where the waters convey signs and "Todo aquí es génesis" (71).

To the details of the tropical cornucopia of *Una isla* that poetically represented Trinidad, Cadenas combines in this book, imaginative components that effectively distance this place from the map of identifiable geographies. The poetic language of *Los*

cuadernos “ups the symbolic ante,” investing this space with supernatural, extraordinary characters, beliefs and rituals. Certain features of the landscape can, however, be traced back to Trinidad, a country of great religious plurality, races and origins from which images such as the following can realistically be derived:

Calles manchadas de fluidos vegetales, de baba ebria, de sexo negro, de mugres provisionales, de hálitos sacros, de africanas flexiones, de alas de loto, de mandarines venido a menos, de dragones rotos, de fosforescencias de tigra, de aires balsámicos de amplios valles búdicos.
Una mezquita se baña al sol en las colinas (69).

A country with significant populations of practicing Muslims, Hindus and followers of the Orisha (Changó) faith, Cadenas’s portrayal of the place of origin amplifies the “exotic” elements of Trinidad, supplementing them with complementary confabulations of his own invention, such as: “Un adolescente oscuro mira desde un trono de luciérnagas el paso de las cebras como cordón de brasas. Pasa un elefante herido” (71). Creating a mythic world to inhabit, the poetic voice unites remote times and places, and thus can claim to have spoken with and seen any number of symbolically “loaded” personages: “brujos” (72), “profetas” (73), “al dios Osiris rodeado de cuervos, a los vikingos que escaparon al volcán, a un caballero desencantado con un halcón al hombro, a un emperador romano con sus trofeos de vírgenes desnudas” (74).

Although the place of origin is elaborated upon and recurring in the book, the poetic voice has to finally admit that its “orillas se han apagado” (102). He calls himself “Anteo sin memoria” (98), a reference to the Greek myth of Antaeus, the virulent son of Gaia and Poseidon whose strength to fight his enemies came from his contact with the earth, his mother and origin. Antaeus was defeated and killed by Heracles, when the latter

lifted and held him from the ground until his strength was drained. Cadenas's protagonist aptly laments his own experience, "Mi piel echa de menos tu caricia, tierra" (98), with the "earth" clearly affiliated to that land of his imagination to which he dreams of returning. His present is that of continuous exile, represented by a parade of anonymous, lonely cities where he is degraded and trapped "colgando de la pasarela del autobús como un orangután triste" (90), tired "de ver naufragar mis expediciones sagradas en vacíos" (84).

Although the poetic subject is loath to admit it, he is forced to concede that the place he posits with origin and authenticity is a "lugar de ficción" (77) or "Erewhon" (90), a reference to Samuel Butler's 1872 novel, about an eponymous, fictional and "utopian" country whose name is an anagram of "Nowhere." The realization of the artifice of this origin represents the final hope for the poetic voice in his desperate attempt to create a foundation for his erection as the subject and object of knowledge. He writes: "Universo oral de mi libertad, en tus galaxias encomiendo mi espíritu" (98). As the speaking subject, he conceives himself to be the creator of meaning and the generator of truth, with words becoming the key to his freedom.

This human-centered language is but another symptom of how Cadenas's protagonist attempts to fulfill his role as Man within the modern episteme. As the speaker of language, the subject attempts to reign over and rein in the words he uses, but to little avail: "las palabras se liberan de la formalidad y con incipiente gozo traspasan las líneas presupuestas. [...] El titiritero demanda orden, procura apagar la descompasada insurgencia, conjura la magnánima retórica pero en balde" (94). As writer and speaker of his autobiography, the poetic subject cannot even control the telling of his life. A failed

puppeteer, his own words rebel against them, speaking their own mysterious meaning that eclipses and erases him. In desperation, he seeks mastery of language but discovers that his efforts are in vain:

Consultaba los inabarcables cursos del verbo, inquiría de las tablas de la dicción sus secretos trasvasables, averiguaba en pergaminos astrales la valía de los vocablos. El color, aroma, sabor, textura, sonido de mi idioma me eran ajenos (99).

Cadenas's protagonist is defeated in and through words, the very material of his construction: "Exhausta está mi lengua, la matriz amante. Ya no puede perfilar ninguna figura en la claridad del día. [...] Derrotada, inútil, impotente" (97). The "figura" that language "no puede perfilar" is that of the figure of Man. *Los cuadernos del destierro* is the dramatization of his attempts to conquer and hold his place as the center of a structure of knowledge, asserting his identity as the Same over the Other, forging a space of origin and resolution for himself, and forcing his language to speak his meaning and identity. His admitted failure is that of Man, and the book is the product of pushing the paradoxical axis of his construction to their limits. Cadenas's next poetry will be the insistent probing of his "defeat" and "failure," and the beginning of an alternative model for being, beyond Man.

3.1.4 THE PATH OF FALSE MANEUVERS

On May 31, 1963, Cadenas published "Derrota," a poem that first appeared in the newspaper, *Clarín del viernes* (Isava Briceño 33). Included in his *Obra entera*, it was placed after the collection of poems, *Falsas maniobras*, although the latter was composed in 1965. In this analysis, I will follow the original chronology of their publication. Rafael

Cordero has recalled that this poem was adopted by the youth of Venezuela of the 1960s as their anthem because it captured “el estado de ánimo de una generación” (113). For his part, Manuel Caballero classifies the text as “una carta escrita para darnos coraje” (30) and Ludovico Silva characterizes it as an act of hyperconsciousness, “una requisitoria hacia sí mismo [...] que, por mayor escarmiento y ejemplaridad, no es realizada, según los consejos del ascético San Juan en <<los retretes del alma>>, sino a la vista del público” (18).

With these statements as an introduction, it should already be evident that the tenor and *raison d'être* of this poem mark a shift from the poems of *Una isla* and *Los cuadernos del destierro*. Whereas in his first books, the poetic voice seeks to establish order and normalcy through various strategies specific to modern Man, in this poem, the first-person subject abandons all pretensions of fulfilling Man's role, preferring to denounce the expectations and conventions that still predominate in the society to which he belongs and declaring himself unwilling to participate within the configuration of accepted values, which he scorns. Although the poetic voice offers no real solution or alternative to this model, he announces his abstention, judging himself, his activities, thoughts and life to be a failure, according to the standards and strictures of the his world. The poet declares himself to be “defeated” in the sense that he acknowledges the fact that he that he will never succeed as “Man,” given that the demands of being the absolute subject and object of knowledge are impossible to meet, as he experienced in his earlier attempts. The title of the poem, “Derrota,” is not without irony; although he is self-deprecating, the effect of his almost fifty-count “confessions of guilt” is to interrogate the

sense and validity of the episteme of Man and to imply its “defeat” as the way of structuring being and knowledge.

Despite being two-and-a-half pages long, “Derrota” is one long sentence, its body constructed of a string of anaphoric, adjective clauses that fill in the space between the first word of the poem, “Yo,” and the independent clause that comprises the last two verses: “me levantaré del suelo más ridículo todavía para seguir burlándome de los otros y de mí hasta el día del juicio final” (“Derrota” 139). Each of the verses in between offers a detail the “yo’s” profile, from his personal psyche to his political critique of Venezuela, from his harsh self-judgment to his non-conformity with societal expectations. He shows himself to be inept at and/or disinterested in standard, expected functions of Man within modern civilization: holding a job, wearing a tie, earning a title, fulfilling a “useful” purpose, marrying and forming a home, being successful, triumphing in life, engaging in politics, and traveling to Paris or India, the geographic credentials necessary to call oneself a cultural or spiritual savant. The reader may wonder if such statements are simply a sign of the times — one more self-proclaimed rebel outcast of the 1960’s expressing his individualism and discontent with hypocritical bourgeois morals. Although Cadenas’s poem may have been adopted by his Venezuelan peers for precisely this reason, I believe that the text exposes the author’s realization of the paradoxical epistemological underpinnings of Man’s construction.

In several key verses, the poetic subject voices his plight and demonstrates his particular consciousness about his situation, saying he is someone: “que he perdido un centro que nunca tuve” (137), “que perdí el hilo del discurso que se ejecutaba en mí y no

he podido encontrarlo” (138), “que no encuentro mi cuerpo” (138) and “que ansío la inmovilidad perfecta” (138). The lack of a center, of control over language and one’s own body, coupled with the need to establish a point of stability speak of an intimate awareness of Man’s crisis which is summed up in the verse “no soy lo que soy ni lo que no soy” (138). Unlike the protagonist of *Una isla* or *Los cuadernos del destierro*, this “I” recurs to no to strategies in an effort to get around his limitations and affirm himself as Man. Without histrionics, he states his perspective of his own position and his desire to find a radically different mode of being: “he percibido por relámpagos mi falsedad y no he podido derribarme, barrer todo y crear de mi indolencia, mi flotación, mi extravío una frescura nueva, y obstinadamente me suicido al alcance de la mano” (139). In the end, the problematic of the poem is revealed in its entirety: the “yo” of the poem recognizes, in addition to the falsehood of society, his own lack of authenticity but is unable to “overthrow himself.” Despite the expressed desire to “sweep everything away” and “create a new freshness,” the axis of this poem remains the obstinate “yo” who admits to an “orgullo satánico” (138) and predominates in this poem. It is only in *Falsas maniobras* that the “yo’s” ego and need for affirmation begins to be abandoned.

The title, *Falsas maniobras*, is particularly well suited for this text and our present discussion. The word “maniobras,” best translated as “maneuvers,” implies a series of tactical and dexterous movements, sometimes devious or deceptive in nature, to make something function or to change directions. In the context of Cadenas’s literary trajectory, “maniobras” specifically refer to the various postures adopted by the human being in relationship to time, the world that surrounds him, language and his conception

of the self. Cadenas qualifies these maneuvers as “false,” thus opening the door to several possible interpretations. “False” could refer to Cadenas’s recognition and self-criticism of his own subject’s failed strategies to assert himself as the subject and object of knowledge. “False” could be the modern epistemological structuring of the human being as Man, and a critique of a society that embraces this role. In both interpretations, the author inherently implies the possibility of “true,” “authentic,” “sincere” or “real” courses of action and manners of *being*.

In the course of this book, all three of these ideas gleaned from the title are played out, alternating unflinching personal and societal asseverations with the opening of alternative conceptions and positioning of the self. The first text acts as a preface to the book, with the poetic subject admitting to his previous “incarnations” — “solía dividirme en innumerables personas”—, his conflicted scorn and desire to conform to modern culture’s expectations — “Para complacer a los otros y a mí, he conservado una imagen doble”—, and his ultimate goal to reach a fresh approach to the self and his reality, — “como un esplendor innominado, y mi soberbia injustificada ceda el paso a una gran paz, una alegría sobria, una rectitud inmediata” (“Falsas maniobras” 107). Cadenas’s doubles are notorious in this book, and a close reading of the poems “Combate,” “Desolado,” “Los dos inútiles,” “Reconocimiento” and “Él que es” reveals a pattern with regards to the way Cadenas conceives the self. In a binary fashion, writes of an external “I” who conforms with the exigencies of Man’s construction —“ese mí orgulloso, ese mí que no deja franquear su claustro”— and an “other,” authentic self described as “informe, vasto, neutro” and “oscuro, humilde y quieto, no necesita protección” (134).

Several poems at the beginning of the book, such as “Mi pequeño gimnasio” speak of the subject’s pitiable attempts to consciously mold himself through a series of exercises into Man. He “bends,” “hides,” “punishes,” “scorns,” “stretches” and “twists” himself in an effort to conform his “consciousness,” “intentions,” “actions” and “words” to the standards he is supposed to uphold, expressed succinctly in the final verses of the poem:

En el fondo los ejercicios están enderezados a hacer de mí un hombre racional, que viva con precisión y burle los laberintos. En clave, persiguen mi transformación en Hombre Número Tal. Llanamente y en mi intimidad, espero con ellos dejar de ser absurdo ("Falsas maniobras" 115).

Cadenas’s lexical choice coincides exactly with our reading of his work up to this point. His first-person poetic voice is remarkably self-aware and severe in his auto-evaluation, recognizing his insecurities, the motives behind his exertions to affirm an identity as rational Man, and their underlying falsehood. To be “Hombre Número Tal” is a bid for safety and positivity through the self, outside of the “laberintos” of the unknown, even thought internally, the “yo” admits his personal reservations about this “absurd” mold of being.

Cadenas’s critique is further developed in the poem “Certamen,” whose title implies a type of competition with prizes, intended to stimulate the cultivation of certain areas of knowledge. Here, the competition is life, represented by a racetrack in a “ciudad instalada sobre la prisa” (116) around which the contestants speed. In this poem, as in many of this book, Cadenas plays with the idea he first presented in the introductory poem, that of “dividing himself in innumerable persons” (107). “Certamen” maintains the

slight presence of a first-person voice, which makes itself visible in the only verse written in parentheses: “(Yo lo he visto vagar por ferias de oxígeno, en fuertes atascos)” (116). The “him” referred to above is the central focus of the poem, and a double of the “yo,” one who initially attempts to compete with anonymous Men who are “sumidos en la apatía de una nueva prisa, enredados en sus caballos de fuerza” and “dormidos, orgullosos de sus progresos, tranquilizados” (116). The “él” realizes his “ineptitud para competir” and decides to “situarse en un punto inmóvil” where he watches the others with “desprecio, vergüenza y envidia” (116). These conflicting emotions understandable: he feels disdain for their limited and arrogant approach to life, embarrassment for having participated himself, and envy for their assured sense of purpose, their pride and unquestioning fulfillment of their assigned role. Beyond this gut reaction to the experience of modern reality, an understated but sophisticated assessment of the wherefore of this manner of being is offered: “En realidad ni él ni ellos se mueven. Sólo se desplazan en el interior de un sueño para evitar que el silencio les hable” (116). Modern Man ceaselessly oscillates in pursuit of establishing himself as the Same and to affirm himself as the center of all movement. Cadenas calls this pretension a “dream” which does not allow for true movement. Man is trapped within his own paradigm and his incessant activity is a strategy to protect himself from all that is “Other” to him: the “silence” which would speak a way of *being* beyond Man.

For this reason, Cadenas writes a poem of personal praise to “Fracaso,” which is personified in the poem as a teacher and a route to salvation, and addressed in the second-person, as “you.” Inverting modern societal values, the poetic voice offers thanks to

“Failure” for having prevented him from committing the gravest “false maneuver”: that of consummating himself as Man. In her linguistic study of this poem, critic Irma Chumacero writes that Cadenas “Contrapone con una visión de la realidad que contraviene lo establecido en el mundo occidental: el fracaso como forma de vida y vía para la propia liberación” (57). It is failure that has made the poetic voice “humilde, silencioso y rebelde” (132) by “limpiándome con una esponja áspera, lanzándome a mi verdadero campo de batalla, cediéndome las armas que el triunfo abandona” (132). He has thus avoided the pitfalls of Man: “representar un papel [...] reñir con jerarquías, inflarme hasta reventar” (132). Cadenas takes issue with Man’s notion of “failure,” writing that, “Tú no existes./ Has sido inventado por la delirante soberbia” (131), and instead, embraces the opportunity to experience “vacío,” “la nitidez del desierto,” “sólo desnudez” (131-2).

In this book, as we have seen in *Una isla* and *Los cuadernos del destierro*, the poetic voice contrasts his present state of being with an experience of unity, identity and belonging. In *Falsas maniobras*, the poetic accoutrements of this condition are slightly reminiscent of the tropical paradise of the previous books, particularly in these two verse of the poem “Bungalow”: “Palmeras, acacias, sauces a pico./ Sol que hace cantar los techos” (120). Nevertheless, the scenery of this “Beloved country” is mostly internal, and eternally pertaining to him, a “País a donde van las líneas de mi mano, lugar donde soy otro, mi anillo de bodas. Seguramente estás cerca del centro” (121). The “center” to which all of his lifelines point is within himself, reflecting an evolved understanding of the “origin” as a personal order of consciousness. Instead attributing plenitude to a golden

past to be recovered, a future to be attained or a lover to be possessed, all rests on the present and the manner in which one *is* in the world. In the poem “Reconocimiento,” the first-person’s “recognition” is that of the changes necessary to abandon the strictures of Man:

He acechado la aceptación súbita de mi realidad.

Despedí la poesía que se cuelga de los brazos.
Incendí los testimonios falaces.
Adopté la forma directa.

Abandono mi caminar intricado. Me dilato en vastedades blancas.
[...]
He sentido ráfagas de otra región sin culpa.
Me hago a la lentitud, al gesto consciente, al rumor del desierto (126).

There is a will to depose the self through a shift in the conception of the human being’s relationship with the world through its mediation with thought, language and carefully scripted actions. Poetry and words should not be the medium for the aggrandizement of the “I;” the ego should be diluted to transparency so that the human being can listen to the silence of the world around him, allowing for the integration of himself his gestures to his “realidad” which he accepts and embraces in the present moment.

A short poem in prose titled “Mirar” explicitly outlines this alternative mode of being beyond Western Man:

Veo otra ruta, la ruta del instante, la ruta de la atención, despierta incisiva [...] ruta relámpago, ruta de mil ojos [...] reflejo del rayo *vigilancia*, del rayo *ahora*, del rayo *esto*, ruta real con su legión de frutos vivos cuyo remate es ese lugar en todas partes y ninguna (128).

This language should recall that of Girri, particularly in his Tao-inspired poems, an influence that Cadenas also overtly touts by naming two of his central poems “Vacío”

and “Satori,” and declaring that “sé que has estado/ en todos mis puntos de partida, envolviéndome, Oriente solícito,/ como una ceremonia” (121). An “Eastern slope,” to borrow Octavio Paz’s title, offers a new point of view and vocabulary to Cadenas that forgo ordinary habits of thinking and acting, demonstrating the possibility of a sudden, intuitive way of “looking” which D. T. Suzuki described as “the opening of the mind-flower” (Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki 85). Irrespective of time and place, this perception depends on the human being’s availing of himself to reality’s present, through his open, empty attention. Man becomes radically redefined by what he is not: “Solamente llevo lo que he quitado./ Soy un hueco florido” (127). When Man’s overwhelming presence no longer dictates the mode of “revealing” the world, then the present can be unveiled in the fullness of its present being.

Cadenas’s poem “Satori” is not the verbal consummation of this experience, but the call to “bogar” or “row” without a goal or destination, simply being in the present of each instant. In this poem, Cadenas demonstrates his intellectual understanding of Zen practice —ego-less action in accord with nature, the opening of perception and the silencing of thought— and Satori —the sudden insight of enlightenment into the essence and nature of everything, which can be triggered by anything. Cadenas compares it with a “Relámpago” which could be sparked by “Un viraje, un golpe seco, un lamido de brillante ola nos lanza a donde es” (129). The fulfillment of this call to *being* is not realized within the scope of this book, but a new conception of the self, a radically different approach to reality and a reevaluation of Man offer a fresh path for Cadenas’s subject to tread. Adapted in part from Zen Buddhist models, Cadenas’s text confronts the

difficult task of founding a knowledge beyond Man. It is precisely in the void left by his disappearance that, if we recall Foucault's assessment, it is possible once more to truly think.

What exactly constitutes Man's disappearance is the source of debate that Cadenas struggles with in his following books. As the modern, Western human being is cloaked in the complex and layered armature of Man, Cadenas seeks to strip away the remaining masks that unwittingly fortify this epistemological definition of the self. His challenge is to decant the human person, and in particular, himself, to determine what constitutes his "real" being, and those aspects of him that are "false." A potential contradiction arises, however, because the Satori experience that Cadenas embraces as antithetical to Man allows for no dualistic thinking or divisions between the "real." Enlightenment is essentially the acceptance of things in their transcendental aspect and the affirmation of their "Suchness," with no exception made for the human being. It is yet unclear if Cadenas devalues the quotidian, manifest self (body, ego, individual consciousness) and attributes "realness" only to the transcendental Being of all beings in their unity. Is this a quest to eliminate particular versions and doubling of the "yo" or to eradicate it altogether? What is this *being* of the human? For the speaking subject, the conundrum is particularly pointed. We may recall Foucault's eloquently phrased questions that Cadenas's poetry also begs:

que faut-il que je sois, moi qui pense et qui suis ma pensée, pour que je sois ce que je ne pense pas, pour que ma pensée soit ce que je ne suis pas ? Qu'est-ce donc que cet être qui scintille et pour ainsi dire clignote dans l'ouverture du cogito mais n'est pas donné souverainement en lui et par lui ? (Foucault Les mots et les choses 335-36).

Cadenas's following book, *Intemperie*, penetrates more deeply inside the human being, with the hopes of sorting out some of the facets of the "I" to embrace that thought which is not of the self, and the "shimmer" of being that lies beyond the *cogito*.

3.1.5 THE INCLEMENCY OF THE SELF

In 1977 Cadenas published *Intemperie*, a short book of 32 numbered, untitled poems that are his most brief, distilled and stripped of images. Luis Miguel Izaba Briceño correctly classifies this as a transitional text in his trajectory (49) and Ilis Alfonso summarizes its problematic as the search to discover how to "vivir desde una perspectiva que no sea el yo, encontrar otro tipo de saber que no esté fundamentado en la razón" (110). Throughout the book, the first-person subject is scrutinized by various projections and doublings of the self, who constitute the enigmatic characters of the text: "el juez" (poem 1); "cuerpo" (poems 6 and 10); a "jugador" whose destiny is unknown (poem 9); an attendant to "la diosa" (poem 12); "perseguidor" (poem 19); "jornalero" (poem 20); "fantasma" (poem 22). The reader perceives an interior antagonism between the "I" and its constituent parts as if only through confrontation and combat can the contradictions, false posturing and impotence of the "I" be revealed.

The violent, cruel and sometimes absurd process of exposing and cleansing the self is the "intemperie" or "inclemency" that subject is left outside to suffer. Cadenas summarizes this method in poem 7 which reads in its entirety: "Hombre/ que se acusa./ En el fondo/ llaga/ del Cristo/ traicionado./ Impostura/ que clama por exactitud" ("Intemperie" 146). Man's self-accusation is leveled against his imposture —of erecting

himself as the ultimate subject and object of knowledge— and betraying his own true nature through false self-aggrandizement. Christ’s “wound” is not only the mark of Man’s betrayal, but also the representation of the pain suffered that guaranteed his eternal redemption. Cadenas’s subject verbally scourges himself, and his self-inflicted wounds are also offered as key to his transformation. Through them, he demands of himself and seeks “exactitude”: the naked, unscripted, open truthfulness of his *being*.

In prosecuting and restricting himself as subject, the poetic voice speaks of a “juez” who lives off of his blood and inside of himself, but who “separándose de nosotros dicta sus fallos” (143); he conceives himself as carrying around a “fantasma incómodo” who “nos ara por dentro” (151); he writes of himself as internally assaulted by a prosecutor who “me despedaza, me corta en trozos, me riega por el campo” (150). These internal enemies serve to shake the armature of the I within its self-conception as Man, resulting in a struggle with the subject’s will and its inclination to assert itself: “¿Y yo? Yo también lo devoro” (150). Locked in battle, the poetic voice eventually realizes that “mi enemigo” is “mi amigo a la larga” (150), because his doubles, bringing judgment and destruction, herald a new possibility of being. Nevertheless, the struggle between these radically conflicting versions of the self is repeated time and time again in the course of this book, such that Cadenas describes his protagonist as “el que se hace, se deshace, se hace” (147). Ilis Alfonso insightfully comments that the poetic subject of these poems does not progressively grow in knowledge with the passage of time:

El logro del conocimiento interno no depende del tiempo que se dedique a ello, es decir, no es algo que ocurre de una manera acumulativa, diacrónica, como

resultado de una estrategia racional. Por el contrario, cada instante de vida es un nuevo conocimiento, una nueva aventura (100).

We may take this observation further by asking why this is the case. The poetic subject relives the same internal battle along the same lines of conflict without a building of knowledge because the eclipse of Man requires the complete, boundless, attentive engagement with the *present* in its eternal newness. *Man's* knowledge is accumulative, and is set up through representation for him to grasp and store, so a new perspective requires the relinquishing of thought habits and assumptions, and a responsive openness to that which presences in the here and now.

In poem 23, Cadenas phrases a key question that other poems attempt to answer: “Repetirse, repetirse, repetirse, y *vivir* ¿dónde es? ¿Quién sabe *ceder* el paso al *deslumbramiento* [...]?” (“Intemperie” 151). The speaking subject recognizes his habitual pattern of existence, that of “repeating himself” endlessly, projecting his own image on the world and representing the world back to himself. It is useful here to recall Heidegger’s explanation of *Ge-stell*, or “enframing,” developed in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (1977), which offers a critique of modern Man’s approach to the real “in such a way that it first *is in being* and *only* is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth” (Heidegger “The Age of the World Picture” 129-30). The conceptual system of Man’s thinking allows him to set up reality as an object of his thought, assuring simultaneously his own existence and the existence of reality thus conceived. Heidegger warns that such representation conceals

the revelation of the world of itself, and is merely the self-perpetuating revealing of a limited version of Man. In the second poem, Cadenas expands on this idea:

Nada, nada se repite.
Sólo yo, en la memoria, me tengo
como un vestigio
entre mis propias manos (143).

The world each moment is fresh, unique and new, full of “suchness” and replete with the presence of being. Only the “I” seeks to retain and perpetuate its own fixed image through memory, so that the self can grasp its being.

The *self*-centered manner of existence is not what the author considers “living,” which requires the “ceding” of his protagonism to the “dazzling” of life. Poem 29 calls for the erasure of the self and the pillars that sustained it so that he can be transformed into an open space, a receptacle for the void:

Vida
arrásame,
barre todo,
que sólo quede
la cáscara vacía, para no llenarla más,
limpia, limpia sin escrúpulo
y cuanto sostuviste deja caer
sin guardar nada (155).

This is where “living is” — it is the absence of the dictates of the will, ego and memory. By becoming a “cáscara vacía,” the human being relinquishes its hold on how the “real” should and can manifest. Letting go and letting *be* is the imperative Cadenas reiterates in poem 26: “Hazte a tu nada/ plena./ Déjala florecer./ Acostúmbrate al ayuno que eres. Que tu cuerpo se la aprenda” (153). The void in these short texts is not a negative absence, but the aperture for the simple flowering of presences. The “full nothingness” is the

disposition of the human being that Joan Stambaugh, in her comparative study of Heidegger and Taoism, describes as “a kind of waiting, not a passive waiting, but a very attentive, intense one” (87). Man, in his new role, is not the source of truth; nothingness takes away from Man his self-evidence and restores him to a vital posture of quiet astonishment in which he is but the opening or “clearing” where that which is can reveal itself and language can speak.

Intemperie closes with Cadenas’s “Ars poetica,” a poem that outlines the moral and aesthetic guidelines he will follow in his future works. The three strophes address the relationship of the word with reality, the writer with the word, and the writer with himself. The opening verses characterize the poetic word itself: it should “hold what it says,” becoming the living, pulsing presence of that which sustains it. Heidegger would speak of Being as that which speaks in poetry, and Cadenas seems to second this perspective by portraying the word as a dynamic presence that does not pertain to Man’s domain or his project of making fast the world through language for his knowledge and use. The word only speaks poetry when it retains its own, impenetrable life force. For Cadenas, the poet is not a belletrist who adds “adornada falsedad,” “tinta dudosa” or “brillos” to “lo que es,” but an attentive listener who writes “para decir verdad” (157). The universe should hold sway through poetry, and the human being is the required listener that becomes the medium for *Being* to speak. For Cadenas, words maintain a special relationship of mutual belonging with the human being, such that “Me poseen tanto como yo a ellas” (157). The poet’s responsibility obliges him to renounce any false amplification of the self and to strictly seek “exactitudes aterradoras” (157). In order to

comply with these standards, Cadenas appeals to his inner double to hold him to the highest standard of truth and transparency: “Sé mi ojo, espérame en la noche y divísame, escrútame, sacúdeme” (157). This constitutes an open recognition that the torments suffered by the “I” throughout *Intemperie* are the necessary pains to finally be what one really is.

3.1.6 REALITY AND LITERATURE

As Luis Miguel Isava Briceño has carefully documented, Cadenas began publishing his prose reflections about life and literature at the beginning of the 1970s, at the inception of his teaching career at the Universidad Central de Venezuela (55). “Literatura y vida” (1970) and “Juventud, historia y cambio” (1973) were not selected by Cadenas to be reprinted in his *Obra entera*. The first significant essay that directly addresses the themes heretofore developed is his three-part *Realidad y literatura*, written in 1972 but published in 1979. Before advancing to *Memorial*, the collected poems that Cadenas composed between 1970 and 1975 and published in 1977, we will pause to briefly discuss the key concepts of this essay that state in a direct fashion many of the concepts we have already gleaned from his poetry.

Realidad y literatura, like Cadenas’s following essays, comes with the author’s disclaimer that his essay is elliptical, non-methodological and non-dogmatic. His purpose in writing this piece is to explore the “posibilidad que tiene el ser humano de establecer una relación directa, no basada en la ideación, con los seres y las cosas” (“Realidad y literatura” 467), and he turns to examples in literature to illustrate how primacy may be

restored to reality itself, and not Man. Cadenas includes at the end of his essay a bibliography that provides insight into the line of thought his writing is inspired by. In addition to poetry or prose selections by Keats, Rilke, Huxley, Wordsworth, Whitman, San Juan de la Cruz, Tennyson, Traherne, Blake, Hampole, Lawrence, Valéry and Basho, Cadenas draws on several theoretical sources, many of whom are the very authors we have consulted throughout this entire study: Heidegger, Suzuki, Krishnamurti and a host of their commentators. Cadenas openly declares his independence from any one line of thought— “No creemos en ninguna tradición espiritual, en ninguna idea, como idea, en ningún símbolo, ningún culto, ningún cielo” (468)— but his opinions do parallel closely those philosophers of his inspiration.

Cadenas opines that the gravest danger for the human being is the “extravío sobre el cual hemos fundado nuestra vida, el de no darle a ella la primacía que le corresponde” (470). In this essay, as in latter works, Cadenas writes of modern Man as an epistemological category —“al referirnos al *hombre* no especificamos su multiforme división en clases, países, razas” (470)— because his existential stance towards the world is defined by the same parameters. A second matter of lexicology in this essay begs to be addressed from the start, as the loose terms Cadenas employs here will be repeated liberally in other texts. The word “vida” from the previous quote is used interchangeably with “realidad” (half of the binomial of the book’s title), “universo” (468) and “nada” (512) to form a broad constellation of meaning that refers to the world in its unmediated, natural, anonymous and living presence. Under this umbrella, we could add Heidegger’s Being, Suzuki’s “absolute subjectivity” (which entails the dissolving the categories of

both subject and object), Krishnamurti's "Truth" and "pure Being" ("life and the understanding and possession of that fullness of life that is happiness, that is perfection" (Shringy 50)).

Following Heidegger's cues, Cadenas writes of Man as a subject who has set himself up and against the universe through his thoughts, memory and actions, thus removing himself from a state of integration with the unfathomable "real." Cadenas's goal is the renewed "enthronement" of life, "una vez que el usurpador, el centro que somos, es apartado, y su lugar pasan a ocuparlo unos sentidos despiertos frente al milagro de la realidad, una mente que ya no se agita en busca de respuestas [...] y un corazón embriagado, no con pensamientos sino con su propia quietud" (480). In the third part of the essay, Cadenas outlines what he perceives to be the habitual pattern in which Man relates to the world: his sensations, which are most attuned to reality, are converted and reduced by the mind into signs and perceptions. These, in turn, become concepts and abstractions that are stored by the mind as memories. The mind, and its accumulation of past impressions, memories and schema, becomes the governing center and intermediary of all experiences, reinforcing the "yo" and preventing "fresh" encounters with the real: "[e]l proceso sería: sensación-percepción-pensamiento" (515). Cadenas writes that Man's aggressive desire, "en el fondo, es manejar la realidad" (493) as a means to "fortalece[r] su delusoria condición de centro" (525).

Cadenas's explanation of modern Man's approach to the world is not as complete or sophisticated as Heidegger's articulation of the technological mode of human existence, *Ge-stell* (Enframing). Nevertheless, both share the concern that the manner in

which Man represents reality to himself and acts from his thought habits, constitutes an attempt to gather together and set-upon the real and the self, such that other courses for experience *being* are restricted. Heidegger writes that the true danger of Enframing for Man is “the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (“The Question Concerning Technology” 28), the same concern Cadenas voices. Krishnamurti, another indispensable source for this essay, similarly addresses what he perceives to be the underlying conflict between the self and the environment (one’s reality), in which Man thinks “If I can conquer environment, overcome it, dominate it, I shall find out, I shall understand” (18). As this attitude is predominant, Krishnamurti agrees that: “It is one of the most difficult things to be really free of a bias, of a temperament, of a twist; and to approach environment with a fresh openness, a directness, demands a great deal of perception” (36).

Reality and Literature asserts that the “yo” governs the self tyrannically and that the human being’s essence is actually “un vacío, que sería el verdadero núcleo de ese ser sin núcleo que es el hombre” (512). Cadenas suggests that in order to recover a “direct perception” of the real, the bastions of the “yo” must be dismantled: his thoughts, memory and the common employment of language. When thoughts are silenced, memories are disbanded, and language is restricted to refocusing one’s present attention to the real, then, Cadenas believes, the self disappears and the world is revealed in its fullness. This true perception of reality, he writes, “no establece diferencias, pues todo le pertenece” (518), making irrelevant divisions of true and false by nature of all things

simple *being*. Here lies one of the contradictions of this essay: Cadenas continually delimits the authentic and inauthentic characteristics of the human being, and he treats him and the things of his production as if they were separate from the “real.” It is thus that Cadenas opines that “la palabra tiene un carácter negativo que impide verle el lado por el cual se vuelve transparencia” (512). He condemns most uses of the word as the expansion of Man’s domain: “palabras desconectadas, exangües, fatuas, ocultadoras, soberbias, palabras-disfraces, palabras-olvido, palabras-velos, palabras que forman la pirámide de la ilusión para el que las maneja, que se siente dueño de un poder” (505-06).

In these judgments Cadenas adopts positions that differ from his sources, although the practical application of his opinions follows those authors of his inspiration. Heidegger, for example, emphasizes the integral role of the human being together with the “earth, sky and gods” in the “fourfold,” whose interplay allows the disclosing of each element in the fullness of itself, and whose round-dance of concealing and revealing is the letting-presence of Being. For Heidegger, one of the human being’s most essential roles is to provide the *open* for language to speak, by placing a claim on him and entrusting him with hearing its peal. Instead of falsifying or distancing Man from the real, certain uses of language, and poetry in particular, re-appropriate him to Being, and allow the things of the “real” to come into its own, as both presence and absence. Cadenas does not renounce all use of language and, in fact, the literary experiences that illustrate his text intimate the suspension of mental processes, the attuning of attention to the real and a particular naming of *things* in order to “acercarnos a la cosa y dejarnos frente a ella como cosa, con su silencio, su extrañeza, su gravedad” (525). For Cadenas, poetry’s “tarea es

elíptica” (524), an opinion that could be Heidegger’s as well: poetry emerges in speech from silence, and its speaking should lead the reader back to the unspoken.

The poetic selections that enrich *Realidad y literatura* reinforce and expand the *ars poetica* that Cadenas outlined at the end of *Intemperie*. Inspired by the same letter by Keats²⁷ that Girri also commented upon in his conception of the “hacedor” (see Chapter 2, section 2.5), Cadenas asserts that the poet should lack a personal identity, so as to be open and awake to experience reality (471-73). In availing himself for the real to presence, Cadenas insists that the poet respect the marvelous enigma of the world, and not seek to intellectually penetrate and grasp it, following in the path of Zen Buddhist poets like Matsuo Basho (476). Correspondingly, the poet must be able to peacefully “float” in the midst of uncertainties, mysteries and doubts without attempting to anchor himself and his world through his will, ego or identity. In writing, Cadenas shuns the imagination, fantasy, prophetic visions, past memories and private mythologies, as they stem from the arrogant notion of the poet as subject and the creative center of gravitation and distract the human being from an awareness of the simple brilliance of the present reality. For this reason, Cadenas insists on stripping poetry of all artificiality and embellishments, placing his minimal verses at the service of the purity of what *is*. In cultivating this no-frills aesthetic, Cadenas, like Girri, believes that prose is a necessary antidote to traditional poetry — “[I]a prosa podría contribuir a desmontar tantas

²⁷ Cadenas is particularly intrigued by the following lines: “A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity: he is continually in for, and filling, some other body. The sun, the moon, the sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute: the poet has none, no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures” (“Realidad y literatura” 472).

falsedades, a destruir “ideales”, autocomplacencias, alucinaciones en el individuo, a fin de entregárselo a la vida” (524). Cadenas’s directives for poetry are to unmask Man’s postures, his falsifications and self-complacencies and to shake him free of his distractions, allowing the opening of his attention to the world. Cadenas quotes Aldous Huxley saying, “Our business is to wake up” (512). Although he has no illusions about the sphere of literature’s influence —“sigue siendo asunto de minorías” (526)—, this is the vital task that he will pursue diligently in his poetic writing.

3.2 To Breathe Through the Pores of Language

3.2.1 THE ZONES OF THE SELF

In 1977 Cadenas released two books of poetry, *Intemperie* and *Memorial*, after a ten-year hiatus during which time only several minor essays were published in Venezuelan magazines. *Memorial* is a collection that gathers three different groupings of poems that were composed during this decade: “Zonas” (1970), “Notaciones” (1973) and “Nupcias” (1975). Together, the collection creates a cohesive arc that spans and furthers the ideas we have developed up to here. For José Balza, “*Memorial* es, por completo, el desarrollo de una teoría poética” (70). This poetic theory begins with “Zonas,” in the quotidian “realms” of modern existence, revisiting the existential struggles of the human being to be free of the innumerable masks of the self, and examining the tragic repercussions of Man-centered being when taken to its extreme. As Ángel Rama has astutely observed, “<<Zonas>> aún sigue manejando las formas narrativas anteriores, aún apela a los personajes fabulosos o al verso grandilocuente, aún compone escenarios sobrerreales” (62).

Of the entire book, only the first poems of “Zonas” seem to fit the title of this collection, *Memorial*, for they once again attempt to reconstruct the idealized “island” of the past that inspired *Una isla* and *Los cuadernos del destierro*. A verse from “Nuevo mundo,” the first poem, summarizes this poetic stance —“Memoria que sale a buscar cosas huidizas” (“Memorial” 162)—, one in which the “I” still attempts to maintain its sovereignty and the poetic word acts as an “Intoxicación de cobres salvajes./ Avanza,

avanza./ Droga” (162). A recounting of the subject’s present state of uncertainty, routine and angst quickly overtakes the focus on the past. Poems such as “Temprano” (167), “Carro por puesto” (168), “Al despertar” (169) and “Insomnio” (172) are among the most referential of this book, situating the speaking narrator in a modern city replete with billboards, highways, barking dogs, books, papers, marketplaces, seagulls, morning fog, cups of coffee, buses and deliverymen. Instead of a joyous celebration of the present, these details as a composite form the landscape of a monotonous, oppressive, simulated existence, which he calls his illness, or “Mal” in a poem of this title: “Detenido, no sé dónde, mas es un hecho que estoy, detenido. Llevo años en el mismo lugar, al fondo. ¿Vivo? Funciono, y ya es mucho” (179). This manner of going through the motions of life intuitively feels false, forced and fake. The speaker expresses his ability to “function,” intimating that this is the norm of the society to which he belongs. Cadenas cleverly captures this suspicion in a succinct poem, “As if” that reads: “Es como si amáramos. Es como si sintiésemos. Es como si viviéramos./ Esto fatiga. Hasta se ansía un error. Puede que al equivocarse los actores rocen la verdad” (183). The motions of Man, traced and retraced for the preservation of his centrality, are viewed as simulacra of life, and the poet yearns for the “actors” to slip, in the off chance that they might stumble into authenticity.

These poems reinforce ideas we have already seen in earlier works, but Cadenas expands upon them in “Zonas” by problematizing Man’s dominant relationship with the real, when it is taken to its last consequences. Eight consecutive poems explore how

Man's mode of existence can result in cycles of death and destruction, when he stands over and against other human beings in his will to power. "Historia," like previous poems we have examined, speaks of Man's existence as a repetition, but this time multiplied as armies of death that gather specters and ghosts, year after year: "Los espectros serán los mismos otros, pero ella [la escena] no se alterará, no habrá modificación" (218). For Cadenas, the specific identities and causes of the perpetrators and their victims are irrelevant. They are all the "same others," defined by their self-assured existential posture, their arrogant approach and reading of reality which is crafted "En sus moldes." In a poem by this name, Cadenas comments, not without irony, that Man predisposes the world and language in order to serve him and to affirm his position, even if that includes his murderous destruction of others:

En sus labios las palabras están como dispositivos ya montados. Salen armadas, no tienen que formarse sobre la marcha, todo está resuelto, el mundo va bien, el cielo y la tierra están de su parte y son felices (220).

Cadenas does not single out a particular ideology, sect or faction as the blunt of his criticism, but rather takes issue with Man's essentially subjective, self-evident representationalism that predetermines *how* anything manifests itself to him, facilitating his "blind" functioning in the world through "índices, anatemas, rótulos" (221). Cadenas vehemently repudiates such self-complacency and the predetermined judgments of Man that obstruct his vision and comprehension of the perfect bodies —life incarnate— that he blindly mows down.

Cuerpos, dulces vasijas, horadados, irreconocibles, roídos. Cuerpos de cualquier bando, divinos, terrestres, caídos en cualquier calle. Cuerpos, suaves cántaros,

más perfectos que la más perfecta idea, destrozados en cualquier lugar de la tierra (221).

Cadenas's return to the body and physical phenomena is but another manner to attempt to extirpate the self that is fortified by the mind, and to return one's awareness to the present reality. These final sentences of "Por alguna divisa" form a dirge, not only for the dead and their endless bodies, but also for the living, trapped by their mental armature of "truth" and the imperatives of the determining logos. In "Atisbo," the poetic subject concludes: "De repente comprendí/ que matamos/ porque estamos muertos" (223).

In Cadenas's opinion, the antidote to this manner of being is ubiquitous, which he explains when he writes, "Realidad, una migaja de tu mesa es suficiente" (177). The remedy lies in a "re-membering" or "dis-covering" of the real through the attentive and caring disposition of the human being, or *Gelassenheit*, to borrow Heidegger's terminology. He becomes the "open" through the renunciation of willing, and the letting-be of world, such that things or ontic beings can disclose themselves and come into their own. Man is redefined as the ontological realm that exists between Being and beings, and the experience of the revealing-concealing play of a "crumb" is "enough" to reincorporate the human being back into the folds of reality. The problem is that old habits die hard, and the human will and thought patterns perpetually assert their iron-grip, reinstating the subject.

In "Zonas," as was seen previously in *Intemperie*, an internal battle is waged within the poetic subject to strip away those tenacious doublings and masks that provide asylum for the "yo." Various poems are plagued with "enemigos," "asaltantes,"

“robadores,” “jauría,” “fauna de claraboyas” “perseguidores,” “malignos visitantes” and “inquisidores” whose arms and strategies are “el miedo” (210), “las mudas de piel” (206), “viejas divisas, retratos, fechas” (203). The poetic voice is cognizant that these are facets of the “I,” that his own articulation and identity as a first-person subject is no different than the visitor that haunts him: “Si ambos fuésemos reales no nos desgastaríamos en esta persecución, pero nuestra servidumbre es la misma: somos personajes” (210). A maturity of understanding is evident in both the self-analysis and the calm, firm stance that he adopts, “Rehúso todo peso ilegítimo” (203). In line with the ideas advanced in *Realidad y literatura*, one of the “illegitimacies” he eschews here is language itself: “La palabra no es el sitio del resplandor, pero insistimos, insistimos, nadie sabe por qué” (209). Although this stance is later amended, for the Cadenas of “Zonas,” literature can hold no candle up to the direct contact of reality, which the human being should experience as sensations grounded in the physical realm, and far-removed from mental machinations: “Sólo he conocido la libertad por instantes, cuando me volvía de repente cuerpo” (208). Language, in its optimum transparency and honesty, can only lead one to the brink of a new awareness, but Cadenas insists that a radical redefinition of Man is possible only when the tyrannical self and the tools at its service —language included— are made still. More now than ever, Cadenas is conscious of the stakes of this ascetic process: “Todo el arrasamiento ha sido *para desplazarme*, para vivir en *otra articulación*” (161, my emphasis) and “He querido derribarme; ser omisión para renacer” (178).

3.2.2 NOTATIONS ON BEING PRESENT

The second section of *Memorial*, “Notaciones” (1973), marks a leap from the “zones” of the self and exemplifies the consummation of Cadenas’s literary precepts, both thematically and stylistically. These poems are the most economic of linguistic flashes whose lightning insights belong to the eye, in its direct, instantaneous contact with the real, and not the mind’s ruminations. These verses capture the Zen-like attention of the poet qua poet, through which he is able to experience the unfathomable universe in its nature as simultaneous presence and absence. The poet’s eye acts as a boundless mirror, and the self is redefined through its gaze, becoming the void where anything, everything and nothing can rest. Guillermo Sucre has written that this is a

[l]ibro de *superficies*: ya no existen el verso o el reverso de las cosas, o si existen es porque aparecen en *la superficie*, donde uno y otro se igualan, donde uno supone al otro. [...] Quiere decir esto: el mundo es *traslúcido*: todo en él es visible, todo en él es cuerpo que se manifiesta, aun en ausencia (68).

The path to the transparent depthlessness of the here and now has been arduous, for it entails the complete transfiguration of the human being. “Voz,” the first poem, serves as an existential calendar or clock, whose twelve parts that mark the stages of the human being’s and his voice’s transformation. In the first eleven sections, the first-person poetic voice is noticeably absent, replaced by the second person, who is exposed in its various postures: from the initial use of language and thought to “[a]cuñar quimeras” (227), through the narrow passage of austerity described as an “[e]ntreoscuro corredor que conduce, muestra y abandona” (229), and finally to the moment “[c]uando en verdad

callas” (228). With the silencing of the self, another “voice” is finally audible, one that is not “el engaño/ de la palabra que sirve a alguien” (229), but a form of speech that is “emanado/ puntual/ fehaciente” (229), the natural welling forth of the word in correspondence to the real. When the first-person voice finally speaks in the last section of the poem, it is to disavow its own voice in favor of “atención,/ atención,/ atención” (230).

“Attention” is the silent clarion call of “Notaciones,” a commandment that is more visual than audible. Attention is incarnated and multiplied in the eyes that gaze from almost every page of this sequence, whereas sounds and the human voice are frowned upon as unnecessary distractions: “De un silencio/ vendrá la respuesta,/ la encendida honestidad” (251). Intuitively one senses an injunction against speaking aloud these poems, as if their utterance would bestow upon them false importance. The reader has the distinct impression that the sparse clusters of words that form each “notation” were printed abashedly; they are engulfed on the page, some a mere speck that the reader does not *read* as sequential words, but rather *sees*. One suspects that the author would have preferred to print an infinite book of mirror pages, renouncing words altogether out of fear that any linguistic articulation predisposes the reader’s mind and distances him from the real. One notation in particular serves as a disclaimer for the book —“El que enseñó a leer a los ojos/ borró el paraíso” (255)— and a longer poem, “Abdicación,” ironically spells out with more words, words’ essential futility:

Enmudezco
en medio de lo real,
y lo real dice con su lenguaje

lo que guardo.

¿Necesita palabras
un rostro?
¿La flor
quiere sonidos?
¿Pide vocablos
el perro, la piedra, el fuego?
¿No se expresan con sólo estar? [...]

Callo. No voy más allá de mis ojos.
Me consta este alrededor (262).

Several lessons can be drawn from this poem that will aid in the interpretation of this section. First, the title clearly states the “abdication” of Man as the locus of language and the articulator of truth. The “real” in its infinite expressions —faces, flowers, stones, fire— speak their being by simply *being present* (“estar”). The human is *being* human when he *is with*, and in the company of the real, a state in which there is no “depth” or hidden meaning, for finally he simply *is*, as all things *are* — their common singularity resting in *being*.

It is thus that we return to the keyword of this collection, “Atención,/ redoma hechizada,/ néctar de estar presente” (246), a state that is only possible when the “I” has renounced its place and its monopoly of awareness. The poetic voice is now free to ask, “¿Qué hago/ yo detrás de los ojos?” (261), for there is no subject or point of view in genuine seeing, an effortless activity that solely attends to what is. The voice declares that “Tengo ojos/ no puntos de vista” (260), a means of affirming that the self is an empty surface that impassively allows all images to come and go, without attempting to retain or limit particular presences and thus asserting a personal subjectivity. Speaking of the self

in the second person, the author remarks: “Tú no estás/ cuando la mirada se posa/ en una piedra, un rostro, un pájaro,/ en esa suspensión sin espera/ en ese estar/ intenso” (232). Cadenas does not mean that literally the human being has disappeared, but rather that the his personal, subjective identity has been subsumed and transformed into the “gaze” that suspends the “self,” permitting an “intense being present.” D. T. Suzuki has written about the sense of sight in Zen Buddhist practices, and he describes the pure act of seeing in relation to the seer and the seen:

The seeing is not reflecting on an object as if the seer had nothing to do with it. The seeing, on the contrary, brings the seer and the object seen together, not in mere identification but the becoming conscious of itself, or rather of its working. The seeing is an active deed, involving the dynamic conception of self-being (Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki 160).

Suzuki’s explanation sheds light on the “gaze” that predominates in Cadenas’s poems by demonstrating that the “seeing” is the unifying consciousness that simultaneously and evenly peers into the world and the human being. This dynamic gaze enfolds the self as it enfolds the rest of reality, indiscriminately, in the immediacy of being present. In another poem, Cadenas affirms his “self-being” as an impersonal, quiet, simple engagement with what is, such that he integrates himself and belongs entirely to his *adherence* to the real, defining himself by what he does: “Soy esta vigilancia./ Soy esta vacilante disponibilidad,/ [...] Soy éste en que se extingue/ hasta la idea de hombre” (272). In a similarly constructed poem, the poet voice adds to his self-portrait by tracing the negative outline of his presence: “No soy lo que llevo/ sino el recipiente./ Lugar de la presencia,/ lugar del vacío” (236). Shorn of all personal features, the self is recast as an open

receptacle, the place for presence and void. This is hardly the first time we have encountered the conjunction of these seemingly mutually exclusive terms: for Heidegger, the void is the necessary opening for the mutual revealing of the fourfold; in Taoism, the void and the sum of all possibilities are ultimately all Tao, which does not distinguish between being and non-being; the *satori* of Zen also surpasses and subsumes these terms. It is in this line of thought that we should interpret Cadenas's transformed subject.

The poet's disposition as present awareness coincides with perspectives advanced by Taoism, Zen Buddhism and Krishnamurthi on a complete engagement with the "here and now." These three wisdom traditions stress that there is no future time or place of revelation or enlightenment, nor was the moment of truth lost in some remote past. *Satori*, enlightenment, liberation —any one of these terms suffice to describe Cadenas's plurality of expressions for the complete awakening of the human being to reality and life— is a matter of present, objectless, purposeless attention. The notion of a "goal" or a "destination" is a matter of distraction, a schematization that removes one from the *now*, artificially discriminates among the elements of the real, privileging and vesting something with exclusive authenticity. Cadenas realizes that no path must be traversed or journey accomplished when one's attention is wed to the present: "El viaje,/ un peregrinar de ciego./ No tiene dónde./ Es aquí/ cada momento/ ¡final!/ ¿No oyes/ el último pájaro?" (248). The "hearing of the last bird" could just as well be the "seeing of a flower;" the author simply states that each moment is *it*, the goal, and that the genuine silencing of the self and attuning of one's being to *anything* provides the opportunity for awakening. The human being, when he abdicates his centrality and turns himself over to

the present, finds plenitude in all things: “Sigo la ilación/ extraña/ de la vida./ Llama que vuelve novedad/ lo que toca./ Como mano de niño” (267). The poetic voice adopts the perspective that “Todo fluye” (268), and correspondingly, his awareness will rest on the waves of the present, in order to “Vivir/ en el sabor de ser,/ tomado” (238).

As Cadenas explains in *Realidad y literatura*, language is limited in what it is able to convey, and the poet’s aspiration is that the poem can lead the reader to contemplation and the brink of silence. Rarely, if ever, can words accompany the experience of cosmic consciousness. One poem that is especially eloquent in articulating the enlightened observation of the real is “Flor,” a short poem that reads: “Desde qué profundidad surge/ como llama/ para esconderla” (231). A simple flower is the producer of transcendental wonder and astonishment, because its *being* represents the marvel of all creation: from the depths of what is absent, hidden and undistinguished something surges. Like that of a flame or a light, its *being* hides darkness, makes absence into a presence and transforms the depths of the unfathomable into a bright immediacy. In his short collection of sayings, *Dichos*, Cadenas comments what we could call the flower’s lesson: “Lo absoluto parece encargarle a lo relativo que lo enmascare, que lo abandone, pues de otro modo no habría juego” (“Dichos” 658). The observer of the flower seeks no representational knowledge or definition of it, but he does allude to an experiential understanding of the fundamental oneness of being and non-being that underlies the entire universe.

Judging by other poems in “Notaciones,” it seems apparent that this insight into creation is but a fleeting instant that is constantly threatened to be overturned by the “I” and its legions: Man’s subjectivity, ego and will. The poetic voice expresses its

awareness of these obstacles and declares its intentions to abolish the self and to embrace emptiness. D. T. Suzuki, in elucidating the doctrine of “no-mind” illustrates the pitfalls of seeking even meditative attention. The problem, he demonstrates, is that setting up even such a noble aspiration as true seeing, one unintentionally perverts and disables the possibility of this experience. Suzuki explains, by quoting and commenting on Hui-neng’s (638-713) teachings, the sixth patriarch and the Chinese founder of Zen Buddhism who advises:

‘neither to cling to the notion of a mind, nor to cling to the notion of purity, nor to cherish the thought of immovability; for these are not our meditation.’ ‘When you cherish the notion of purity and cling to it, you turn purity into falsehood...Purity has neither form nor shape, and when you claim an achievement by establishing a form to be known as purity, you obstruct your own self-nature, you are purity-bound.’ [...]However excellent are the merits of these spiritual exercises, they inevitably lead us to a state of bondage [...] Even when we talk of ‘seeing into one’s self-nature’, this seeing has also a binding effect on us if it is construed as having something in it specifically set up; that is, if the seeing is a specific state of consciousness (Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki 161-62).

The self-imposed imperatives that are interspersed in these poems seem to become their own greatest encumbrance to simply experiencing the real, creating a “binding effect” on the subject that is difficult to shake. Micro-poems such as “Crece/ el deseo de ver tu rostro,/ tu rostro sin mí” (266), “Vida/ redúceme a ser/ sólo una crudeza frente a ti” (273) and “Sé/ que si no llego a ser nadie/ habré perdido mi vida” (249) mark a division between present experience and being and an ideal that requires the modification, selection and suppression of certain elements, in a time and a place that is not the here and now. In *Dichos*, Cadenas summarizes the cunnundrum of his own character’s situation: “No buscamos ser sino sentirnos en algún estado ‘superior’. Estamos

adiestrados para perseguir siempre una ganancia, tal es nuestra barrera. La agonía de no querer ser lo que somos" ("Dichos" 656-57). These schematizations and projected desires become a predominant challenge that the protagonist of this book must face in the next section

3.2.3 NUPTIALS WITH THE REAL

"Nupcias," (1975) marks a prominent stylistic shift in Cadenas's work, one that will be developed further in his next collection of poetry, *Amante* (1983). This third division of *Memorial* is itself grouped into three parts, "La diosa," "Homenaje" and "Visitantes," each of which can be read as an extended poem. The most singular feature of "Nupcias" is the deliberate and consistent assignation of personal pronouns, which become the "voices" throughout the section. "Tú" is the central focus of the poems, an allegorical being that is referred to as "La diosa," but who cannot truly be named — "¿Quién puede nombrarte/ en verdad,/ quién entre los que se precian/ entre los gárrulos?" (278)— because "she" is reality itself, in its pure and indivisible state. Most of the poems are addressed to "you," who is characterized as mother and lover. "El amante," is the representation of the subject, who speaks mostly in the first person, but is sometimes referred to in the third person as "él." He is ardent suitor of the "tú," and calls himself her "hijo." Finally, anonymous "ellos" appear in certain poems, standing in for modern Man, as characterized in our previous analyses.

"La diosa" is a poem of love and devotion to the "you," as well as the personal history of one subject's dynamic relationship to the real. A distinct variation of traditional

mystical poetry, Luis Miguel Isava Briceño comments that in these poems, “La retórica amorosa está emparentada con la religiosa, y Cadenas aprovecha la doble vertiente, la doble ‘valencia’ de este lenguaje” (110-11). The goddess is immediately lifted from the category of definable entities, from the first verses of the poem, “En el espejo donde te miras/ no hay nadie” (275). The “tú” has no profile, no visible “self,” for she is “ajena al juego de las imágenes” (288). The metaphors that most closely approximate her are the ardent “llama” (282) and “fuego” (284) that transform all forms of the physical world into undifferentiated energy: “tus manos/ desgarran/ queman,/ abandonan” (298). The “diosa” is an allegory of the sum of reality in its indivisible, insuperable *being* that Cadenas has striven to experience. The real of the *present* is “tu [the goddess’s] región sagrada” (277), which only those who embrace *what is* and who have no attachment to that which is *not*, can experience. Cadenas writes that “ésta es tierra/ donde el engaño no tiene cabida” (293). Here, the word “engaño” can be taken to mean any state that is not the undivided attention to the real. Krishnamurti explained in a talk that “attention is not something that you come to; it is attention *now* to everything [...] When you are completely attentive there is no self, there is no limitation” (360). It is thus that we should interpret the poetic voice’s judgments: “Eres para raptos más vehementes” (296) and “Tu corona es para silenciosos/ desconocidos” (278). Only those who disavow the self, quiet their thoughts and give themselves over to the rapture of the present are “crowned” with the fullness of the “goddess’s” presence.

Many people are unable to meet these requirements because their insecurities and needs for self-confirmation take precedence over their devotion, and even more are not

even conscious of reality beyond themselves. Cadenas portrays Man through adjectival phrases like “los gárrulos” (278) and “los llenos” (279), which capture their self-absorption. “They” do not know how to see or to listen to the world, as their sole focus is their own words and image, and they have no sensibility to the wonder around them: “Los llenos/ quitan los ojos de ti./ Tu brillo/ se les hace pobreza./ No se sienten reflejados” (279). When they do turn their attention outward, it is only to assert themselves by waging a battle against all that they are not, projecting their own image on the world they wish to master:

Esperas desde siglos
pero ellos no están preparados.

No podrían darte
el mirar que no conoce,
la incandescente nada que deja ser.

Traen sus curiosas armas
como para un combate
(y lo pierden).

He presenciado su desesperación,
ese incansable verse ellos
en lo que miran (287).

In this poem, Cadenas portrays a patient, ever-ready “goddess” whose only condition is that her lovers match her transparent simplicity with their own. Man, however, is not prepared to renounce his arms, or his desperate need to see himself reflected and amplified in the things that surround him. He continuously “desea/ revestirse con tus prestigios” (293), not realizing that there is no battle to be fought or competition to be

won. As Cadenas summarizes in one of his *dichos*: “El misterio tiembla en todas partes, también en nosotros, pero no nos percatamos” (656).

The first-person poetic voice distinguishes himself from the others through his insightful observations about Man’s behavior and the candid and public evaluation of his own successes and failures. His shortcomings—intentional distraction, a lack of attention, fear of relinquishing a cultured identity, a feeling of inadequacy and the compulsion to search for plenitude elsewhere— are the derivations of Man’s legacy. Cadenas has observed repeatedly that, “La vida, ese hecho deslumbrante, inasible, tremendo, no es suficiente *para el hombre*. Él exige más, y por supuesto, nada puede aplacar su descontento” (“Dichos” 666, emphasis added), and he adds that “Cada instante es un regalo. Esto nos debería volver humildes y hacernos dar las gracias” (“Dichos” 657). As Man has erected himself as his own center through his forgetfulness of the wonder of his being and that of Being itself, Cadenas implies that his experience of suffering is a natural consequence. In a short section of “La diosa,” Cadenas writes: “A quien se tiene por tu hijo/ lo dejaste/ en poder de las Erinias” (301). The Erinyes of Greek mythology persecuted mortals who broke “natural” laws and exacted retribution to restore balance in the order of the world. In these verses, Cadenas is not portraying a vengeful goddess, as some critics would have it, but demonstrating the natural consequences of Man’s deviance from a posture of humble thanksgiving. The Erinyes represent the terrifying and inevitable process of dismantling Man, which is required to bring the human being back to his participatory role in reality’s fold.

As in the last poems we analyzed in “Zonas,” here again the poetic subject is trapped by his own hopeful anticipation to overcome the “I” and return to life’s mystery. He requests the goddess’s assistance —“Concédeme/ la humildad de extraviarme” (303)— and attempts to adopt a state of receptiveness: “me dispongo a esperarte/ ¡con qué paciente ardor!/ me encuentre yo otra vez” (283, my emphasis). His schema and thoughts of future fulfillment are obstacles in and of themselves for experiencing unity in the present. By yearning for an “original” state of unadulterated sensations —“el trémulo responder/ como de niño/ cuando se es cuerpo” (291)— and dwelling on some future encounter, he forgets that “todo momento es el tuyo” (290) and that who he is already and always has been, is enough:

Si soy indistinguible de la porción asignada
y a ella me ciño, sin comparación,
entonces ella es lo real, lo único, lo máximo (292).

The second part of “Nupcias,” called “Homenaje,” corresponds to this former title more than “La diosa.” Composed of ten short poetic texts, “Homenaje” shares much in common with the Zen-inspired poems of “Notaciones.” From the first verses, the poetic voice redefines himself negatively: he knows not who he is, his name does not correspond to the *being*, he finds it strange that he was at one time born and that he is “here.” The new consciousness he expresses is without limitations of identity, time and space, or even attachments to the living body he inhabits:

Ya no sé
si puedo hablar en nombre de alguien.

¿Quién es esta sangre, estos tendones, estos ojos,

esta extrañeza, esta antigüedad?
Una fuerza
me tiene en su mano.
Entonces es ella
la que puede decir soy,
la que puede llevar un nombre,
la que puede usar la palabra yo (312).

In this poem, there is only one being and identity —that of the goddess— which knows no distinctions and whose name is reality, or the world. In *Dichos*, Cadenas elaborates that “Dios es un nombre que le damos al misterio, pero no hay modo de allegarse con nombres a lo innumerable” (669). Man cannot name reality’s holy mystery, and in these poems, he begins to comprehend experientially that his own nature is no different than that of the “goddess.”

Through the “death” of Man, a new “flowering” is possible in the abyss of his disappearance, a collective, non-individuated surge of existence that brings to bear the non-manifest, limitlessness of Being. Two consecutive pages of concise verses outline in linguistic “flashes” the human being’s encounter with the “goddess”: “Intensidad./ Muerte y contestación/ a la muerte” (314) and then, “Florece/ en un abismo” (315). The last verses of “Homenaje” clarify the nature of the writing of this section. Cadenas eschews the term “poetry” to refer to the manifestation of these condensed lines on almost empty pages, preferring to describe to them by their function: they are “respiraderos” (316), a word that can mean “vent, airhole, porthole, skylight or ventilation shaft.” All of these definitions convey a space of passage for light or air, a liminal area between the internal and external, an opening through which breath and language freely flow. By discarding the traditional notion of the poem, Cadenas

renounces authorship and self-expression, allowing his verses to “inhale” subjectivity and “exhale” pure presence.

As this is a book of endless circling, —an internal “laberinto” (306), as Cadenas describes the protagonist’s lifelong relationship with the real— it should be no surprise that the final section of “Nupcias” finds the poetic voice once again navigating the terra incognita of himself, haunted by terrifying doubles and persecutors. “Visitantes” acts a troublesome coda in poetic prose that shifts the text from a visual to an audio order. Proper “seeing” was the metaphor of enlightenment in “Notaciones,” whereas in these texts a “Voz,” that of the “goddess,” takes precedence. The poetic subject is thrown back into chaos, where the “voces, teas, látigos” (319) of his pursuers drown, with the arms of Man, the voice that *speaks* reality. Cadenas writes, “La voz fue interrumpida por la quimera, por el desdén, por la ruptura. Nada quedó exento” (322). Although the protagonist recognizes that his accusers are facets of himself, he expresses frustration toward the “goddess” who, despite his devotion, “permanece inmóvil” (321) and immutable in the face of his suffering. A heightened desperation is pronounced in “Visitantes,” as if his temporary “nuptials” with the real make even more intolerable his present state of stagnation: “haces más enconado el acoso” (318). The final poem is an appeal to a new entity, “Señor del cambio, hijo del mar” (325), to internally alter his composition and, as if by alchemic conversion, transform him altogether. Cadenas observes and, having witnessed cycle after cycle of the poetic subject’s peripeteias, the reader is apt to agree that, “Sin tu favor la tarea se vuelve interminable” (325).

3.2.4 REINTEGRATION OF THE SELF AND THE WORD

Cadenas's next poetic collection, *Amante*, was published in 1983, the same year as *Anotaciones*, a short book of prose observations about poetry, language, the condition of modern Man and the mystery of the universe. Many of the author's comments are variations on themes we have already touched upon, but some of the ideas furthered in its pages are reversals of what he proposed in *Realidad y literatura*, bringing him closer to a Heideggerian understanding of poetry, the poet and their respective roles in the world. In previous works, Cadenas had suggested that all uses of language and thought are, to some degree, falsifications that occult the real, whose silent presence is distorted and circumscribed by the mind and its words. *Anotaciones* reevaluates this position by abolishing any criteria of exclusion, used to establish categories of the "real real" and the "false real":

Hoy me resisto a dividir la realidad [...] ¿Por qué una flor ha de poseer la dignidad de lo real, del misterio, pero un sueño, una fantasía o un pensamiento no? Ese trazar una raya entre lo que tiene rango y lo que carece de él me resulta extraño ahora. Lo que ocurre, sea lo que sea, tiene para mí *status* existencial, realeza ontológica (545).

By bringing thoughts and words back into the category of the ontological, Cadenas is able to embrace his own writing as a direct experience of the real. As such, he can offer it to his readers as a means of preserving the mystery of *being* and making the human-*being* "más verdadero" (536).

All thoughts and language, for their simple existence, may now be considered part of the enigma of the world, but not all modes of language are equally suited to bring the

things of the world to the Open, allowing them to stand in themselves. As an expansion of his “Ars poetica” at the end of *Intemperie*, Cadenas delineates the *raison d’être* of his writing and its aesthetic and ethical ramifications. He repeatedly rejects, as we have already noted, the term “poetry” because of a fundamental misgiving towards any “confección artística” (557) and the “obligación del poema, del género, de la clasificación” (556). All genres connote what Cadenas considers to be artificial specifications, standards and fetishisms, and even when an author seeks to modify a literary form, so often his “experimentalismo [...] no obedece a una necesidad” (557).

Throughout *Anotaciones*, Cadenas stresses that writing should be unwaveringly “fiel a mi necesidad” (557) and that it is “algo que se me impone, a lo que no debo ofrecer resistencia, contra lo que no debo luchar. Es mi habla” (551). This type of “speech” is what Cadenas calls an “inestilo” (560) because of his rejection of verbal acrobatics, loquacity and intellectual artifices and his strict adherence and attention to the exact words that demand expression. We may recall that Girri preferred the title “hacedor” to describe his trade. Cadenas takes this term one step further, and emphasizes the fact that he is much less an “hacedor” than an “*hecho*,” (548) a creation and presence of the universe. His writing seeks to reflect and pay homage to this provenance: “Recordar el origen sería el punto de partida de un pensar diferente, primigenio, sacral. Aquí viene a propósito una intuición de Heidegger, según la cual pensar es agradecer” (548-49). Cadenas is certainly recalling Heidegger’s *Nachdenken*, or commemorative thinking-thanks such that the human being is attendant upon Being through careful

listening. Cadenas's thoughts of thanks generally take the form of notes, fragments and brief observations that are born of and register his daily experiences with the real and are recorded through "palabras llenas de lados, en un lenguaje próximo al de todos los días" (536). Cadenas believes that this form of writing is more faithful to language's speaking because it is not based on pre-established norms, its brevity allows for less fantasy and it succinctly points out and says its truth. In concordance with Heidegger's appreciation of literature, Cadenas ventures that poetry's most essential gift is its preservation of the unconcealment of concealment that is experienced in language and is analogous to the nature of the presencing of things and the world. Cadenas writes,

'En Heidegger, la verdad no consiste en conocimiento, sino en las cosas mismas, tal como se manifiestan.' En ellas está presente el misterio. [...] Nos encontramos en el reino de la *alétheia*, el descubrimiento, la revelación, y lo que aparece en todo su poder es lo ignoto, inseparable de lo que existe. La verdad sería mostración de las cosas, que descansan en el misterio, siempre, y lo rezuman incontinentemente (562).

The language of poetry maintains present the inherent mystery of the real through the disconcerting force that originates from its un-plumbable speaking.

In 1984, one year after the publication of *Anotaciones*, Cadenas further developed his passionate defense of poetic word in an essay titled *En torno al lenguaje*, principally a critique of modern society's neglect of language and its repercussions. Cadenas begins by declaring his intentions: "Quisiera que este trabajo fuese testimonio de un recio amor, el amor a la lengua. [...] Si este trabajo pudiera servir de pequeño arsenal para defender lo más amenazado, la lengua y la cultura, me sentiría contento" ("En torno al lenguaje" 567-68). Unlike the linguistic purist or academician, Cadenas's concern over the present state

of language stems from a belief in the ontological essence of the word. Like Heidegger, Cadenas leaves no room for ambiguity when he diagnoses the clear and present dangers currently threatening human existence, nature and language, which issue from Man's Thanatotic compulsion to achieve "dominio sobre la naturaleza [...] haciéndolos [Men] olvidar el fundamento" ("Anotaciones" 538). Man's conquests have deep repercussions in language, and his habitual employment of words as mere tools for representation and definition reduce them to a "barbarous" and decadent poverty of slogans, clichés, newspeak and propaganda, which is multiplied in most speech acts. Cadenas writes that in modernity, "no es el silencio lo que nos quieren trocar por la palabra, sino el ruido" ("En torno al lenguaje" 644), an evaluation similar to Heidegger's in *Being and Time* of Man's idle chatter, *Gerede*. Cadenas wishes to demonstrate that human thought, perceptions and approaches to the real are truncated when language is robbed of its subtleties and nuances and mindlessly repeated as ready-made formulas. Instead of safeguarding the mystery of the world and functioning as the space for the human being to be immersed in its depths, modern society's habitual employment of language cultivates deception in expression, dulls discernment and eradicates the historical richness of words that "[n]os sumerge en el pretérito o nos lo trae a nuestro hoy" (585).

En torno al lenguaje represents the author's most pragmatic writing in that he analyzes particular statistics about Venezuelan literacy and education and concludes with specific, idealistic suggestions to better "attend" to language: the fomentation of reading, the careful study of classic works of literature, a reevaluation of educational priorities, a shift in the role and goals of teachers, a favorable re-estimation of leisure time as the

necessary condition for genuine reflection. Cadenas refers to a wide range of writers and thinkers —Karl Kraus, Herbert Read, George Steiner, Pedro Salinas, Nietzsche, Eliot, Pound, and D. H. Lawrence, among others— in support of his positions, particularly in establishing a direct connection between a depravity in language and that in thought and action. For purposes of this study, one of the more relevant outcomes of this essay is his further reassessment of the poet's role in relationship to society. Conscious of the almost negligible reach of poetry today, Cadenas nevertheless defends it as a small but necessary bastion for language. The poet is one of the few with a commitment to the word, and he “la levanta, la hace expresar lo que ella puede y se la devuelve a quienes la han hecho, limpia, salvada, perdurable” (606). Without making distinctions between the genres, Cadenas considers literature to be “la depositaria de la lengua” because it “[a]tesora todo el esplendor” (632).

Part of the indivisible “esplendor” that Cadenas now embraces more fully is the human being and his creations. In *Dichos*, he had already written, “El prodigio de lo dado y el prodigio de lo que el hombre hace remiten a un mismo manantial” (666). This idea is reiterated in the introduction of *En torno al lenguaje*:

Todo, absolutamente todo, forma parte de la realidad, que es, en última instancia, desconocida. Pero siendo desconocida, nos constituye, es nuestro fondo, por lo que también le pertenecemos, lo cual *nos confiere una dignidad* que no percibimos ni tampoco solemos honrar, pues ¿cuándo la tenemos presente con fuerza decisiva?

Si un árbol es un milagro, no lo es menos un deseo, una palabra. ¿Por qué habríamos de otorgarle un puesto mayor al árbol? ¿Por qué *no está ‘contaminado’ por el yo*? ¿Por qué es trasunto de lo desconocido? ¿Quién nos autorizó para establecer divisiones? ¿No es falta de humildad hacer afirmaciones sobre lo que es o no es real?

Todo pertenece a *una misma dimensión*, todo o nada. Así, comencé a recuperar lo que la *poderosa dialéctica de los místicos* me había arrebatado (567-8, my emphasis).

The message of this text is a deliberate counterpoint to *Realidad y literatura*, and it balances the “unilateral” (567) views of the earlier essay by suggesting that even the “I” belongs to the mystery of the real. Critic Gustavo Guerrero has read the above quote as marking a one hundred and eighty degree shift in Cadenas’s writing, from one of “other-worldly” mysticism to a poetics of the here-and-now and a return to subjectivity, which he observes most prominently in the poetry of *Gestiones* (1992). Although many of the poetic elements of this final collection give greater play to concrete aspects of reality, I believe it is a mistake to interpret Cadenas’s previous works as seeking transcendence beyond this world. His search to abolish the “yo” in *Intemperie* and *Memorial* was spurred by a desire to experience the fullness of reality, not to escape from it. Throughout his writing, including his most recent essay, *Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística* (1988), Cadenas consistently warns against the idolatry of the “I”/ ego at the same time that he advocates for a spiritual awakening to the immediacy of the present. In the above quote, when he writes of his “recovery” from the dialectics of mysticism, Cadenas is most likely referring to the mystics’ tendency to denounce the body and the creatures and things of this world in favor of a non-earthly union with God. Where Cadenas *had* previously adopted a similar perspective of duality was in rejecting the self’s identity and the products of its mind as false, in favor of the “natural” real, to which he ascribed ontological status. Although the *language* of mysticism still holds enormous

sway over *Amante*, which we will presently examine, the dialectics common to writers like San Juan de la Cruz y Santa Teresa of Ávila have been overcome.

3.2.5 A PERSONAL MYSTICISM

Although Cadenas published *Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística* in 1998, 15 years after *Amante*, I believe the two texts should be read in synchrony. The latter in many ways corresponds to Cadenas's personal take on mysticism, which is later developed in prose in his non-traditional essay whose writing Fabienne Bradu has classified as "titubeando o, mejor dicho, tropezando con los escollos de lo numinoso" (74). The "Notes" about San Juan are, by Cadenas's own admission, not really about the saint; rather they form an informal, personal and interrelated interpretation of religion, God, the mystic *via negationis*, the "I" and the meaning and experience of illumination. My logic in first outlining some of the ideas presented in this text is to facilitate and condense our reading of *Amante*, a book of poems that represents a mystic experience, Cadenas-style.

In *Apuntes*, Cadenas draws on a number traditions and personal experiences in reference to the "mystical" — Dionysian bacchants, San Juan de la Cruz, Santa Teresa, Lao Tse, Eckhart, Sankara, Suzuki, Emerson, Whitman, Rilke, Thoreau, Lawrence and Joseph Campbell. Distancing himself from any specific tradition, Cadenas ventures that: "Lo místico es lo real, inexpresable simbólicamente. [...] Lo místico es el mero acto de estar aquí, ahora, completo en sí mismo, deshecho ese perpetuo *tic* que tenemos de ir a buscar la realidad en otra parte" ("*Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz y la mística*" 682).

He adds that mysticism's goal is to "tomar conciencia de ese mismo estado de unidad cósmica y totalidad" (690). Cadenas emphasizes the word "consciousness" because mysticism is not the product of "doing," but rather is the unfettered, unified experience and comprehension of oneself and the world. This position differs from traditional Judeo-Christian religious models and practices that set God above and apart from his creation and man: "En el cristianismo, Dios es lo absolutamente otro, concepto que inevitablemente produce un desencantamiento con el mundo" (693). Cadenas takes issue with this conception of God because it forces the positing of spiritual union in the afterlife, or only in a death-within-life mystical experience.

With remarkable frankness and humility, Cadenas offers his own reading of God, which he calls interchangeably "realidad última, ser, presencia, lo innombrable, *Brahman*, *Tao*, lo desconocido, ello [...], energía, fondo originario o primordial, vida" (684). Following the cues of Eckhart who affirmed the shared identity of God and man (680), and the theory *Advaita* by Sankara of no-duality between *Atman*, the soul, and *Brahman*, the creator (693), Cadenas is able to state in his own words:

sólo podemos afirmar la realidad de la cual también formamos parte, aunque tampoco sabemos qué es [...] Nuestro verdadero linaje es el enigma. Somos eso. Dentro de nosotros está también lo que anima [...] La palabra Dios es un emblema del misterio absoluto, que nos constituye y que por eso mismo rehúso ver como lo totalmente otro (704-5).

Remembering the Taoist cautionary adage that "the Tao that can be named is not the Tao," (678), Cadenas does not attempt to define that which is beyond any definition, but he does insist that God can be "lo absolutamente desconocido sin que ello signifique *lo otro*" (684). All of creation is an expression of *Being*, which itself is not a being, but

sustains all that exists. If Cadenas is certain of one thing, it is that everything is sacred and belongs equally to the mystery of *being*, such that enlightenment —satori, nirvana, illumination, emptiness, silence or union— is of *this* world and indiscriminately includes the creatures of this world, the human being, his language and thinking.

It is on this basis that Cadenas cordially takes issue with the Catholic mystic tradition, although he respectfully acknowledges that only first-hand experience would allow him to speak with complete authority. In the writing of San Juan de la Cruz, Cadenas finds disturbing the unrelenting war waged against the self, the required disavowal of the creatures of the world, the violent asceticism to punish the body and the condemnation of language, which the saint so masterfully employs. We have already heard in various forms Cadenas's counter-reasoning, the source of his "riña cordial con los místicos" which argues that the Spanish mystics "sacrifican mucho de la naturaleza o la cultura, y yo me avengo mal con exclusiones" because for Cadenas, "[t]odo forma parte del mismo torrente" (696). One "worldly" presence that he especially wishes to recognize as integral part of this "torrent" is the body whose pre-cognitive sensations maintain the most direct connection between the human being and the real. Cadenas writes: "El cuerpo vocea un secreto que no se oye: es naturaleza, en contraste con el yo que vive separado de ella [...] ¿No debería el cuerpo ser el maestro del yo en vez de su esclavo?" (697).

From the above quote, it should be evident that Cadenas upholds his long-standing position that the "I"/ ego is the principal obstacle for the human being to experience a "mystic" consciousness, an opinion shared by San Juan de la Cruz. Cadenas

writes, a little tongue-in-cheek, that “El verdadero Dios de la gente en todas partes —no hay límites geográficos para él— ha sido el yo” (694). Cadenas believes that at the societal level, the “I-as-God” existential stance has allowed and cultivated the rampant evils of the world such as the abuse and exploitation of the environment, the fostering of radical nationalism, the disregard for other human life, the arms race and corruption. The very nature of the “I” is such that he “se atribuye todo el mérito, cuando se envanece, cuando olvida el origen sagrado de aquello que pone al servicio de su yo” (698). Mysticism’s insight, Cadenas contends, is the ideal ultimate antidote to the ego.

The “process” for the attainment of “satori” commands Cadenas’s attention, and he contemplates various aspects of it in relationship to the Spanish saint. Of particular interest to our author is the oft-cited “noche oscura” of San Juan’s mystic process, in which senses and spirit are led to feel abandoned and desolate and habitual forms of prayer and worship are fruitless. This occurs precisely when the light of the divine presence is nearest, that which secretly instructs the soul in love’s perfection. Cadenas also remarks that in the mystic experience, words can only correspond to the period leading up to epiphany, but can never capture symbolically that incommunicable experience. Theoretically available for all to attain, it is, nevertheless a “don” (692) or a “gift” that is independent of one’s efforts and desire for fulfillment. For San Juan de la Cruz, there is only one path to enlightenment, and it rests on God’s grace, which may explain why so few people have successfully followed his example.

For his part, Cadenas embraces a plurality of “paths” to the enlightenment San Juan writes of, but he also openly questions the very notion of a “route” to illumination —an

issue we already addressed in our analysis of *Memorial*. Here, in his own words, Cadenas lays bare the exacerbating paradox of the search for a true awakening: “buscar la iluminación es alejarla, ya que se trata de un deseo como cualquier otro. Se cae así en una especie de concupiscencia espiritual. ¿Entonces qué hacer? Nada tal vez; porque *todo lo que hace el yo*, incluida esta búsqueda, sigue en su mismo campo” (688, emphasis added). If the search itself feeds one’s desire and ego, adding distance to between oneself and the present real, then is it best to abandon the effort for a true shift in consciousness? Cadenas appears to hesitate in his answer. On one hand he responds that through effort, the human being can attain a greater “conocimiento de sí mismo, y sobre todo del peligro que representamos” (692); on the other, he sets his own example of offering his continuous but non-directed attention and availability to the real in his writing and daily activities, without fixating on a goal beyond the present.

Amante (1983), is the poetic precursor of *Apuntes*, and it embodies many of the facets of Cadenas’s personal perspective on mysticism that we have just examined. The three epigraphs that precede the text aid us in establishing the precise coordinates of this reading. The first, by William Carlos Williams asks, “Why do you try/ so hard/ to be a man./ You are a lover” (“Amante” 328). Interpreting the word “man” of Williams’s verse in the Foucauldian sense, it is clear that Cadenas wishes to redefine the human being in his capacity for love, care and attention to something beyond himself. What kind of an “amante” does Cadenas propose to place in Man’s stead? The next two epigraphs that follow, guide us to a greater understanding. First, C. Kohn, a commentator of Karl Kraus’s works, remarks how in the latter’s poetry, “le culte de la langue rejoignait dans

sa pensée le culte de la femme” (328), thus alluding to the similar overlap of semantic fields in Cadenas’s poetry: that of the traditional vocabulary of courtly love of a woman with its transposition in the expression of mystical experiences, and the almost unnamable devotion to the word as such. The third quote, this time by Kraus, rephrases Heidegger’s understanding of language as the house of Being, and the human being’s relationship to the poetic word: “Ich bin nur einer von den Epigonen/ die in dem alten Haus der Sprache wohnen” (328), roughly “I am but one of the epigones that live in the old house of language.” The protagonist of *Amante*, therefore, is already defined as a lover or custodian of language —his beloved— to which he belongs. Language is his sheltering home, and he calls himself one of its epigones, another means of stating that the words comprising the poems that we will presently read, actually issue forth from language itself.

Amante is comprised of three uneven groupings of texts in verse that should be read as one long poem, reminiscent of “La diosa,” of *Memorial*. As with this earlier text, of particular interest here is the singular use of multiple speaking voices and symbolic characters: “ella, el amante, el anotador” (329). The “ella” of the text is the beloved, the female representation of language in its purest speaking. Fabienne Bradu has pertinently queried, “¿Qué sucedería si las palabras se volviesen transparentes, unívocas, redondos receptáculos de realidad, cabales moradas del ser? Sucedería lo que persigue Cadenas en su poesía: un contacto directo entre la palabra y la realidad” (75). The lover of this text is devoted to listening to the pure speech of Being, and he conceives his devotion to his beloved as the act of faithful transcription. The very poems that we read should be read as

a speaking that springs from her and whose enunciation returns both the scribe and reader to her silence:

El amante custodia tu ara
con las palabras que le concedes,
las de todos los días, pero a otra luz.
(No pueden venir sino de ti,
en él adentrada.) (359).

It is thus that “el amante” and “el anotador,” who alternate as the speaking voice²⁸, are identified as different names for the same human entity. The last poem of the book confirms this interpretation: “No sé quién es/ el que ama/ o el que escribe o el que observa./ A veces entre ellos/ se establece, al borde,/ un comercio extraño/ que los hace indistinguibles” (384).

In addition to the “strange commerce” between the identities of the lover and the scribe, *Amante* is the chronicle of the relationship between the human being and unmediated reality. In his commentary on *Amante*, Rafael Cordero writes, and I agree, that: “La condición de estar en el Aquí y en el Ahora, activamente conectado con la prístina energética de la vida, es precisamente la condición de amante que este libro trastocador nos propone” (114). To be “actively connected life’s pure energy” is but another description of Cadenas’s interpretation of the mystic experience, as we have just seen in *Apuntes*. In *Amante*, Cadenas also outlines the human state and consciousness that allows for enlightenment. Again it is emphasized that the “I” is the greatest obstacle to a union with the world and the self, but that the world and the self in and of themselves *are*

the mystery. One poem that illustrates the human being's transformation reads: "Se creyó dueño/ y ella lo obligó a la más honda encuesta,/ a preguntarse qué era en realidad suyo./ Después lo tomó en sus manos/ y fue formando su rostro/ con el mismo material del extravío, sin desechar nada,/ y lo devolvió a los brazos del origen/ como a quien se amó sin decírselo" (342). From these verses, it is evident that when Man gives up his notions of possession, both of his lordship over the real and himself, he can be reincorporated and welcomed into its undivided mystery. Another poem summarizes the conditions that determine to whom enlightenment is and is not availed:

Es a él
que lo sagrado
quiere encomendarse.

Los oficiantes no pudieron sostenerlo.
Estaban atados por prescripciones,
hacían una raya divisora,
tasaban lo desconocido—
"hasta aquí, decían, llega el misterio
que administramos",
como si fuese una heredad
gobernable
por mano de hombre,
pero él nunca prescribió ni trazó linderos
ni pensó que tenía autoridad (366).

Those who seek to define what belongs to Being's mystery, administrate the real and preside over it as Men are unable to "sustain" its presence, and they inevitably are not commended with its keep.

²⁸ See Luis Miguel Isava Briceño's poem for poem division of the poetic voice's identity in *Voz de amante (Estudio sobre la poesía de Rafael Cadenas)*, p. 123.

The experience of “lo sagrado” in *Amante* prefigures the opinion that Cadenas voices in *Apuntes* —that enlightenment is entrusted to those who experience themselves not as a “self,” but as indivisible from the beloved, understood here as that which grants reality and language. The mystical experience of *Amante* involves an awakening to one’s eternal belonging to that which is, a realization which is often delayed by Man’s seeking elsewhere. With the “mystery” always immediately present but hidden because of the subject’s efforts to attain it, the “lover” passes through moments of excruciating loneliness and despair, much like San Juan’s “noche oscura.”: “¡Qué penuria/ en la mano misma del misterio!/ el misterio voceado en nuestra cara/ como viento arrasador,/ [...] vena que todo lo recorre/ pulsando,/ a la mano como tu cuerpo” (381). As close to the human being as his own body, the Godly presence is nevertheless hidden, even in its destruction of Man’s best-intended “código[s]” (340) and “retórica del amante” (371). The poetic voice of the following verses, conscious of his own wandering, asks the “beloved” for forgiveness, realizing that he had always been “housed” in her present: “Perdona/ su extravío./ No te encontraba,/ y lo tenías/ en tu mano/ suspendido./ Tal vez/ los que tú levantas/ necesitan errar/ antes de sentirse./ Mas una vez/ alojados/ olvidan su rostro/ y viven” (457).

When one does finally “forget one’s face and live,” the experience of unity is one of pure present, an immediacy that incorporates the body as well as consciousness. Enlightenment is not a promise to be kept in a different realm, the fantastic appearance of an “Other” endowed with otherworldly truth and holiness or the final accomplishment of a prescribed set of tasks to be successfully completed. Cadenas does not belittle the

“yoga” or exercises the human being performs in anticipation of this moment, for the process often reveals the inherent dangers of the ego, but he does insist that everything is and always has been, a matter of *being present*, —*Nirvana is samsara*— ideas which are stated more eloquently in one of the last poems of *Amante*, which I quote in full:

Cuanto hiciste
fue para propiciar
el encuentro.

Aparta pues de ti
la espera.

Ahora.

Sólo hay

aquí,
ya,

un aquí embriagado
en un ya de oro.

Te encontrarás de bruces
ante ella.

La vida a quemarropa.
Por fin.

En tu cuerpo.

La flor inmediata,
la única,
te esperó siempre (378).

3.2.6 DWELLING ON EARTH

Cadenas’s most recent poetic collection, *Gestiones*, is from 1992 and it was

rewarded the first Pérez Bonalde International Poetry Prize. The title word has been the source of critical discussions, but I agree with Christiane Dimitríades, who simply refers to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia*, that the most apt definition in relation to this book is a “contrato que se origina por el cuidado de intereses ajenos sin mandato de su dueño” (148). The “contract” of these poems is one of the author with the world and language, and the “interests” that he cares for are those of the mystery of the real within daily existence. *Gestiones* has been read in radically opposing fashions: Luis Moreno Villamediana criticizes the book as a conservative and pompous attempt to “levantar el acta que da cuenta de los destrozos dejados por los letristas, los incontinentes y los lunáticos y a prescribir los remedios” (152); on the opposite end of the spectrum, Gustavo Guerrero sees this work as a refreshingly clean break with the notion of poetry as a correlate of mysticism, and Cadenas’s first genuine “intento de fundar la poesía en la continuidad de nuestra experiencia ordinaria” (78-79). I would have to place my own reading somewhere between these two extremes, as I think the ideas at the root of this poetry are a clear continuation of those he has developed throughout his earlier works, although the execution and provenance of the poetic elements pertain to a broader spectrum.

Gestiones is the work of a mature artist who has clearly established his personal aesthetic and ethics and can now evaluate his own accomplishments and limitations with greater patience and less vehemence, and experience through other people and things, that which he desired to find in himself. Whereas *Memorial* and *Amante* in verse and *Anotaciones*, *En torno al lenguaje* and *Apuntes sobre San Juan de la Cruz* in prose

fervently advanced the position of an awakening within the “here and now,” rarely did Cadenas incorporate in his writing the actual things, places, relationships, memories, history and beings of the world, preferring almost *koan*-like verses to shake the reader into the his present, such as the poem that concluded the previous section. In *Gestiones*, however, Cadenas allows the daily things of this world to cohabitate within the poem, not only within the *idea* that the poem presents. Even the “I” is not scathingly banished from the poems, but is treated with almost affectionate irony, a presence no longer to be built up through rejection. Maintaining the same perspective about the function of poetry and the necessity of the human being to free himself of the dominion of the ego, Cadenas nevertheless appears to be more charitable and accepting of his own shortcomings, finding fulfillment in the examples of others before him.

The two sections of *Gestiones*, “Convivencia” and “Mediaciones,” best illustrate the physical presence of the world as participating in the mystery and daily living as the realm for experiencing *being*: a crowded restaurant is the site for a reflection on what Man requires to be free from himself (“Gestiones” 394); a hotel stay is motive for pondering the roles and requirements of being a writer and husband (400); a childhood port revisited opens a window into time’s passage and memory, and the question of what it means to *be* the same (402). Another poem resembles those from previous books that insist on the present, but now the actual presence of that *specific* present is given space in the poem: “Me cerca *ahora*./ *Ahora* sin intermediarios,/ *ahora* en primera instancia,/ *ahora* como si fuera mi piel, —el disco que oigo,/ las voces en el comedor,/ un relincho en la granja tras el edificio—/ *ahora*, el espíritu santo de *ahora*” (412). In these verses,

the sounds of quotidian existence form the chorus of *being*, and the poet's attentive listening invests the music, voices and whinnying with equal ontological status. The following poem performs the same movement, but this time through "proper" seeing: "El amanecer/ encuentra tu rostro,/ lo golpea con sus ramas amarillas./ Así, vaciado de repente, es mucho./ Lo hace digno de la vida: extraño" (413). A well-known face enveloped by light is infused with the strange dignity of presence in which individual identity is "emptied" to allow life's simple being to shine through. This interchange between the singularity of things and existence has several variations in *Gestiones*, but is best captured by these delightful verses that could credibly be found illustrating Heidegger's discussion of the play of Being and beings, or the idea of Tao: "Lo que miras a tu alrededor/ no son flores, pájaros, nubes,/ sino/ existencia./ No, son flores, pájaros, nubes" (406).

In addition to physical beings in these poems, Cadenas opens his verses to cultural presences, further supporting his opinion that human creations equally belong to the mystery of the real. The life and creations of writers and artists such as Auden, Donne, Rubens, Osip Mandelstam, Archilochus and Rilke as well as a work of Polish theatre and the Greek trilogy *Oresteia* are brought into the fold of the present within Cadenas's poems. Of the aforementioned authors, Rilke is the inspiration of a series of 16 poems that pays homage to his work, ethos, aesthetics and life's mission. Whereas Cadenas remains hesitant about his own writing and questions his personal capacity to embrace the real's mystery and quell the ego, he sees in Rilke the culmination of such an existence and his writing as the epitome of unmediated listening to Being, a reading that closely

follows Heidegger's.

Cadenas holds Rilke up as an exception in comparison to all others, himself included, to whom he refers simply as “nosotros.” Rilke is capable of the arduous undertaking of the consummate poet, that of breaking all of his ties and self-imposed limitations in order to: “estar/ ahí/ desabrigado/ sin exigir nada/ salvo/ el dictado hondo,/ su ráfaga/ anonadante,/ la voz/ sin sueño,/ el sonido que no pertenece a nadie” (451). “We,” on the other hand, are bound by our limitations, scared to let go of the false safety of our egos, and left asking who, if anyone, is truly up to the task of the poet: “¿Quién deja de oponerse?/ [...] / ¿Quién se vive en el vacío?/ ¿Quién hace del desabrigo refugio?/ ¿Quién se disuelve en el percibir?/ [...] / ¿Quién accede a trocar su día por un rostro que no ha de ver?” (456). The gift of Rilke's poetry is that through the attentive reading of his verses, one can be brought to the experience from which they sprang. Cadenas speaks for himself when he writes: “Me arrancas/ de mí/ para mostrarme/ la presencia,/ el inmóvil ahora” (448). Similarly, in perfect alignment with Heidegger's discussion of restoration of the “thing” to its “thingness” through art, Cadenas describes how Rilke's poems allow the entities of the earth stand in themselves in the Open of disclosure: “Él las [things] acogía transformándolas/ en lo que eran, devolviéndolas a su exactitud,/ bañándolas en su propio oro,/ [...] / Piedras, flores, nubes/ renacían/ en otro silencio/ para un distinto transcurrir” (443).

Much to his lamentation, Cadenas recognizes that few people know how to continue Rilke's legacy or even listen properly to his words. His assessment of the present is bleak, which he summarizes as “los arrasamientos del siglo veinte” (448), and

his evaluation of Man's state is equally dismal: "Los hombres están atascados,/ hacen ruido para no escuchar,/ su corazón ya no los soporta./ *Todo respira y da gracias,*/ menos ellos" (454). In examining his own existence, Cadenas does not sugarcoat the reflection, he sees, and he freely discloses the persistent paradox at the heart of his life's work: "Soy/ apenas/ un hombre que trata de respirar/ por los poros del lenguaje./ Un estigma,/ a veces un intruso,/ en todo caso alguien fuera de papel" (420). After an entire lifetime dedicated to poetry as a means to "conducir a otro comienzo" (447), Cadenas humbly admits that Man's legacy is hard to shake and the chance to live and write from a different conception of the self is the constant challenge and opportunity of being. Cadenas's last poem, "Moradas" is the recapitulation of this mature outlook, some of whose final verses conclude this chapter:

Sentir es magnífico; escribir, exultante; habitar lo sumo. Pero ¿dónde está el lugar aplacado, el sitio de reunión, el punto del encuentro solvente?
Abandonamos. Decidimos vivir (463).

EPILOGUE

The poetry and prose of Girri and Cadenas have been brought together in the space of these pages because their works insistently ask the question of how the human being understands his relationship with the world he inhabits, and how he apperceives himself. Initiating their literary careers during the second half of the 20th century, both authors were born into a system of knowledge and a manner of being a subject that long predated them. Planted squarely in what we have referred to here as the modern Western episteme, Girri's and Cadenas's earlier works are testimonies of the arduous but imperative task of testing, interrogating and becoming conscious of the pre-established conditions or "givens" that inform our conception of ourselves and others, our notion of time and origin, our use of language and the reach and nature of our thought. Both identify Man's current position as the axis for being and thinking as non-essential and restrictive of other modes of knowledge and experiences of reality.

The second "movement" in the trajectories of Girri's and Cadenas's writing is also notable for the commonalities in their individual responses, a singularity within the scope of Latin American poetry. Both seek a radically different understanding through a pendular motion such that by turning inward to quiet the mind and release the self from the limitations of the "I," a new outward perspective, in which the human being is included, is afforded. This new vision is described by both poets as simple, depthless and pertaining to the present. It entails a disposition of openness and receptive listening and seeing. It promises a fullness of presence and the experiential knowledge of man and world's mutual belonging. It safeguards Being and brings all beings into their ontological

dimension. Poetry, as an activity not rooted in or practiced as personal subjectivity, provides that open amphitheatre for Being and things to reveal themselves in their own dimension, and to call man into their presence.

If initially Girri's and Cadenas's writing responds to their personal inquietudes and dissatisfactions, ultimately, their tireless probing and careful listening hold greater implications for human living on the earth. This deduction follows closely the thought of Martin Heidegger and various Eastern philosophies, whose ontological perspectives on the human being and his reality simultaneously give rise to an ethics of thought and action quite foreign to Man. One of the purposes of this dissertation was to heed in all seriousness the call that echoes and bounces from the last, prophetic lines of *Les mots et les choses*, to Heidegger's tortuous and unsayable speaking of Being, from the *koans* of the Zen masters to verses by Girri and Cadenas such as these: "El dueño tiene miedo./ Los ojos sólo tienen realidad" ("Memorial" 256). The prolonged study of Girri's and Cadenas's works offered, in part, the opportunity to bring these voices of diverse provenance together that so often are ignored or dismissed. Sometimes, despite my best effort to allow each writer to speak, I perceive my hand in their orchestration. I nevertheless believe that beyond the pages of this text, they form a harmonic, if sometimes contrapuntal chorus whose calm insistence carries within an urgency and a promise that have rung true to me as a reader and co-inhabitant of this earth.

The difficulty of their message is also the major obstacle in writing —particularly in an academic fashion— about this topic: a true eclipse of Man's speaking must be something Man cannot say. Can such an undertaking be anything but solitary and silent?

Both Girri and Cadenas acknowledge and are forced to embrace the ultimate incommunicability of their task, as they rest in the Open as both “hacedores” and “hechos.” Does this invalidate their lifelong poetic projects or the present one? It is my hope, and one that I share with Girri and Cadenas, that from these apparent paradoxes there emerges a path of new thinking.

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VITA

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