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Mexico in Ruins: Metaphors of Ruins and Ruination in Twentieth-Century Mexican Poetry

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish

by

Benjamin Hafen Cluff

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jacobo Sefamí, Chair
Associate Professor Viviane Mahieux
Professor Gonzalo Navajas

2016

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DEDICATION

To

Anna Evelyn, Jillian Elaine, and Gordon Benjamin.

But most of all, to my love, Shaunielle.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Professor Jacobo Sefamí, who always greeted me with a smile and welcomed me with an *abrazo*. His office and classroom were places of learning, laughter, and literary wonder. Thank you for the gift of poetry, for guiding my explorations of this marvelous labyrinthine subject, and for your guidance as I sought to make a humble contribution to the study of this field which we both love so much.

I would like to thank my committee members, Professor Viviane Mahieux, who does so much to better the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and whose consummate example of professionalism taught me a great deal about the intricacies of academia, and Professor Gonzalo Navajas, whose infectious enthusiasm and inspirational teaching brought me to the University of California, Irvine and who willingly joined my dissertation committee on short notice. Thank you both for your feedback, kindness, and encouragement. I would also be remiss if I did not mention Professor Maarten Van Delden, who for reasons of timing could not serve on my committee, but contributed so much to my formation as an academic.

Additionally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my professors at Brigham Young University and the University of California, Irvine who helped shape my academic interests, introduced me to Borges, Rulfo, and Pacheco, and challenged me to delve deeper into the maze of Latin American Literature. David, Greg, and Doug, thank you for helping take that big step forward. To my dear friends and colleagues at UCI who listened and provided feedback, *mil gracias*. I am profoundly thankful to the poets and authors that have responded to my inquests with enthusiasm and encouragement, especially Jorge Humberto Chávez, who writes hauntingly beautiful verses and is so generous. To my bike, who carried me for many miles while I pondered or momentarily forgot what is written in these pages, thank you. Ron and Chuck, you taught me how to ride and let Mike and I tag along on so many great adventures, thank you. To my friends who understand what it is like and helped me through the fog, Cody, Matt, Mac, and Chris, but most of all Will and Jared, thank you. To the Bosworth family, thank you for your friendship and for those many Sunday afternoons.

I express my most sincere thanks to my family whose love and support cannot be quantified, I thank them for the following: Mom and Dad, you always allowed me to dream and never put limits on my imaginings. Dan, for all of the support, distractions, and wonderful memories. Michelle, for your unending encouragement and all those laughs we shared, and Nate, for the *mate* inscribed with my future academic title, which kept me going when I needed it. To the Gibbons, who accepted me and loved me as their own. Once again, I cannot thank my children, Evelyn, Jillian, and Gordon enough, for their hugs, smiles, and laughter, which made it hard to leave but so good to come home. Finally, Shaunie, I couldn't have done this without your continuous support, unrelenting positive attitude, patience, kindness, and constant love.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mexico in Ruins: Metaphors of Ruins and Ruination in Twentieth-Century Mexican Poetry

By

Benjamin Hafen Cluff

Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Jacobo Sefamí, Chair

This project began with a simple observation, that the vast archive of Mexican poetry, is brimming with ruin poetry, poems written about a specific site of indigenous ruins or some other material ruin, or verses that use the idea of ruins as a metaphor or symbol by which the poet comments on Mexico's political or social state of affairs. This dissertation explores three tropes of twentieth century Mexican poetry as they relate to ruins: the modern city as a ruinscape and maker of ruins, the ruins of disaster, both man-made and natural, and the concept that contemporary poetry in indigenous Mexican languages serves as a form of resistance through which indigenous peoples in Mexico struggle against cultural ruination. The introduction features ruin poetry by José María Heredia, José Juan Tablada, and Efraín Huerta, which serves as examples of more traditional verses about ruins. Chapter 1 examines the presence and characterization of the modern city over time in the works of Ramón López Velarde, Manuel Maples Arce, Salvador Novo, Xavier Villaurrutia, Efraín Huerta, and Eduardo Lizalde, who at the end of the century reads the city as a modern ruin. Chapter 2 focuses on José Emilio Pacheco and Jorge Humberto Chávez's poetic reactions to natural and man-made disasters, the 1985 Mexico City earthquake and the surge of violence in northern Mexico, related to the drug trade,

during Felipe Calderón's presidency. Chapter 3 explores the poems of Natalio Hernández, Jun Tiburcio, and Alberto Gómez Pérez, who write poetry in their respective indigenous languages, Nahua, Totonac, and Tzotzil, as a form of cultural resistance to political practices that would marginalize their languages and cultures to the point of extinction. Within the verses of these aforementioned poets, I found that ruins and ideas about ruins function as a particularly adept critical tool through which Mexico's poets criticize, critique, or simply respond to their nation's state of affairs and circumstances.

Introduction: A Foundation of Ruins

Aprende de estas ruinas,
Si no á vivir, á caer

-Francisco de Quevedo, “Funeral á los huesos de una fortaleza que gritan mudos desengaños”

Piedra de las cronologías,
síntesis de los años y los días
donde se exhala en silencioso canto
el pertinaz espanto
de las viejas mitologías…

-José Juan Tablada, “El ídolo en el atrio”

I. Introduction

This project began with a simple observation. As I delved into the vast archive of Mexican poetry, I noticed a subtle thread that connected a great number of Mexican poets. Regardless of their lyrical influences, particular *ars poetica*, or the era in which they wrote, many poets had penned one or more poems about a specific site of indigenous ruins or used the idea of ruins as a metaphor to comment on Mexico's political or social state of affairs. The phenomenon was too frequent to ignore, and much like the one who speaks in Francisco de Quevedo's poem, "Funeral á los huesos de una fortaleza que gritan mudos desengaños," I began to wonder, what could be learned from indigenous ruins and the many poems written about them? Quevedo's poem suggests that one who gazes upon ruins might learn "Si no á vivir, á caer" (225). Indeed, for a ruin to become such, as the word's etymology reveals, it must undergo a downward fall or collapse, it must fall into ruin. As I would discover, the Quevedo's poignant pedagogical suggestion, learning to fall, echoed themes found in much of Mexico's poetry of ruins.

According to Gustavo Jiménez Aguirre, when the Cuban-born poet José María Heredia wrote "En el teocalli de Cholula" in December of 1820, he initiated the tradition of writing poems specifically about "ruinas monumentales y vestigios de diversas culturas mesoamericanas…" (8). A traditional *silva*, Heredia's poem is rather straightforward, and like many poems from the Romantic era it praises the confluence of nature and manmade structures that result in a beautiful ruin. "En el teocalli de Cholula" closely follows centuries-old tropes of ruin gazing that once again came into vogue in Europe during in the early nineteenth century at the apex of Romanticism. While verses about ruins and ruin gazing continued to be popular among Mexican poets throughout the twentieth century, a different form of ruin poetry emerged alongside its older counterpart. In many cases, rather than serve as the object of poetic

contemplation, ruins function as a symbol used by the poetic voice comments on Mexico's political or social status quo. Perhaps because their presence also connotes absence, ruins seem to function as a loose signifier, allowing the poet to fill the gap and make of them what they will.

This dissertation explores three tropes of twentieth century Mexican poetry as they relate to ruin poetry: the modern city as a ruinscape and maker of ruins, the ruins of disaster, both man-made and natural, and the notion that contemporary poetry in indigenous Mexican languages is a form of resistance through which indigenous peoples in Mexico struggle against cultural ruination. Before examining these topics, however, it is necessary to survey some of the more prevalent intellectual concepts about and theories pertaining to ruins and to examine how those ideas were manifest in the poetry of their time. I will also discuss the unique case of Mexico and how the physical remnants of indigenous civilizations problematize many western notions about ruins.

II. Thinking Ruins: A Philosophical Genealogy

In December 1997, the Getty Center in Los Angeles, California opened an exhibit titled "Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed."[1] The exhibit's companion book, of the same name, features an unattributed quote that claims, "At least since the Renaissance, […] ruins have occupied a central position in our collective imagination, provoking reactions ranging from nostalgia to foreboding, from dreams of grandeur to fears of mortality. (Roth et al, n.p.). The Getty exhibit's companion text mentions the most common tropes associated with ruins and ruin gazing, nostalgic thoughts of the past and foreboding thoughts about the future. Yet while the Renaissance certainly saw an increased interest in ruins as aesthetic and philosophical objects, as we will see, the earliest evidence suggests that people who lived centuries before the Renaissance were preoccupied with decaying buildings devoid of their former inhabitants,

structures that lent themselves to plaintive thought and poetry of lamentation. Ruins have long inspired observers to think of and write verse about related subjects such as the incessant passage of time, their own mortality, or the deafening absence of those who came before, themes we will explore below.

As far as we know, an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet who lived in the eighth century AD was among the first in the western world to write a reflection upon a site of ruin. In the poem, simply titled "The Ruin," the poetic voice contemplates the remnants of a former Roman bath:

> Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it,
> The city buildings fell apart, the works
> Of giants crumble. Tumbled are the towers,
> Ruined the roofs, and broken the barred gate,
> Frost in the plaster, all the ceilings gape,
> Torn and collapsed and eaten by age.
> And grit holds its grip, the hard embrace
> Of Earth, the dead departed master-builders,
> Until a hundred generations now
> Of people have passed by. Often this wall
> Stained red and grey with lichen has stood by
> Surviving storms while kingdoms rose and fell. (In Thwaite, 10)

Written as an elegy with the characteristic melancholic and brooding tones of that genre, this short excerpt from "The Ruin" exemplifies the style and themes commonly found in poetry about and philosophy of ruins that persist in to this day. Describing the ruin's physical features, the voice notes absence of those who constructed the bath house, "the dead departed master-

builders." Emphasizing the absence of those who built the structure implies the inquiry *ubi sunt*, which translated from Latin means "Where are now, those who lived before us?" Ferguson et al explain that *ubi sunt* originates from an "extensive medieval tradition…lamenting the mutability of human life and institutions" (16, note 6). Though not limited to poetry about relics and old vestiges, *ubi sunt* continually appears in poetic contemplations of ruins, from ancient times to the present.

The notion of *ubi sunt* was so commonplace throughout the Renaissance and early modern era that French philosopher and critic Denis Diderot theorized the reflective process by which the viewer of a ruin arrives at the very melancholic state from which they contemplate their own mortality or ask "*Ubi sunt*?" In his essay "The Salon of 1767" Diderot writes that upon witnessing a site if ruin, "we retreat into ourselves; we contemplate the ravages of time, and in our imagination we scatter the rubble of the very buildings in which we live over the ground; in that moment solitude and silence prevail around us, we are the sole survivors of an entire nation that is no more. Such is the first tenet of the poetics of ruins […]" (cited in Dillon, 22). Merely the beginning of an observation inspired by ruins, the contemplative mode described here develops further. Diderot goes on to explain that ruins invoke grand ideas in the viewer, for them everything "comes to nothing, everything perishes, everything passes, only the world remains, only time endures […] the objects surrounding me announce death and compel my resignation to what awaits me" (Dillon, 22). As he continues explaining the poetics of ruin gazing, Diderot's description itself becomes a lament of sorts while simultaneously revealing another mode of thought often associated with ruins, *memento mori*.

By their very nature, ruins connote the presence of an absence, evidence of a once-existent culture or people that either vanished or, perhaps, was vanquished. Thus it seems logical

that a ruin might inspire the viewer to ask *ubi sunt*. By extension, the idea of *memento mori*, Latin for "remember your mortality," or "you too will die," develops from the *ubi sunt* theme. Returning to "The Ruin," our anonymous Anglo Saxon poet emphasizes the transitory nature of human existence in contrast to the endurance of the ruin, whose walls have "stood by / Surviving storms while kingdoms rose and fell" and "a hundred generations […] / Of people have passed by" (10). Recognizing the effects of time's constant march on the ruin, the voice cannot help but think of its own brief life and impending death. Not infrequently then, poems about ruin gazing may begin with *ubi sunt* before, almost inevitably, exploring the *memento mori* theme.

Though we have seen evidence of such melancholic musings from earlier times, the Renaissance turned the attention of the west toward Rome and Greece, and as such, brought ruins to the cultural foreground. Thus, in the 18th century a typical response among the Romantics was to use "ruins for the fiction of meditation. Pondering a *memento mori* or the theme of *Ubi sunt*?, they lingered in states of melancholia and paused for self-reflection" (Masiello 28). The penchant for melancholic ruin gazing, as we have already seen, has old roots. Yet it "culminated with the elaboration in the late eighteenth century of a Romantic aesthetics of fragmentation, failure and picturesque decline" (Dillon, 11). The notion of melancholic ruin gazing became so entrenched in the Romantic that it continued well into the twentieth century, as we will see below. Another trope often associated with ruins is the connection between nature and the dilapidated structure.

Our anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet writes of "the hard embrace / of Earth" and a wall "Stained red and grey with lichen," emphasizing the collusion of nature in the process of decay. Though the role of nature as a maker of ruins is implicit in works about architectural vestiges, in the early twentieth century the natural process of decay was foregrounded by German

philosopher Georg Simmel. Simmel's 1911 essay, "The Ruin," is a seminal study of the role of nature in the creation of ruins. He theorizes that a completed architectural structure strikes the perfect balance between the forces of man and nature as it represents man's ability to form nature in his own image, almost a spiritual union of sorts according to Simmel. However, once the structure begins to crumble and become a ruin, the imbalance revealed between man and nature has a profound effect on the viewer:

> This unique balance - between mechanical, inert matter which passively resists pressure, and informing spirituality which pushes upward - breaks, however, the instant a building crumbles. For this means nothing else than that merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favor of nature. This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we fell, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature's revenge for the spirit's having violated it by making a form in its own image. (259)

Simmel's language, employing the biblical allusion of creating a thing in one's own image, infuses his theory of ruins with greater weight and makes the crumbling of a building that much more tragic. Regardless of whether the viewer created the ruined building they observe, according to Simmel, seeing it overtaken by nature and in a fallen state creates a sense of longing for the whole and integral form that once stood in its place. As we saw in the prior section, ruins often inspire their viewer to question the whereabouts of those who created or inhabited the structure, asking *ubi sunt*. Simmel's theory differs in that a ruin manifests itself as the absence whole, resulting in the viewer feeling nostalgia for wholeness. While both modes of thought are

by nature tinged with a longing for what has passed, Simmel's theory emphasizes a nostalgia born of the incompleteness of the architectural work, rather than the absence of its creators.

Despite the feeling of melancholy which stems from the incompleteness of a ruin, according to Simmel, one also feels joy upon seeing a crumbling architectural work. He claims that once a building has been subjected to the elements for a sufficient amount of time, it begins to take on the colors and characteristics of "the surrounding landscape" resulting in a "unity of tint" and emerges "a new whole, a characteristic unity" (Simmel, 260, 263). Simmel notes the importance of color and tint in his aesthetics of ruins. The process by which a ruin adapts the colors and tints of its surroundings is through erosion that is manifest as patina, a tarnish that naturally develops on human products made of "metal and wood, ivory and marble" (262). For many, patina denotes age and makes an item "more beautiful by chemical and physical means," transforming it into something new (262). By adopting the colors and tints that surround it, patina, an architectural work becomes more ruinous while also achieving a different type of equilibrium with nature that, according to Simmel, "conveys the impression of peace" once nature achieves its balance with the ruin, "[fusing] the contrast of present and past into one united form" (264, 266). In essence, he believes that –rather than display a perfect balance between man and nature, as an integral architectural structure might– a ruin reveals a sort of symmetry between the past and the present. Brian Dillon rightly critiques Simmel's essay as "a late iteration of the ruin aesthetic of the previous two centuries – a vision of the ruin as essentially an accommodation between nature and culture, the artificial object sliding imperceptibly towards an organic state…" (13). Yet, Simmel's "The Ruin" is significant not only because it fuses nineteenth and twentieth century thought on ruins, but also because, as we will

see below, the German philosopher's "affirmation of the ruin found an echo in the work of his [student] Walter Benjamin" (Yablon 5).

In a similar vein to Simmel's thoughts on ruins, Spanish essayist and philosopher María Zambrano writes that nature is the main force in creating ruins: "No hay ruinas sin el triunfo vegetal sobre lo que un día se alzara soberbiamente sobre la tierra. Pues, todo lo que se edifica sobre la tierra en cierto modo lo humilla" (127). Zambrano echoes Simmel's binary of man-made edifice/nature-made ruin. However her thought differs somewhat by underscoring the importance of time in the equation of ruin-making. Zambrano notes that ruins are "una fusión entre la naturaleza y la historia…una pacificación, una reconciliación de donde nace esa especial belleza que…trae la 'catharsis'" (127). History, or the passage of time, pacify man-made structures and their resultant, fallen state, a reconciliation between the forces of man, nature, and time, evokes a cathartic response in the viewer. Zambrano further emphasizes the importance of time as it relates to ruins, explaining that ruins are merely a metaphor, a tragedy without author, "Su autor es simplemente el tiempo" (127). The process of natural ruination, then, occurs when a man-made edifice is left, exposed to time and the eroding powers of nature. Yet, both Zambrano and Simmel have a specific kind of ruin in mind; one constructed of more traditional building materials, such as stone and wood that requires at least decades, if not centuries to develop, such as the indigenous vestiges of Mexico.

One of the more influential thinkers of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin emerges as an important figure in many of the recent studies on modern ruins and the ruins of modernity. From his angel of history who, propelled forward by the storm of progress sees modernity's end product as a persistently mounting pile of debris (*Illuminations* 258), to his metaphor for remembering as a process of excavation (*Selected Works* 576), Benjamin's work has proven a

rich source for the scholarly interpretation of ruins. Though thoughts on ruins can be found scattered throughout his writings, much contemporary criticism on ruins stems from an oft-quoted passage in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that is especially germane to this study:

> The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in the reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. (177-78).

According to Benjamin, history, or the accumulation of time passed, manifests itself physically as a process of ruination, what he terms irresistible decay. Benjamin moves past the notion of ruin as aesthetic object and instead interprets it as a process (Stead 51). The wide influence of Walter Benjamin's writings, especially after the mid twentieth century, helps inspire a resurgence of interest in and new philosophy about ruins, especially as they relate to modernity.

Refocusing philosophy of ruins on the twentieth century has proven fruitful for many scholars. For example, modern ruins are often comprised of different building materials, such as steel, glass, and cement, which erode differently than stone and result in a distinct process of ruination, even creating new modes of signification unavailable to ancient ruins. Thus, some contemporary thought on ruins –such as Bjørnar Olsen and Þóra Pétursdóttir's recent collection of essays, *Ruin Memories: Materialities, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past* (Routledge 2014) and *Ruins of Modernity* (Duke UP 2010) edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle– tends to distinguish itself from the more Romantic-infused notions of ruins and ruination by exploring how and what modern ruins signify. As Andreas Huyssen writes,

"Concrete, steel, and glass building materials aren't subject to erosion and decay the way stone is. Modernist architecture refuses the return of culture to nature. Furthermore, the real catastrophes of the twentieth century have mainly left rubble rather than ruins… (23). Thus, in the twenty-first century, the notion of a ruin as partially-dilapidated but still recognizable form is critiqued by Gastón R. Gordillo who, in his book *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Duke 2014), argues that rubble itself is an unprivileged form of ruin. Moving even further beyond the ruin itself, Ann Laura Stoler's edited volume, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Duke 2013), draws from Benjamin's suggestion that processes of ruination, rather than ruins themselves, should be the object of modern criticism.

One of the more influential works on ruins in the twenty-first century, Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* explores how ruins relate to restorative and reflective nostalgia. While the former seeks to rebuild monuments and ruins in order to restore past glory, as was done with Chichen Itza in Mexico for example, the latter is a more pensive mode that "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history…" (Future 41). Boym's book is an important work about the role of ruins in the modern city, focusing on restorative nostalgia, monuments, and memory in postwar Moscow. Building on *The Future of Nostalgia*, elsewhere, she writes that "Ruins give us a shock of vanishing materiality. Suddenly our critical lens changes, and instead of marveling at grand projects and utopian designs, we begin to notice…cracks on modern transparencies…" (Ruinophilia 273). While ruins are often associated with distant, even ancient cultures, when we gaze upon modern ruins, from our twenty-first century perspective, they "point at possible futures that never came to be." (Ruinophilia 273). Indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century, and more so in the early twenty-first century, critics frequently use ruins as an interpretational allegory for failed utopic projects of the late modern era. One study that does just

that is Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle's *Ruins of Modernity* (Duke 2010), a collection of essays that is heavily influenced by both Boym and Benjamin's work.

Regrettably, the majority of recent critical works on ruins tend toward Eurocentrism, or at least a northern hemispheric bias, since many include a section on the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. Fortunately though, a good amount scholarship that focuses on the specificity of Latin American ruins has been published recently. Among the more outstanding works are a comparative transatlantic study of modern Latin American and Spanish poetry, Cecilia Enjunto Rangel's *Cities in Ruins: The Politics of Modern Poetics* (Purdue 2010), Gastón Gordillo's interrogation of debris as s form of ruin mentioned above, and a collection of essays edited by Michael J. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh, *Telling Ruins in Latin America* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009), which explores the recent resurgence of interest in ruins in Latin American cultural production. As I noted previously, much literature on ruins ignores the unique place of Mexico's ruins in this theoretical landscape. What follows is a brief history of how Mexican ruins came to exist as such in the present.

III. The Ruins of Mexico

As we saw earlier, ruins are intrinsically tied to architecture and monuments. Further, the ideal medium for the ruination of a structure is stone as it endures and is not easily destroyed by nature (Yablon, 8). Since stone monuments or structures are required for ruins to become present, the history of ruins in Mexico necessarily begins with the Olmec. Centuries before the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico, the Olmec culture thrived in coastal region of what are now the states of Tabasco and Veracruz. The Olmec culture left behind Colossal Heads carved out of stone as well as the remnants of ceremonial centers, such as La Venta, which date from the late Early Preclassic and the Middle Preclassic era, approximately 1800-400 BC (Coe, *Mexico*

236). After the Olmec, the Zapotec culture gained influence on the opposite coast constructing the large city Monte Albán. Their cultural apex coincided with the rise of the *Teotihuacanos* and their eponymous city. These two cultures were at their height in the Late Preclassic and Classic period (400 BC – 650 AD) after which their influence and grandeur diminished (Coe, *Mexico*, 236).

The Mayan cultures overlapped somewhat with *Teotihuacano* culture and reached its zenith shortly after the fall of Teotihuacán (Coe, *Maya*, 10). After the fall of the Maya, the Toltec culture dominated parts of the Yucatán peninsula and much of the Valley of Mexico (Coe, *Maya*, 10). This chronology not only begins to illustrate the diversity of Mesoamerican cultures, in Mexico alone, but also demonstrates that the Aztecs were the heirs of a long line of indigenous civilizations. When the *Mexica*, often referred to by their imperial name, the Aztecs, arrived in the Valley of Mexico as a nomadic tribe of hunters and gatherers, it was already littered with the ruins of previous cultures. Those ruins, especially in the southern jungles of Mexico, would have already begun the process of natural decay and return to nature discussed by Simmel. Yet, unlike Simmel and his Romantic precursors, it is extremely unlikely that the *Mexica* would have derived any sort of pleasure from viewing the ruins of the previous civilizations. However, much like some European nations did with the Greeks in Romans, the Aztecs aligned their myths with those of the great civilizations that came before them. As Michael D. Coe writes: "The Aztecs knew of the great, ruined city of Teotihuacán, to the northeast of their island capital, and said that the gods had met there to create our present era, and the Sun that was to give it life and substance" (*Mexico* 16). It was common among Mesoamerican cultures to adopt aspects of other indigenous cultures they were aware of or came into contact with. Similar to what had been done by other indigenous civilizations before them, the Aztecs adopted the physical and cultural

remnants of other nations into their own history and world, gleaning what they could from Teotihuacan and Toltec ruins that scattered the valley (Coe, *Mexico*, 187). Though after their arrival the Spaniards would initially reject Mexico's indigenous cultures, a similar process of adoption and the historical revision took place in the early twentieth century, resulting in a modern Mexican nation that as a matter of public policy embraces and celebrates its indigenous roots.

The Aztecs rise to power was gradual but steady. They founded Tenochtitlan in 1325, but could not be considered an imperial force until after the 1428 war of the Triple Alliance. For a time, the burgeoning Triple Alliance, led by the Aztecs, boasted great influence and an expansive empire. Tenochtitlan was so strikingly beautiful that when Cortés and his company of conquistadors arrived in 1519, as Bernal Díaz del Castillo writes, they could only describe it by comparison to great imaginary cities that were the stuff of fiction, some even went so far as to question whether or not they were dreaming (156). Despite the Spanish invader's sense of awe in the face of the brilliant Aztec city, its inhabitants were cultural others whose practices offended Cortés and his company's Catholic sensibilities, they were to be conquered and subjugated. At once one of the most fascinating and tragic chapters in the long history of ruins and ruination, the conquest of Tenochtitlan saw one civilization perish while another was born. The new nation, known as New Spain before adopting its current name after independence, has long had an uneasy relationship with its indigenous past. Though Cortés greatly admired the brilliant design and architecture of Tenochtitlan, he abhorred its ceremonial center's purpose, the bloody spectacle of ritualistic human sacrifice and the worship of pagan deities. During the three month siege of Tenochtitlan in the spring and summer of 1521, the Spaniards and their indigenous allies laid waste to the Aztec capital, tearing down many buildings and leaving the city in ruins.

After the conquest a few "*cuicapicque* o poetas nahuas" that had survived the horrible ordeal were able to transcribe some "icnocuícatl, 'cantos tristes', o elegías" in which they describe the fall of Tenochtitlan (León-Portilla, XVI). Their songs were later compiled in a collection titled *Cantares Mexicanos* and could be considered the first poetry about indigenous ruins. According to the Roman Catholic Priest, Ángel María Garibay, who later translated the *Cantares Mexicanos*, the following excerpt is part of a lament that was likely composed in 1523:

> Ya abandonan la ciudad de México:
> el humo se está levantando, la niebla se está extendiendo...
> Con el llanto se saludan el Huiznahuácatl Motelhuihtzin,
> el Tlailotlácatl Tlacotzin,
> el Tlacatecuhtli Oquihtzin...
> Llorad, amigos míos,
> tened entendido que con estos hechos
> hemos perdido la nación mexicana. (León-Portilla, 160)

These moving lines from an *icnocuícatl* demonstrate the great sense of loss and mourning felt by the Aztecs felt after the conquest, not only had their nation been lost, but also their world. Their once grand city almost a total loss, the Aztecs may have been surprised to see at least one important structure still standing. Curiously, rather than tear down what remained of the *Templo Mayor* after the conquest, Cortés, then the first governor of *Nueva España*, chose to leave it standing. According to D. A. Brading, the conquistador's decision not to completely destroy the *Templo Mayor* was likely done, in part, out of respect for his former interlocutor, Moctezuma, but also a conscious effort to "preserve it as a testimony of [Tenochtitlan's] former grandeur" (39). Of course, unlike the *Templo Mayor*, many Aztec structures were not preserved, their

stones served as foundation and building materials for a new palimpsestic city whose architecture was unequivocally European while its organization and layout echo its indigenous origins. Thus, the ruins of Tenochtitlan served as the literal foundation upon which Mexico City was built, and the figurative foundation of Mexico itself.

As Mexico City emerged from the remnants of its former incarnation, many remnants of indigenous structures were buried so that the indigenes could no longer worship them. Yet for almost two decades after its founding, the monumental ruin of the *Templo Mayor* stood as a reminder of Mexico City's former life as the center of Aztec culture. In 1538, Antonio de Mendoza, the first Viceroy of New Spain, made the decision to level all remaining Aztec structures, including the *Templo Mayor*, and to build a grand Spanish city (Brading, 40). Mexico City was to reflect, visually, its importance as the capital city of the most powerful new world viceroyalty during the colonial era, thus the Spaniards sought to hide its indigenous past. For the most part, the Aztec past was meant to be suppressed and forgotten. Remnants of the indigenous city were destroyed, buried, or used as filler material in the construction of build Spanish colonial structures (See figure 1). For the next 400 years, the Spanish colonizers carried out a continual and gradual erasure of Tenochtitlan; though there are exceptions to the rule, generally when remnants of the Aztec past would surface they were reburied. However, as if prefiguring Freudian

Figure 1. An Aztec carving used as the corner stone of what is now the Museo de la Ciudad de México on the corner of José María Pino Suárez and República del Salvador streets in Mexico City's Historical Center

psychology, throughout the colonial and modern eras, remnants of Mexico's indigenous past that had been buried and repressed would resurface and return to haunt its present.

However, after more than two hundred years of colonization, attitudes toward Mexican antiquities began to shift. In the late eighteenth century, creoles who were considering their cultural heritage and identity as residents of Mexico, began to look to the past for answers. Francisco Javier Clavijero's *Historia Antigua de México* (1780), which tells the story of the Mexican from their origins up to the Spanish conquest, was one of the first historical works to describe indigenous Mexican culture in a more neutral manner, largely devoid of the stigmatic discourse that typically permeated such works. Enrique Florescano writes that "by proudly rescuing the indigenous past, [Clavijero's book] became a symbol of Creole patriotism" and spurred great interest in Mexico's indigenous roots (229). The last decades of the eighteenth century saw a boom in the study of Mexican antiquities. José Antonio Alzate, who at the time was editor of *Gazetas de literatura*, famously wrote an article describing the ruins of El Tajín and in 1792, Antonio de León y Gama published *Descripción histórica y cronología de las dos piedras*, which examined and explained the *Piedra del sol* and *Coatlicue* monoliths which had been accidentally discovered in the *Zócalo* two years earlier. Florescano notes that León y Gama's book marked the first time "an archeological monument served to support the explanation of an entire system of ideas" noting that the sun stone was uniquely Mexican "and could not be explained in terms of the European calendar" (230). That same decade explorers set out to investigate the remnants of indigenous structures that were known to historians, such as the ruins of Palenque.

The newfound enthusiasm for Mexico's pre-Hispanic past increased exponentially around the turn of the century. Many foreigners, perhaps inspired by Captain Antonio Del Río's

1786 expedition to and short survey of Palenque, sought permission to travel through Mexico and explore its many ruins. Alexander Von Humboldt and Aimée Bonpland, having attained permission from Carlos IV to travel freely through the country, investigated and drafted rather accurate drawings of many pre-Columbian sites of ruin. Interestingly, these drawings depicted the very essence of Simmel's notion of beautiful and peaceful ruins described above. Often they showed a fragmented whole, partially covered or overtaken by the meandering jungle vines so common in area. Despite the fact that many of the ruins studied by Von Humboldt were already well known, his and Bonpland's work "constituted a virtual second discovery of the New World" (Evans 22). Von Humboldt's journey paved the way for others, such as Captain Guillermo Dupaix, –who undertook the last Mexican expedition under the instruction of a Spanish King, Carlos IV– and John Lloyd Stephens, who continued the rediscovery of Mexico's ancient past. The nineteenth century produced a wealth of knowledge about Mexican antiquities and saw a paradigm shift in attitudes toward pre-Columbian cultures and their remnants that would continue into the twentieth century.

A rather poignant example of how Mexico began to embrace its indigenous roots is found the country's national anthem. In 1853 the words to Mexico's *Himno Nacional* were penned by the poet Francisco González Bocanegra. The sixth verse makes a fascinating corollary between Mexican nationalism, the nation's Aztec origins, and ruins. It reads as follows:

> Antes, patria, que inermes tus hijos
> Bajo el yugo su cuello dobleguen,
> Tus campiñas con sangre se rieguen,
> Sobre sangre se estampe su pie.
> Y tus templos, palacios y torres

Se derrumben con hórrido estruendo,

Y sus ruinas existan diciendo:

De mil héroes la patria aquí fue.

The verse implores the citizens of Mexico to fight to their death and until the great buildings of the nation fall before becoming enslaved. The image of the nation's countryside watered with blood is fascinating since the verb *regar* connotes an action that is beneficial or nutritive to the direct object of the verb. The idea of the countryside receiving nutrition from the blood of its citizens recalls the Aztec notion of blood sacrifice, a process that was not only beneficial to the earth and the cosmos, but necessary for it to continue existing (Coe, *Mexico*, 197). The connection between the mestizo culture of the mid-nineteenth century (when the national anthem was written) and the peak of the Aztec culture is clear.

Further, the last four lines of the sixth verse of the Mexican national anthem describe a hypothetical scenario in which Mexico is vanquished. If this were to occur, the ruins of Mexico's "templos, palacios, y torres" would remain as a testimony that the country was a nation of a thousand heroes. Referring to the nation's towers, palaces and temples (a word that associates Mexico's religious buildings with the fallen Aztec temples) as potential ruins denotes a circular pattern of existence for the nation. Modern Mexico was born out of ruins and would sooner return to ruins than be vanquished by a foreign invader. The concept also alludes to the Catholic tradition that was and is so prevalent in Mexico from its birth, "…pues polvo eres, y al polvo volverás" (Reina Valera, Gén 3:19). As early as the nineteenth century there is evidence that the ruins of the past were becoming more and more a part of the present.

In March, 1925 Jesús Galindo y Villa published his *Historia sumaria de La Ciudad de México*, ironically enough, to celebrate the sixth centenary of Tenochtitaln's founding (3). He

proudly explains that in order to build Mexico City, the former Aztec capital "fué [sic] totalmente arrasada, no pudiendo de ella conservarse en pie ni muro, ni una construcción, ni un resto que acusara su pasada grandeza," (91). While he notes that excavations reveal "numerosas reliquias arqueológicas" he goes on to reassure his reader that "en medio de la Ciudad colonial, nada hay que recuerde a la Ciudad indígena; como de diverso modo se observa en otras urbes del mundo, en las cuales asoman por donde quiera las muestras de lo que fueron" (91). Oddly, in a work that is meant to celebrate Tenochtitlan's founding, Galindo y Villa brags that the true origin and age of Mexico City remain hidden meters beneath the surface. He seems to believe that Mexico City is more beautiful than some European cities because, unlike them, its sixteenth century structures Mexico City were not, at the time, interspersed with ruins and architectural remnants from the distant past. However this was only possible because Mexico City was literally founded upon the ruins of Tenochtitlan.[2] Galindo y Villa's work reveals a tension in early twentieth century Mexican attitudes toward its pre-Columbian origins. They sought to embrace and celebrate the indigenous past of their Federal District, but were not quite sure how to go about it. Thus, Galindo y Villa simply recounts the process of conquering and ransacking the Mexica capital. As a city built by a cultural other, Tenochtitlan was not respected or conserved, but demolished stone by stone while its remnants, devoid of any meaning for the Spanish, were used to build new structures for the colonial city.[3] Galindo y Villa sees a sort of continuity between the former and present cities, "pudo México ser arrasada, y, sobre sus ruinas humeantes alzar cimientos la nueva" emphasizing their common place name while boasting of the former's complete erasure (92). Our historian explains that Cortés, afraid that leaving Tenochtitlan intact might result in an indigenous uprising, ordered the construction of "la fundación de la actual Ciudad de México sobre los escombros de la anterior" (92). Though

Galindo y Villa's narrative history seems to celebrate the Spanish conquest more than it commemorates the sixhundredth anniversary of the founding of Tenochtitlan, his text reveals the intellectual struggle of a nation exploring its own identity and working through notions of what it means to be Mexican and have a dual, Spanish and indigenous, heritage.

In the mid-twentieth century, and today, more than ever, Mexico embraces its literal and symbolic foundation upon ruins. On the esplanade of the *Plaza de la Tres Culturas* at *Tlatelolco,* a site of ruin on many levels, just outside the entrance to the *Templo de Santiago,* overlooking the ruins of *Tlatlelolco* there is a plaque that reads: "El 13 de agosto de 1521, heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtémoc, cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortés. No fue triunfo ni derrota, fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo que es el México de hoy." (Figure 2)

The quote seen here echoes the melancholic tone of the *Cantares Mexicanos* cited above. At the same time, because of its placement at a site of ruin, it reminds us of Simmel's notion that ruins are always imbued with melancholy and a sense of loss. From its earliest origins, Mexico was littered with ruins, the nation was literally and symbolically founded upon ruins. It is not a surprise then that tropes of ruins should continue to appear in the nation's cultural production.

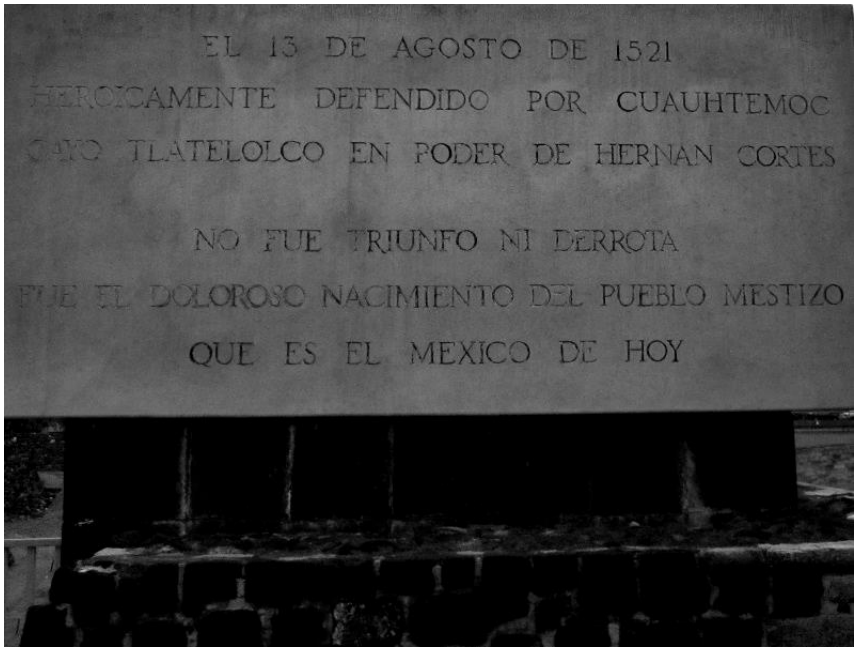

Figure 2. A plaque at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas commemorating the birth of the Mestizo people.

IV. Mexican Ruin Poetry

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as Mexico became more familiar with its indigenous archeological sites through the investigations of several explorers, the nation's poets began to ponder indigenous ruins in their own work. Similar in content and form to the anonymous Anglo Saxon poem we saw earlier, the three poems that follow –written between 1820 and 1963– rely heavily on the age-old tropes of ruin poetry, *memento mori* and *ubi sunt*. In each poem the one who speaks gazes upon a ruin and proceeds to ponder their own mortality or the whereabouts of the people who built the ruined structure they look upon in the poem's present. Unlike the poetry examined in subsequent chapters, these verses are quite simple and don't move beyond the aforementioned tropes. However, they are important in that they exhibit the durability of centuries-old tropes about ruins, but also because they demonstrate how Mexican ruin poetry reflects changing attitudes toward the nation's indigenous past over a 140 year period.

José María Heredia's 1820 poem, "En el teocalli de Cholula," a *silva* about the Aztec ruin for which it is named, displays many tenets of Romantic era verse: a sense of wonderment at the vastness and beauty of nature, an interest in autochthones cultures, and shows of emotion. The voice begins by describing the natural setting of the *teocalli*, or Great pyramid of Cholula, situated near two prominent volcanoes. As the sun sets, the voice speaks to one of the volcanoes, Popocatépetl, asking just how many peoples and kings it saw inhabit the valley below during its long existence. The one who speaks laments the absence of those who built the pyramid and once inhabited its surrounding area implicitly asking *ubi sunt* before answering: "Fueron: de ellos no resta ni memoria" (16 cited in Jiménez A.). The voice uses a preterit form of the verb *to be*, emphasizing the absence of those who once peopled the valley of Mexico, where the great

pyramid stands. Heredia's poem moves quickly from the *ubi sunt* question to a *memento mori* as the voice cries that all things perish:

> Todo perece
> por ley universal. Aun este mundo
> tan bello y tan brillante que habitamos,
> es el cadáver pálido y deforme
> de otro mundo que fue… (16 cited in Jiménez A.)

The unrelenting passage of time makes ruins of all things and peoples, regardless of their grandeur. Interestingly, after the *memento mori* the one who speaks in Heredia's poem becomes lost in a dream and sees the Aztecs of old as they sacrifice their slaves, spilling blood upon the valley floor and the great pyramid of Cholula. Rather than lament the absence of the pyramid's former stewards, the voice reflects the era's Eurocentric attitudes toward indigenous peoples, telling the pyramid that it is better that the Aztecs and their beliefs, "la supersticón que serviste" now rests "en el abismo del infierno…" (17 cited in Jiménez A.). Heredia's belittlement of the Aztec culture at the conclusion of "En el teocalli de Cholula" displays an aspect of Mexican ruin poetry that differentiates it from its European counterpart. Because of the country's unique history, many Mexican poets writing about indigenous ruins do so from the perspective a dominant culture gazing upon a cultural other.[4] Whereas an Irish or Italian poet writing about a ruin in their own country would be reflecting on a structure belonging to their own cultural heritage, perhaps a mestizo poet in Mexico may not feel a sense of connectedness or belonging when writing about vestiges belonging to a culture that was thought to be inferior. While many were fascinated by the nation's pre-Columbian past, their views of indigenous culture itself were still quite negative. As Jiménez Aguirre notes, Heredia's knowledge base is grounded in "la estética y el pensamiento ilustrados," hence the voices horrified reaction as it envisions Aztec ceremonial sacrifice (9). Heredia's poem displays traditional tropes of ruin poetry while

reflecting the predominant mestizo view of Aztec culture in early nineteenth century Mexico. However, as the attitude toward indigenous cultures in Mexico shifts, it is reflected in the ruin poetry.

More than one hundred years after Heredia's poem was written, José Juan Tablada (Mexico City 1871) publishes a collection of poems titled *La feria* (1928), a varied and ludic collection whose poems reflect its title. Tablada's delightful collection explores subjects as diverse as farm animals, traditional Mexican dishes, fair games, and ruins, in various poetic styles, though his famous adaptation of the Japanese haiku doesn't appear until later. It is important to note, that much, if not all of the poems in *La feria* were likely written while Tablada was away from Mexico, either working as a diplomat in South America or avoiding the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution in New York. Thus, Tablada's 1928 collection celebrates Mexican culture from afar, which makes the inclusion of the poem "El ídolo en el atrio" all the more interesting. The poet's inclusion of a poem about an Aztec ruin among poems the celebrate what one might consider traditional or even folkloric Mexican culture serves as an indication of Mexico's changing attitudes towards indigenous cultures in the early twentieth century. Similar to Heredia's "En el teocalli de Cholula," Tablada's poetic voice gazes upon an Aztec ruin that is, apparently, imbued with nostalgia and begins to imagine its possible past. However, contradistinctively,
"El ídolo en el atrio" celebrates rather than denigrates the ruin's Aztec past, even though the poem depicts human sacrifice in a synecdochal manner.

Tablada's ekphrastic poem opens by identifying its eponymous idol, "Una piedra del Sol," commonly known as the Aztec calendar, as the voice proceeds to imagine a substance seemingly spilling from the stone's carved mouth, "un reguero de sangre humana / y

zempazúchiles de muerte...” (482). In a sharp departure from the tone of Heredia’s poem, Tablada’s poetic voice is not put off by evidence of Aztec sacrifice. Rather, it seems inspired by the image of the stone and, in stanzas three through five, continues an ekphrastic reading of the poem’s subject:

> Piedra de las cronologías,
> síntesis de los años y los días
> donde se exhala en silencioso canto
> el pertinaz espanto
> de las viejas mitologías...
>
> Los meses enflorados y agoreros
> en ella ensartan luna de pálido tecali
> así como los cráneos hueros
> en el zompantli del teocali.
>
> En torno de esa Tabla de la Ley
> gladiatorios o místicos agrúpanse los meses
> entre bélicos cantos y rumores de preces
> como en torno de un Rey... (482-83)

The voice emphasizes the passage of time, a classic trope of ruin poetry, but what is striking is Tablada’s imagery. The poetic voice finds beauty in the ruin it gazes upon, but not conventional beauty. Flowers mix with flowing blood, and skull-filled zompantli –wooden racks used among the Aztecs and other Mesoamerican peoples to publically display the skulls of their captives or sacrificial victims– are compared to moons of pastel marble strung together. The voice ponders the passage of time and makes note of two symbols of death, constituting a form of *memento mori*. Much like Heredia’s poem, upon viewing an indigenous relic the voice imagines the past from whence the ruin emerged and then considers its own mortality. However, Tablada’s “El ídolo en el atrio” reflects the more positive view of indigenous peoples that existed in early twentieth century Mexico.

Though the twentieth century saw a shift in the way ruins were conceived and theorized, traditional ruin gazing tropes, such as *ubi sunt* and *memento mori*, continued to appear in ruin poetry well into the century. Known as a poet of the city, Mexico City is a constant presence in Efraín Huerta's writings. His well-known leftist politics are also frequently on display for his readers, often singing praises to the common man or the city's working class. Huerta's eponymous poem from *El Tajín y otros poemas* shifts away from the city to the jungle of Veracruz, Mexico. A poem in three parts, "El Tajín" is written in free verse, and there is no apparent pattern to the number of stanzas or verses. Huerta dedicates the poem to his son, David Huerta, and to Pepe Gelada, probably the "amigo" mentioned walking among the ruins in the first verse of the third section (279). If there is any doubt about the subject and topos of Huerta's poem, the epigraph dispels them, it reads: "…el nombre El Tajín le fue dado por los indígenas totonacas de la región por la frecuencia con que caían rayos sobre la pirámide…" (277). "El Tajín" is, unmistakably, a meditation on pre-Columbian ruins.

Opening the poem, the poetic voice describes walking among the ruins of El Tajín using the infinitive, impersonal verb form, "Andar así es andar a ciegas, / andar inmóvil en el aire inmóvil, / […] / dar pasos sobre muertes, / sobre un suelo de cráneos calcinados." (277). Almost immediately the voice invokes the paradoxical notion of "andar inmóvil," which is repeated with some variation in the first lines of the second stanza: "Andar así no es andar sino quedarse." In the fourth line of the second stanza, the one who speaks reveals more, "porque nada está vivo / en esta soledad de tibios ataúdes. Muertos estamos, muertos / en el instante, en la hora canicular," (277). Using conjugated verbs for the first time, the poetic voice characterizes the ruins by a lack of life, and counts itself among the dead. Of course, the voice could simply be employing an ironic tone, referring to the bitter heat and humidity of a Veracruz summer, alluded

to with phrases such as “tibios ataúdes” and “hora canicular,” during which the jungle heat could seem like death. However, the poem’s serious character undermines such a reading. Also, returning to the notion of immovability combined with death, the voice notes that the ruin itself “Parece ser un mar de sangre / petrificada” (278). In “El Tajín” death is more closely aligned with the notion of steadfastness than heat.

The second section develops a more elegiac tone and the trope of *memento mori* appears as the voice uses the aura of death it feels at El Tajín as a metaphor for something larger: “No hay un imperio, no hay un reino. / Tan solo el caminar sobre su propia sombra, / sobre el cadáver de uno mismo,” (278). The ruin reminds the one looking upon it that, like a fallen empire or kingdom, he too must die. In the penultimate verse the voice continues exploring a *memento mori* while directing an apostrophe to the ruins: “Oh Tajín, oh naufragio, / tormenta demolida, […] / cuando nadie sea nada y todo quede / mutilado, cuando ya nada sea / […] / cuando el país-serpiente sea la ruina y el polvo, / la pequeña pirámide podrá cerrar los ojos / para siempre, asfixiada,” (242). The voice seems to be telling the ruin that once Mexico, –whose existence is at least partially responsible for El Tajín’s ruined state– or “el país-serpiente” is also in ruins and reduced to nothing, then El Tajín can rest. David Huerta reads his father’s poem as a poet’s contemplation of a national drama, seeing Mexico’s future “sintetizado en los nichos y las columnas de una civilización muerta…” (12). David Huerta interprets “El Tajín” as a *memento mori* for Mexico itself. Like the Totonac ruins observed by the voice, Mexico will also lose its splendor and slowly fall into ruination. The final stanza seems to support this reading as it outlines the lifecycle of the ruin: “Tajín, el trueno, el mito, el sacrificio. / Y después, nada.” (279). What is perhaps most interesting about “El Tajín” is that in a pre-Columbian ruin, the poet of the modern city sees his own mortality, and that of his country as well. On the crumbling

ruins, Efraín Huerta's poetic voice reads a *memento mori* and reflects upon Mexico's inevitable fall, resulting in a rather bleak allegory of the country's future.

V. Conclusion

This brief introduction outlines some common critical notions about ruins, explores the unique nature of the archeological remnants of early Mexican civilizations,[5] and provides examples of nineteenth and twentieth century Mexican ruin poetry that, two of which employ centuries old tropes often associated with ruin poetry despite being firmly grounded in the twentieth century. Perhaps because ruin poetry, it could be argued, is a genre unto itself, we continue to see poetry in which the voice gazes upon a ruin and experiences a *memento mori*. However, while some contemporary ruin poetry continues to imitate ancient and early modern tropes about ruins, new approaches to ruins emerged in the early twentieth century.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, many thinkers and poets shifted their attention away from ancient archeological sites and instead began to read their modern surroundings as ruins. Cecelia Enjunto Rangel claims that modern poems depart from Romantic, "narcissistic, melancholic readings of destruction" and instead historicize ruins "often the products of modern progress or war" (4). While there are exceptions, such as the poems above, as early as the mid-nineteenth century and even more so in the twentieth century, a great number of Mexican poets portray modernity and modern projects that trumpet ideals such as progress, development, and advancement, as makers of ruins. After the Mexican Revolution, the modern city –more often than not, Mexico City– became focus of a national narrative of progress. As I discuss in chapter one, Manuel Maples Arce's *estridentista* movement championed the city as the bastion of modernity, replete with modern machines and modes of transportation. Yet, while some sang the praises of modernity's crowning achievement, poets such as Xavier Villaurrutia,

Salvador Novo, Efraín Huerta, and Eduardo Lizalde painted a different picture, reading the modern city instead as a sort of ruinscape.

In the latter half of the twentieth century Mexico experienced several disasters, though few were as devastating as the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. Chapter two begins by examining José Emilio Pacheco's poetic response to the late-century temblor. As a poet who often delves deeply into ideas about ruination, as though searching for the answer to some esoteric question about the cosmos and the human condition, when faced with the shocking destruction of his home city, Pacheco simply reads the ruins as a token of betrayed trust and later, as a memorial to those who died in the quake. In a similar vein, Jorge Humberto Chávez searches for meaning among the man-made ruins of the so-called drug war that defines Felipe Calderón's *sexenio*. Responding to the incomprehensible horror that transforms one of northern Mexico's most vibrant cities into a virtual ghost town, Chávez reads Ciudad Juárez as the ruins of a social disaster.

Chapter three surveys poetry in Mexican indigenous languages that emerged in the early 90s. After enduring centuries of cultural oppression, policies of cultural appropriation, and an educational system that sought outright to erase their languages from the national stage, many indigenous writers began to publish literature in their native languages as a form of protest. Reading this poetry alongside Ann Laura Stoler's notion of processes of ruination, I argue for a view late twentieth century poetry in indigenous languages as a political poetry and an act of cultural resistance whose purpose is resisting ruination.

Cities as ruins, ruins of disaster, and indigenous resistance to processes of ruination: these axes run throughout the fabric of Mexico and even seem tell the nation's story in the twentieth century. As I read the archive of twentieth century Mexican poetry, searching for patterns and

sifting for meaning, I first noticed poems about specific archeological ruins. Yet, as I dug deeper, a different type of ruin poetry emerged, a poetry that differentiated itself by moving beyond the typical concept of ruins as the fallen remnants of an ancient stone structure. While some ruins are privileged above others, others more complete than their counterparts, and some more visible, I discovered that what they have in common is more important their differences. An incompleteness, a gap, a space that provides a rich potential for meaning.

Notes on the Introduction

[1] The title is a reference to the phrase, "irresistible decay," that Walter Benjamin uses in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (Verso 1977) to describe history (178).

[2] This was not necessarily a new process, as Roth et al remind us, "In ancient times the debris of the past was freely used as the foundation for subsequent building or, if too sacred to be discarded, was often buried" (*Irresistible Decay*, inside cover).

[3] However, artifacts with intrinsic meaning, such as the monolithic carving of the goddess *Coatlicue*, were intentionally buried and meant to be kept out of sight and mind.

[4] The notion of a mestizo writing about a cultural other is magnified by the fact that Heredia is a Cuban exile who lived the first nineteen years of his life in Cuba. Thus, the indigenous cultures of Mexico may have seemed even more curious to him. "En el teocalli de Cholula" was written in December 1820, the very month that Heredia turned 17.

[5] Of course, much of what I said about the uniqueness of Mexican ruins would apply to indigenous archeological sites in much of Latin America. Though the palimpsestic construction of Mexico City upon the ruins of Tenochtitlan adds layers of possible meaning that wouldn't be available to many sites of ruin in Latin America.

Chapter 1: The Mexican Metropolis and the Ruins of Modernity

…y la ciudad es una ferretería espectral.

-Manuel Maples Arce, "Tras los adioses últimos"

Estoy mirando la ciudad destruida,
Flor aplastada por un pie sombrío
…
Es la enorme catástrofe florida.

-Carlos Pellicer, "13 de agosto, Ruina de Tenochtitlán"

Este poema crece y se deforma como la ciudad,
Como ella se degrada y se envilece,
Se excede y descoyunta acaso en gusto y en carácter…

-Eduardo Lizalde, *Tercera Tenochtilán*

I. Introduction

Roger Bartra writes that one of the characteristic myths of modern Mexican culture is the notion, created in the post-revolutionary era, of rural Mexico as a subverted Eden. Not only does this myth serve as a cathartic expression of guilt related to the destructive force of the revolution, but also, he writes, "para poner orden en una sociedad convulsionada por la veloz llegada de la modernidad y sacudida por las contradicciones de la nueva vida industrial" (10-11). The trope of the Mexican countryside as a subverted Eden appears with some frequency in early twentieth-century Mexican poetry, especially in the works of Ramón López Velarde, who so lovingly paints the Mexican provinces with in his verses. However, after the Mexican Revolution, as the country once again focused on modernizing its infrastructure, growing its economy, and adapting and expanding the capital city to accommodate an influx of *campesinos* who left behind their subverted Eden, the city as a utopian metropolis emerges as a symbol of modernity in Mexican verse.

In the early post-revolutionary era, poets who were eager to modernize their art shifted their views away from the poetics of the nineteenth century and instead reflected upon their modern surroundings. While some, perhaps most notably the *estridentista* Manuel Maples Arce, celebrate the city as a bastion of modernity, others such as Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia, who are unsure about what to make of their urban setting and its embrace of new technologies seem to long for Bartra's mythical Eden. As Mexico industrializes and the capital city grows, Efraín Huerta, and Eduardo Lizalde contemplate their urban surroundings in verse begin look upon modern Mexico and the discourse of modernity itself with suspicion. These two poets, among others, interrogate the burgeoning metropolis as a symbol of modernity, noticing cracks in the foundation of the progressive discourse that champions the city, they begin to write

the city as a kind of ruinscape. This chapter examines portrayals of the modern city in Mexican poetry, ranging from the second to the penultimate decade of the twentieth century. More specifically I study how poetic representations of the city as a symbol of modernity initially run parallel to and champion the nationalist discourse of progress and modernization but gradually expose fissures in the discourse that celebrates the modern city as a manifestation of progress, eventually reading Mexico City itself as a ruin of modernity.

It is important to establish a vocabulary to navigate the minefield of meanings associated with varying notions of the modern and modernity, both within and without the field of literary studies. According to Matei Calinescu, since the Romantic era there are two divergent versions of modernity, the first a developmental phase of Western civilization, the second more of "an aesthetic concept" (41). While the former is a doctrine of progress, reason, industrialization, scientific and technological advancement –the very discourse of Mexico's *porfiriatio* in the late nineteenth century– the latter is manifest in the arts. I describe Calinescu's distinction between these two versions of modernity as technological and aesthetic modernity and will refer to them as such in this chapter. He writes that aesthetic modernity was "disgusted with the middle-class scale of values and expressed its disgust through… rebellion, anarchy, and apocalypticism…" among other things (42). In fact, the rebellion of aesthetic modernity from technological modernity is so antagonistic that Cathy L. Jrade calls it "anti-modernity" (18). While aesthetic modernity seeks to separate itself from the tenets of industrial and technological modernity, the former is influenced by and constantly dialogues with the latter.

Echoing Calinescu's description of bifurcated and contradictory versions of modernity, Octavio Paz writes that a principal feature of modern poetry is its "diálogo contradictorio con y contra las revoluciones modernas y las tradiciones cristianas…" (*Los hijos*, 326). Paz's

observation regarding the antagonistic stance of aesthetic modernity vis-a-vis technological modernity is similar to those of Calinescu and Jrade, while hinting that, by nature, notions of modernity are intrinsically tied to the Judeo-Christian concept of linear and unrepeatable time, a critique that Calinescu also mentions elsewhere (13). Indeed, both versions of modernity subscribe to a linear concept of time, but also a belief in innovation and renewal as an indicator of progress. In modernity the new is often interpreted as a step forward, as improvement. Praised above all else, progress is the primary purpose of modernity, whose objective of continual improvement implies a modern utopia as its end goal. Given that time is fleeting and in constant movement, according to Judeo-Christian traditions that inform western civilization and the concept of the modern, the singularity of the moment is a key aspect of modernity. Etymologically, the word modernity stems from the Latin word *modernus*, likely derived from *hodiernus*, which means "today" (Chambers 670). The contemporary then, the present, the now is a central concept of modernity and modern poetry itself.

Modern poetry, according to Paz, critically interrogates and responds to its present moment, a gesture that results in continual change and innovation; "sin cesar,"; he writes, "[la poesía moderna] se interroga se examina y se destruye para renacer de nuevo" (*Los hijos* 354). If modern poetry, as Paz claims, is a constantly renewing form that dialogues with and against the technological modern revolutions of its time, it is within this context that we should understand his paradoxical assertion that the modern tradition is a tradition of rupture. In *Poesía en movimiento* Paz writes that modernity afirms the uniqueness of an instant, "porque no se parece a los otros…Aquello que distingue al instante de los otros instantes es su carga del futuro desconocido. No repetición, sino inauguración, ruptura y no continuidad. La tradición moderna es la tradición de la ruptura" (*Poesía* 5). In other words, each instant presents the possibility for a

break with the past and the inauguration of a new future. Thus, the most modern action a poet can carry out is to break with past traditions and begin anew, as Rubén Darío does when he proclaims a new autochthonous Latin American aesthetic, el *modernismo* (Paz, *Poesía* 5).

II. *Modernismo* and Modernity

Before examining contrasting portrayals of the modern city in Mexico's early twentieth-century vanguard movements, it is important to understand their precursors. José Emilio Pacheco describes *modernismo* as "la primera etapa del movimiento moderno" in "las literaturas de lengua española" (Introducción XIX). For Pacheco, *modernismo* negates the idea of a poetic group or school and instead demands that each poet discover their individuality while emphasizing the present. *Modernismo*, he writes, "Es una voluntad de situarse en el ahora, de encontrar el estilo de la época. *Modus hodiernus*, lo moderno son los usos y costumbres de hoy, un hoy que no se parece al ayer y necesariamente diferirá del mañana" (Introducción XI). Pacheco references the etymological origin of the word *moderno*, from the Latin *modernus*, which likely derived from *hodiernus*, meaning "today" (Chambers 670). The modern is the immediate now, the contemporary, and to write modern poetry, in the style of *modernismo* or otherwise, is to reflect the poem's fleeting present. Thus, in Mexico *modernismo* had to wrestle with the sociopolitical realities of the *porfiriato*.

Adela Pineda Franco notes that Mexican *modernismo's* uniqueness "lies in the fact that it was embedded in the cultural politics of Porfirio Díaz's centralized authoritarian regime…[which] is characterized by the praxis of liberalism, the cult of positivism, and the bourgeois culture that embraced the myth of 'order and progress'" (220). Pacheco notes that Latin American *modernismo* as a whole was particularly fond of and made frequent use of exotic images borrowed from various mythologies from around the globe. He writes that with the

advent of *modernismo*, "el mundo poético hispanoamericano…se puebla de palacios versallescos, jardines e interiores orientales, dioses, ondinas, ninfas, sátiros, efebos, cisnes, [etc.]…toda la utilería de la cultura humanista…" (Pacheco XLI). While such imagery is, without a doubt, escapist and innocuous, in the context of Porfirian Mexico, *modernismo's* exoticism could be interpreted as a kind of rebellion against the political *status quo*. In fact, given *modernismo's* embrace of the notion of art for art's sake, Pineda Franco believes that in late nineteenth-century Mexico, "Modernista writers…saw themselves as dissidents with regard to the dominant socioeconomic and positivist Porfirian order" (220). The subtly rebellious attitude of Mexico's *modernistas* and their desire to capture the essence of their present moment characterizes the modern paradigm and heavily influences Mexican poetry in the twentieth century.

III. The City as a Symbol of Modernity

As the embodiment of modernity, the idea of the city is often painted with utopic brush strokes where new social structures exist, the poor may find refuge, the working class can get ahead, and the wealthy comingle with all working toward a better future. In theory the modern city serves as the de facto showroom for emerging technologies and scientific discoveries that represent a step forward, are often equally accessible to all social classes, and produce a cleaner, healthier municipality. Although the reality of the modern city is much less rosy, as the proving ground of modern concepts and technologies, and despite its many imperfections, in the early 1900s the city becomes intrinsically linked with modernity and comes to symbolize it as a kind of proof of concept.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, eager to leave behind poetry's *modernista* movement and narrative's tendency toward mimetic realism of the late 1800s, writers and poets,

especially those belonging to the literary vanguard, broke with their genre's erstwhile traditions and explored new forms and meanings. Yanna Hadatty Mora explains that the symbol of rupture most commonly used, especially among the era's prose writers, is the city. "El objeto favorito de su prosa, es, casi de manera inevitable, la ciudad; con la precisión de que por antonomasia se trata de la Ciudad de México" (17). In the literary output of so many early twentieth century Mexican writers, both poets and writers of prose, Mexico City stands not only as a metonymic symbol for all modern cities but for modernity itself. After the Mexican Revolution, the capital city grew rapidly while new governments wrestled with questions about how to move forward, jumpstart the economy, and what to do with the remnants of the Porfiriato's modernizing projects while spearheading their own. In the 1920s and 30s, with each new influx of post-revolutionary rural refuges, Mexico City expanded and developed, evolving into a utopia for some and a dystopia for others.

An episode from Martín Luis Guzmán's autobiographical novel about the Mexican Revolution, *El águila y la serpiente* (1928) aptly illustrates this point. Guzmán's novel follows the narrator, a version of himself, and his compatriots as they search out famous revolutionary figures such as Pancho Villa and Venustiano Carranza, among others. Their hope is to achieve a social and political revolution that disrupts the *status quo* and drastically improves the plight of the peasant in Mexico. Early in the novel, a section titled "Primer vislumbre de Pancho Villa" finds the protagonist and his traveling companion, Alberto J. Pani, being guided south. A man named Neftalí Amador takes them across the U.S.-Mexico border from El Paso, Texas into Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where they are to meet Pancho Villa. As the three men pause at the border and gaze upon the two cities separated by the Río Bravo, they compare El Paso's brilliance to Juárez's lack of the same. Guzmán's narrator notes that, according to Amador, their

journey constitutes one of the greatest sacrifices and humiliations that "la geografía había impuesto a los hijos de México…" (224). As if to emphasize his point, in the following paragraph the narrator states that the spectacle of Juárez, apparently quite sad in and of itself, is more miserable still when compared with "el aliño luminoso de la otra orilla del río, extranjera y inmediata" (224). Guzmán's characters read El Paso's streetlights, a symbol of modernity at the time, as an indicator of one city's technological superiority over the other. The effect must be jarring, one city brightly lit, a beacon of emerging technologies while its immediate neighbor remains mostly dark.

Crossing a stream, as their feet sink into the mud, Amador states, "Esto es un potrero," then, speaking of his hopes for the revolution he says, "Cuando la Revolución gane lo limpiaremos. Haremos una ciudad nueva; nueva y mejor que la de la otra orilla del río." (224). Amador naively believes that the revolution and its heroes will almost messianically transform wastelands and dusty cities into modern jewels, with all their accompanying urbanities and refinements. Guzmán's depiction of one fictional insurgent's hopes and aspirations for the near future –a post-revolutionary era that brings with it new, clean cities, better than their north-American counterparts– introduces the idea of the Revolution as something more. Amador interprets the revolution as a utopian and modernizing project that, paradoxically, fulfills the Porfirian promise of clean, new cities. Whether Amador's hopes are to be understood ironically or not, this passage from *El águila y la serpiente* depicts the idea of the city as the way of the future, a modern ideal. Of course, the result of the Revolution was not the construction of new, clean cities where border towns once stood. Nor did it bring about the modernization of Mexico's provinces and plains. If Ramón López Velarde's poem "El retorno maléfico" is any

indication, for many, the revolt against Porfirio Díaz's regime brought with it little more than a wave of destruction.

Referred to by some as the first modern Mexican poet, one of Ramón López Velarde's main poetic themes is the picturesque Mexican countryside. Rafael Solana calls López Velarde's version of Mexico "una patria chica" that is comprised mostly of rural pastoral settings that largely ignore the modern city and Mexico's sociopolitical realties, such as the revolution (738-43). However, at least one of his most well-known poems, "El retorno maléfico," deals with the revolution, albeit indirectly, portraying the aftermath of the revolution in the form of destruction. It depicts the poet's beloved countryside laid waste by the very revolution that Guzmán's character, Amador, portrays as a mechanism of transformation and progress that would forge utopic cities from the dust of dilapidated border towns. "El retorno maléfico" almost reads as a counter-claim to the idealistic hopes of Amador, for the revolution failed to modernize the city and worse yet, it destroyed much of the countryside that López Velarde so lovingly captures in verse.

Published in 1919 as part of the collection *Zozobra*, "El retórno maléfico" inspires Bartra's notion of the subverted Eden myth which he believes is so common in modern Mexico. In a tone critical of the revolution's utopic promises, López Velarde's poetic voice, a prodigal son who returns home after the revolution, describes the tattered remnants of his home town laid waste by the violence of the revolution. The one who speaks utters the first line as though he had been agonizing about whether or not to return home, "Mejor será no regresar al pueblo, / al edén subvertido que se calla / en la mutilación de la metralla." (153). The prodigal son left a town that for him was like unto the garden of Eden, an almost mythical place where his dreams would be fulfilled, and returns to a veritable ruin. The walls that remain standing are pocked with holes

made by the shrapnel of munitions and bullets. Surveying his now abandoned idyllic town, in the third stanza the voice notes on the lime-washed walls a sort of document of the fighting that his village witnessed, staring at the holes and black stains on the once pristine white walls, the prodigal son realizes that the revolution has not only laid his town to waste, but also has left hopes for the future in ruins:

> Y la fusilería en la cal
> de todas las paredes
> de la aldea espectral,
> negros y aciagos mapas,
> porque en ello leyese el hijo pródigo
> al volver a su umbral
> en un anochecer de maleficio,
> a la luz de petróleo de una mecha
> su esperanza desecha. (153)

The revolution's utopic aim was to break from the landholding system it inherited from the colonial era and provide *tierra y libertad* to all Mexican. But for López Velarde's poetic voice the revolution only brings the ruination. The remaining stanzas of "El retorno maléfico" consist of several images and soundscapes, presented as a kind of stream of consciousness, that likely reflect the prodigal son's memories of his edenic town before it was destroyed by revolutionaries. The images and sounds are not elaborated upon nor developed, but simply appear one after another just as they might in the mind's eye of the one who speaks: "[el] campanario de timbre novedoso; / remozados altares; / el amor amoroso / de las parejas pares" (154). The succession of tranquil images continues for twenty lines as the prodigal son realizes that, unlike his biblical counterpart, there will be no great feast or celebration held in honor of his return, for the town is in ruins, a victim of revolutionary uprising.

In the penultimate line, the prodigal son's stream of consciousness is interrupted by "el gendarme que pita…" a sound that seems to surprise him, dissolving his image-filled Bergsonian

daydream and situating him firmly in the poetic present, which is colored with "una íntima tristeza reaccionaria." (154). Gabriel Zaid reads the last line of López Velarde's poem as a critique of the post-revolutionary present by a poetic self that commits the sin of remembering how beautiful and peaceful "la paz porfiriana" was (787). For Zaid "El retorno maléfico" prefigures Juan Rulfo's Comala, as López Velarde's poetic voice expresses its fears about "los espantos, los crujidos, [y] los murmullos de la casa paterna" as though he would have to respond to their ghostly inquest "¿Y para esto fue la Revolución?" (785). If the city is a symbol of modernity and progress in twentieth century Mexico, "El retorno maléfico" asks what became and is to become of the provinces. López Velarde's poem criticizes the utopic discourse used in literature and elsewhere to speak about the lofty goals and outcomes of the revolution, implicitly asking if the ends justify the means.

Rubén Bonifaz Nuño writes that as soon as the Mexican revolution's fighting ceased, the same generals that had commanded troops in the battle field exchanged their leadership roles for desk jobs as bureaucrats and "se preocupaban por edificar cimientos de nuevas ciudades sobre las cenizas de las ciudades antiguas" (12). While the Mexican Revolution sought land reform, those changes would be delayed for a time as Mexico's political leaders focused on economic development and continuing the process of modernization in the capital city. The city grew exponentially with each new decade and its progression eventually becomes a process of ruination by which certain peoples are excluded or marginalized, some aspects of Mexican culture are replaced with imported culture, and the clean, brilliant city becomes a grimy, contaminated metropolis. As the twentieth century marches on Mexican poets see their capital city as a symbol of modernity, but not a utopia, instead noting many of its dystopic

characteristics with more frequency as the mid-century approaches. Eventually, some of Mexico's poets even read Mexico City as a ruin of modernity.

IV. The Strident City

Describing the post-revolutionary breaks in Mexican aesthetic and technological modernity during the 1920s and 30s, Rubén Gallo uses the phrase "the other Mexican revolution," comparing the works of artists and writers to the political aims of those who revolted against the Díaz regime. (1). Gallo explains that the "new revolutionaries" fought with the instruments of technical modernity in order to "dethrone the nineteenth-century aesthetic ideals that continued to dominate the art and literature in the early years of the new century" (1). The efforts of these artists and writers to break free from the aesthetic molds of the nineteenth century using new forms and styles was "like all revolutionary projects…utopian" (Gallo 1). Of all the literary vanguards that arose in Latin America in the 1920s and 30s, perhaps the most ambitiously utopian was Mexico's *estridentista* movement. As mentioned above, Haddaty Mora identifies the city, with all its entrapments and new technologies, as one of the themes explored by Mexican writers who sought to explore what it means to be modern and distinguish themselves as such. In the early post-revolutionary era, the poet who most overtly relied upon the city as a symbol and manifestation of his modern subjectivity is Manuel Maples Arce. As the poet of the *estridentista* movement, Mexico's own contribution to the wider vanguard movements of the 1920s, Maples Arce's stridentist works fit the mold of Rubén Gallo's "other Mexican revolution (1) and Haddaty Mora's description of modern aesthetics. In fact, Maples Arce's early works exemplify Calinescu's notion of the dialogic relationship between aesthetic and technologic modernity, as his poetry embodies aesthetic modernity by emphasizing technological developments and their place within the city.

Like many other avant-garde movements that professed some sort of -ism, the stridentists produced manifestos that explain their aims, their politics, and their poetics. In 1921, Maples Arce, then a law student, pens *Actual Núm. 1* which becomes known as the *manifiesto estridentista*, a revolutionary document not only in its content and form, but also in its manner of distribution. The young poet published his manifesto by unconventional means, plastering the brightly colored document on several walls in central Mexico City, using a method that Elissa J. Rashkin describes as "graffiti style" (1). *Actual Num. 1: Hoja de vanguardia*, criticizes the literary and social conventions of the time and explains one of the main tenets of the stridentist movement as follows:

> Es necesario exaltar en todos los tonos estridentistas de nuestro diapasón propagandista, la belleza actualista de las máquinas, de los puentes gímnicos reciamente extendidos sobre las vertientes por músculos de acero, el humo de las fábricas, las emociones cubistas de los grandes transatlánticos con humeantes chimeneas de rojo y negro anclados horoscópicamente…junto a los muelles y congestionados , el régimen industrialista de la grandes ciudades palpitantes, las bluzas *(sic.*) azules de los obreros explosivos en esta hora emocionante y conmovida; toda esta belleza del siglo… (Jorge Schwartz 164)

El estridentismo finds beauty in and emphasizes aspects of technological modernity: machines, radios, and even the polluting smoke of factories and ocean liners. Though Maples Arce believes they are distinct, the influence of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's 1909 futurist manifesto in *Acutal Num. 1* is clear. Yet as a form of aesthetic modernity, the stridentist movement overall embraced rejections of middle class values and academic culture, thus "works of art unrelated to the cult of modernity and the urban aesthetic espoused in *Actual No. 1* therefore became widely recognized

as estridentista" (Tatiana Flores, 160). However, Maples Arce's poetry, like the movement that influences it, is replete with allusions to innovative technologies of the time, such as the airplane, electrically powered devices, and the cinema, among others.

Maples Arce is not content with simply exalting the futurist elements of society, he is also an iconoclast who wants to lay waste to the nineteenth century. An epigraph of sorts in *Actual No. 1* that reads:

> É MUERA EL CURA HIDALGO
> X ABAJO SAN RAFAEL-SAN
> I LÀZARO…
> T ESQUINA…
> O SE PROHIBE FIJAR ANUNCIOS (Schwartz 162)

The "ÉXITO" epigraph foreshadows the young poet's revolutionary aspirations and indicates that he would consider his movement successful if other Mexicans leave behind the symbols of old Mexico, such as Hidalgo, and embrace new modern ones, such those mentioned in his manifesto.[1] Maples Arce believed that Mexico needed to embrace the globalization of culture and avoid "facile nationalism that searches in vain for…cultural purity and authenticity," for him the modern city was the way forward (Rashkin 28). The city was the epicenter of social movements and the place where Maples Arce's revolutionary art could inspire revolutionary practices. One of Maples Arce's collaborators, Germán List Arzubide, writes in his 1926 publication *El movimiento estridentista* that their movement is the "único movimiento revolucionario-literario-social de México" (Cited in Schwartz, 187). As Jorge Schwartz explains, "En verdad, motivados por la Revolución mexicana de 1910 y por la Revolución rusa de 1917, los estridentistas se distinguieron por lanzar un movimiento de vanguardia que trató de aliar la creación estética con la revolución" (187). While the notion of a revolutionary poetry in and of itself reflects a utopic vision of literature's role in the modern world, as Paz writes, the

estridentistas believed that in a new utopic society, revolutionary poetry and revolutionary praxis would be one and the same (*Obras I*, 248).

As I mentioned above, *estridentismo* draws at least some inspiration from futurism, the most recognizable influence in the poems of Maples Arce. His poetry, a form of aesthetic modernity, constantly cites the other modernity: technology, new inventions, and symbols of economic and infrastructural developmental, such as bridges and highways. Maples Arce's first collection of poetry, *Andamios Interiores: Poemas radiográficos* (1922), reflects this tendency. The first poem, "Prisma" describes "La ciudad insurrecta de anuncios luminosos" wherein the one who speaks becomes separated from a woman by "una locomotora / sedienta de kilómetros" that rips her from his arms (43). Even love moves fast in the modern city. Interestingly, despite his insistence upon renovation and revolutionary metaphors, Maples Arce tends to use traditional versification, almost always writing lines comprised of seven, eleven, or fourteen syllables. The following quartet composed of *versos alejandrinos,* from the poem "A veces, con la tarde…" further demonstrates his style:

> Mis ojos deletrean la ciudad algebraica
> entre las subversiones de los escaparates;
> detrás de los tranvías se explican las fachadas
> y las alas del viento se rompen en los cables. (47).

Maples Arce's use of a mathematical adjective to describe the city evokes many images at once: that of a modern city whose buildings reflect the sharp angles of futuristic architecture, a grid system that makes up its streets, but also the cold, numerical reality of the modern city, where an individual is more of a number or a statistic than anything, where the plight of the worker might be ignored by the innumerable masses. The mention of the *tranvías* and the electric cables from which they draw their power is typical of stridentist poetry, which subconsciously or otherwise echoes the futurist movement. The revolutionary aesthetic movement calls for a poetry that

reflects the continuous movement and rapidity of the city's "calles cinemáticas" that the *estridentistas* saw as the epitome of the early twentieth century city. While elements of futurism are a constant theme in his works, Maples Arce also seeks to marry modern aesthetics with a strong social and political message.

In 1924 Maples Arce publishes perhaps his most important work, *Vrbe: Super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos*.[2] The title betrays its political content and leftist ideology, from which the author does not shy away. In a reversal from the *modernista* era, when much of the poetry was directed to the middle class, Maples Arce dedicates this particular work to "los obreros de México" who populate the imaginary city depicted therein (48) Bartra calls Maples Arce's Mexican worker as the hero of modernity, "el campesino sumiso [que] se levanta como zapatista revolucionario y que el 'progreso' lo transforme en un hombre nuevo: el proletariado" (50). While the tone of his Bolshevik poem is more overtly revolutionary than that of his earlier works, Maples Arce continues to write in his futurist-influenced stridentist aesthetic. References to Mexican geography and culture, such as the description of "la noche tarahumara" (63), the mention of "obregonismo" (63), and a reference to Ocotlán, Jalisco (68) situate the events of *Vrbe* squarely in Mexico, but Maples Arce's "ciudad sindicalista" is a literal utopia in that the city is a no-place (65). By setting his poem a non-specific *topos* Maples Arce can freely create his ideal modern city in poetry, unencumbered by the realities of Mexico's own urban landscapes.[3]

In *Vrbe's* modern city, where "motores cantan," the one who speaks addresses the city apostrophically, praising the peculiar symphony that arises from the cacophony of technological modernity in action, "¡Oh ciudad / musical / hecha toda de ritmos mecánicos!" (63). Just as with

Andamios Interiores, *Vrbe* is full of allusions to technological developments that populate the modern city where the poem takes place:

> He aquí, mi poema
> brutal
> y multánime
> a la nueva ciudad.
>
> Oh ciudad toda tensa
> de cables y de esfuerzos,
> sonora toda
> de motores y de alas. (61)

The new, multanimous city has many sides, multiple valances and various classes, but Maples Arce's poem sides with the workers. The source of the city's tension is not quite clear, it could stem from the constant noise and motion of cars and airplanes, but the poet may simply be evoking and image of high-tension power lines that stretch across the city carrying electricity to its inhabitants. Those cables must be taught and maintain their tension so as to safeguard the pedestrians below from electrical shock. Yet, given the poem's subtitle, "Super Bolshevik poem in five cantos", the tension mentioned here likely reflects impending Bolshevik uprising featured in the fourth canto.

Vrbe, like Maples Arce's earlier poetry is also populated by Mexico's workers, but is more overt in its politics, featuring a clarion call for the Mexican worker to awaken their social consciousness and learn from the Russian Revolution: "Los pulmones de Rusia / soplan hacia nosotros / el viento de la revolución social." (61). For the young Mexican stridentist, *Vrbe* unites theory and praxis, resulting in poetry that is revolutionary in both form and content. The workers he portrays in his Boshevick fantasy, "pedradas y denuestos," rise up against the "burgueses ladrones" and strike in canto four (63, 66). Interestingly, the poet's depiction of the worker's strike and political rebellion in canto four is only sparsely populated with symbols of

technological modernity such as telephone lines and trains (66-67). Whether or not the one who speaks reads technological modernity and its machines as implements of bourgeois repression is unclear, but the voice's attitude toward the city as the site of a possible worker's utopia becomes more ambivalent as the poem progresses. Even the innovative aspects of the poem are rather tenuous, despite the more ostensibly revolutionary theme of Maples Arce's second collection of poetry, he continues to employ traditional syllabification, many of the lines in *Vrbe* are composed of seven or eleven syllables. Yet, in this collection, Maples Arce begins to depart from traditional versification, like his precursor José Juan Tablada, employing verses that contain as little as three or four syllables while also experimenting with the space of the page, rather than using all left-justified stanzas, a practice that is almost universal years later.

Yet while *Vrbe's* seemingly straightforward celebration of the modern city as place ripe for worker revolts, the voice also depicts the city as space where the lower classes disproportionately bear the labor burden required for development and advances in technological modernity (65-7), and as the poem progresses, the voice's attitude toward the modern city grows more ambiguous. While the masses of agitated workers seem to be calmed by "Los discursos marihuanos / de los diputados," voices from far off Ocotlán, Jalisco tell of rebels in trenches, barraged all night as explosions and flying shrapnel shatter the nocturnal silence (68-69). Notably, Maples Arce ends his poem in a very negative tone: "Las calles / sonoras y desiertas, / son ríos de sombra / que van a dar al mar, / y el cielo, deshilachado, / es la nueva / bandera, / que flamea, / sobre la ciudad." (69). The optimism about Russia's influence on the workers exhibited earlier in the poem fades with the coming of a new day, Elissa Rashkin notes that as *Vrbe* draws to an end, "The bravura of the poem's subtitle has been strikingly challenged…[and] a frayed and tattered sky presides over a desolate, almost apocalyptic landscape" (119). The modern city,

the potential worker's utopia, lays in ruins. While Rashkin believes that the new sunrise represents an optimism for the future, the final image seems rather bleak and the future more uncertain than before, it is unclear exactly the new dawn will bring.[4]

In 1927 Maples Arce published *Poemas interdictos* which shows a continuing commitment to *estridentismo* and its emphasis on technological modernity. For example, "Canción desde un aeroplano," as the title indicates, features a poetic self who travels on a plane and enjoys the new perspective modernity allows him. As the plane ascends in the sky, "Súbitamente / el corazón / voltea los panoramas inminentes; todas las calles salen hacia la soledad de los horarios; subversión / de las perspectivas evidentes; *looping the loop* / en el trampolín romántico del cielo, / ejercicio moderno…" (76). Not only does the airplane provide new perspectives otherwise impossible before the advent of flight, what the voice refers to as a modern exercise, but it also speeds up his travel. Distances fade quickly as the airplane takes the voice to northern cities, "de la América nuestra," such as New York, Chicago, and Baltimore, where technological modernity is on full display (76). Yet, like many other poetic versions of aesthetic modernity, *estridentismo* was intimately tied to a specific moment and place in time, 1920's Mexico. Octavio Paz's reading of modern Mexican poetry emphasizes the tradition of rupture, which is in constant flux, always searching to renovate and reinvent itself. Like Tablada before him, Maples Arce had what one might call poetic periods.[5] While his early works clearly belong to the avant-garde, Maples Arce eventually drifts from the revolutionary aesthetic through which he so ardently championed the city as the semi-utopic locus of technological modernity, wherein the masses might unify and rise up.

Despite the young poet's ardent insistence upon practicing revolutionary art forms, after publishing *Poemas interdictos* Maples Arce would remain silent for twenty years, when in 1947

he releases a new collection of poetry, *Memorial de sangre*.[6] His later work is rather conventional and frankly, occasionally much less interesting than his poems written under the banner of *estridentismo,* sometimes even resembling the very style he once rebelled against. The verses from *Memorial de sangre,* as well as those written during the remainder of his life – posthumously published with his complete poetic works in 1981 as *Las semillas del tiempo: Obra poética 1919-1980*– all but ignore the avant-garde movement Maples Arce championed in the twenties. Further, "Ars poética," published as part of his complete poetic works, practically renounces the poet's former aesthetic.

We can deduce that "Ars poética" was published sometime after 1977 since it references Vicente Aleixandre's Nobel prize for literature, awarded that year. Strangely, Maples Arce pens his poetic description of the qualities a poem should embody years after presenting his theory of the same in *Actual Num. 1*., perhaps the Mexican poet wrote his later poem as a denial of his former style. "Ars poética" is devoid of any mention of the city or any allusions to technological modernity. The poet's ardent politics are absent from the verses he writes years after the radical experimentation of the 1920s avant-garde movement. In fact, "Ars poética" suggests that its reader avoid searching out the "*Plebe*" and abstain from "las charangas" (142). Maples Arce's use of a term that bears shades of negativity to describe the lower class multitudes indicates a shift away from the laudatory language used to describe the Bolshevik masse in *Vrbe* and his stridentist poetry. But also, "Ars poética" seems to suggest that a reader of poetry would be wise to stick to the cannon and ignore the controversy and noise, the aforementioned "charangas," of poetic trends. Maples Arce's poetic voice implores the reader explore the verses of a select few, among them, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Apolinaire, Góngora, Quevedo, Manrique, García Lorca, Aleixandre, and a lone Mexican poet, Ramón López Velarde. Indeed, the repentant

estridentista poet encourages the reader to ignore *estridentismo* altogether and instead read the French symbolist poets as well as those of the Spanish baroque and Generation of ’27. Maples Arce’s later poetry utterly rejects his early style, even in its treatment of themes that he once used to emphasize modernity in his verses. One such example is “Tres ciudades,” a trio of traditional sonnets with consonant rhyme and eleven syllables per line.

Like the previous poem we analyzed, “Tres ciudades” explores a theme central to Maples Arce’s early poetry, but in a completely different mode. Rather than write about a metropolis, as before, more provincial cities serve as the poetic object: Veracruz, Guadalajara, and Puebla. Though these three cities are some of the larger Mexican municipalities outside of the capital, the poetic voice ignores their modern entrapments and instead describes them as though the voice were wandering through their streets in the nineteenth century. The voice notes Veracruz’s “acentos liberals” and praises the city as the place where Mexico’s liberal Leyes de Reforma emerged after the mid-century (146). In “A Guadalajara” Maples Arce’s poetic voice celebrates the town’s architecture and Spanish blazons that adorn buildings such as the Palacio Municipal which, despite being constructed in the mid-twentieth century, boasts a colonial Spanish architectural style. Like the Guadalajara municipal building it alludes to, “Tres ciudades,” longingly gazes into Mexico’s past from a twentieth-century view point and cannot help but ache for a bygone era. The last poem in Maples Arce’s poetic triptych, “A Puebla” also celebrates aspects of the city’s nineteenth century past, its “barroca arquitectura” which inspires the poet to recall the 1862 Battle of Puebla (147). The voice of “Tres ciudades,” who admits his advanced age in the third poem’s tercets, bathes the cities with nostalgic tones and a longing for pre-Porfirian Mexico, echoing Bartra’s notion of a subverted Eden. Mexico’s stridentist poet, who so vehemently championed the modern city and technological modernity, abandons his former style

and instead, imitating the nostalgic gaze of Mexico's first modern poet, Ramón López Velarde, celebrates the nineteenth century.

V. *Contemporáneos* and the City

Maples Arce was not alone in his tenuous embrace of the city as a symbol of modernity, other poets of his era, such as Xavier Villaurrutia (1903-1950) and Salvador Novo (1904-1974), also portray the city with a hint of suspicion in their verse. Villaurrutia and Novo belonged to an important poetic and intellectual group known as the *contemporáneos*, a name taken from a literary journal of the same name, first published in 1928, which they and several other like-minded writers contributed to. While much of the Mexican avant-garde rejected the tradition of *modernismo* (which was largely written for a middle-class readership) and embraced leftist politics along with the ideology of the Mexican revolution, the *contemporáneos* broke with the spirit of the *–ismos* and instead, wrote a very hermetic and personal poetry that explored subjects such as death, dreams, and solitude (Sefamí 13). The *estridentistas* saw Novo and Villaurrutia's group as their poetic and political rivals because of their refusal to write nationalist literature, Maples Arce even participated in a very public polemic that, among other things, accused the *contemporáneos*, many of whom were homosexuals, of effeminizing Mexican letters because their style was more cosmopolitan than nationalist.[7] In fact, before associating with the journal *Contemporáneos* Novo and Villaurrutia collaborated on *Ulises*, a journal which provided a space wherein they could show their fondness for the French, American, and English vanguard movements that influenced their works (Castañeda 479). The *contemporáneos* differed from artists that embraced nationalism in part because their art was extremely personal, drawing upon their distinct poetic influences, personal tastes, cosmopolitan interests, and sexuality. As Octavio Paz explains, while the previous generation convinced themselves to believe the nationalist

rhetoric of the revolution, "Los poetas Contemporáneos ya no podían creer ni en las revoluciones ni en sus programas. Por eso se aislaron en un mundo privado, poblado de fantasmas, del erotismo, el sueño y la muerte. Un mundo regido por la palabra ausencia" (qtd. in Sefamí, 14). While the private world of Novo and Villaurrutia's poetry does not explore the modern city as symbol of modernity as overtly as Maples Arce's works do, and despite their different styles and influences, urban landscapes do creep into the verses of the two *contemporáneos* from time to time, occasionally even coinciding with the strident antagonist's approach to the modern city.

Though Villaurrutia wrote earlier poems, he begins to come into his own with the publication of *Reflejos* in 1926 –two years after André Breton publishes his surrealist manifesto– which announces the young poet's predilection for the themes of the night, dreams, solitude, and death. Despite the prominence of surrealist themes in *Reflejos* the poetic voice occasionally demonstrates an interest in gadgets of technological modernity. The poem "Fonógrafos" (an invention of the late nineteenth century), for example, portrays a phonograph record as a heart without a pulse, "sin diástole ni sístole," that goes crazy under the phonograph needle "y sangra en gritos su pasado" (36). The phonograph ruptures the silence that had squeezed the voice and another person, "inútiles," into a corner, providing a form of life in their otherwise dead conversation (36). Though phonographs had been around for about fifty years when *Reflejos* is published, Villaurrutia's poem shows a voice working out the role of technological modernity in everyday life. In this same collection, the poem "Cinematógrafo" describes a street scene wherein "la plancha gris del cielo," –perhaps a metaphor for nostalgia, the greyish monochrome cityscape, or the pressure of living in the modern city– creeps closer to the ground daily, bringing the poetic self to the verge of tears (41). However, the voice only dares weep in a movie house, described as follows: "En este túnel el hollín / unta las caras, / y solo así mi corazón se atreve."

The soot that paints faces of those the tunnel metaphorically depicts the darkness which hides the tears of the one who speaks. The movie house serves as a refuge of sorts for men who want to be in the dark so that they can grieve for whatever ails them, and the voice expresses a desire to linger in the darkness (41). The reader ignores the voice's source of grief, but learns that the one who speaks recurs to a modern apparatus, the movie house, for emotional solace.

From the same collection, "Suite del insomnio," comprised of seven short, unrhymed poems of varying meter, deals with the difficulty of sleeping in a modern city. The suite finds thematic unity under the umbrella of things that add to the poetic voice's insomnia, each poem addresses a different source, such as thirst, and the ticking of a clock. But the "Insomniac's Suite" also touches upon two of Maples Arce's favorite symbols of technological modernity, trains and trolley cars. "Silbatos," the suite's second poem, alludes to "trenes sonámbulos" whose distant whistles conjure the image of undulating serpents pursuing one another (42). The third poem, "Tranvías," describes a city's electric trolley cars as "Casas que corren locas / de incendio, huyendo / de sí mismas, / entre los esqueletos de las otras / inmóviles, quemadas ya." (42). It is unclear what Villaurrutia's metaphor of burned houses symbolizes –perhaps the bleak home life of those whose houses are skeletons– but the trolley cars as houses, crazy with fire, running from themselves evokes the loud noises stemming from the speed with which they move, thus keeping the insomniac voice awake. These brief interactions with technological modernity depicted in *Reflejos* show an individual rather at odds with and trying to reconcile with the era in which they live, with all of its accompanying gadgets and machines

While touches of cosmopolitanism and the influence of Villaurrutia's work as a music and art critic show through in his subsequent collection of poetry, *Nostalgia de la muerte* (1938), the collection's title denotes its predominant themes. Comprised of three sections, "Nocturnos,"

"Otros nocturnos," and "Nostalgias," Villaurrutia's night songs could be described as airy, ephemeral, and even phantasmal. While *Nostalgia de la muerte* is almost completely devoid of references to technological modernity and the city as symbol of modernity, many of its verses feature a poetic self as a kind of sleepwalking *flâneur* who walks the deserted streets of an unnamed city at night, half awake, half asleep, suffering an existential crisis. For example, in "Nocturno miedo" the night inspires thoughtful introspection and the one who speaks begins to question their very existence (45). Troubled by such profound musings, Villaurrutia's insomniatic poetic subject arises and begins to wander the streets while only half awake: "Entonces, con el paso de un dormido despierto, / sin rumbo y sin objeto nos echamos a andar. / La noche vierte sobre nosotros su misterio, / y algo nos dice que morir es despertar." (45). The use of a first person plural pronoun, *nos*, indicates a perceived filiation with others, while the poetic self is completely alone in the street, figuratively and emotionally, the voice believes that others also suffer similar moments of radical doubt. In the fourth stanza the voice asks, "¿Y quién entre las sombras de una calle desierta, / … / … / y no ha sentido miedo, angustia, duda mortal?" (45). Only the second poem in the collection, "Nocturno miedo" establishes a motif that runs throughout this collection, the darkened streets of an unidentified city either trigger or serve as the locus for personal crisis of sorts.

The city of Villaurrutia's second collection of poetry is reductive, comprised only of streets, absent of life, modes of transport, structures, and devoid of the noise and movement he depicts in *Reflejos*. In fact, the vision of city streets that runs throughout *Nostalgia de la muerte* prefigures the style of film noir, a genre whose protagonists live in the city and often suffer a personal crisis of their own. Villaurrutia's eerie deserted streets, full of nothing but shadows seem familiar to the viewer of film noir, a genre that investigates crimes and other nocturnal

happenings in the night-darkened streets of the modern city. The first line of "Nocturno en que nada se oye" even reads as though it was written as the opening line of a voice over monologue one might hear uttered by a hardboiled noir detective: "En medio de un silencio desierto como la calle antes del crimen…" (47). However, Villaurrutia's surrealist streets are not crime scenes, but rather, the void wherein his poetic self tries to make sense of the human condition.[8] In a poem from the following section, "Estancias nocturnas," the poetic self once again sleepwalks the streets of "la ciudad sumergida," aware if his state but quite hesitant to awake because the one who speaks is not sure whether he will awake from a dream or something more terrifying, "un sueño mi vida." (62). *Nostalgia de la muerte* often exhibits the inner thoughts of a voice that questions its very existence. This exercise in radical skepticism more often than not takes place in Villaurrutia's surreal nocturnal atmosphere, comprised only of grey streets, sleepwalkers, and shadows.

Interestingly, the only cities actually mentioned in *Nostalgia de la muerte* are foreign, such as Los Angeles and New Haven, where the poet studied theater at Yale University for a time. Villaurrutia's poetic portrayal of the streets of Los Angeles is the polar opposite of those unpopulated gray streets featured elsewhere in his collection of poems. The City of Angels' streets, although darkened by the night, "fluyen dulcemente" with people and the neon lights are just bright enough to reveal "el secreto de los hombres" that come and go, meeting other men, while also low enough to create an air of mystery (55). Unlike the solitary streets of Villaurrutia's unknown city in other poems, those of "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" are alive with people, whom the voice exclaims, "¡Son los ángeles!" (56). The liveliness with which Villaurrutia's poem depicts the nightlife of gay men in California could not be further from the dark, empty streets wandered by his sleepwalker who aimlessly wanders about contemplating

life and death. The sharp contrast raises the question, could the grey streets of *Nostalgia de la muerte* represent the solitude one might feel in Mexico City? Paz explains that Villaurrutia had a study in Mexico City decorated like a film set from the 1930 Jean Cocteau movie *Blood of a Poet*, an avant-garde film that features surreal imagery and bizarre set pieces (*Obras 4* 75). According to Paz, Villaurrutia decorated his study like so for escapist reasons, he claims that the poet of *Nostalgia de la muerte* said, "Para soportar a México he tenido que construirme este refugio artificial…" (*Obras 4* 75). Of course, biographical anecdotes cannot be read as evidence of poetic form and style, but in a letter to Salvador Novo, written from California in June of 1936, Villaurrutia tells his dear friend that upon entering the Mexican consul in Los Angeles "veo la muerte," later explaining that Los Angeles is a city where "el deseo y la satisfacción del deseo" flow through the streets, the same metaphor used in "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" (Cartas 74-75). Regardless of the possible readings these biographical elements open for *Nostalgia de la muerte*, to be sure, Xavier Villaurrutia's poetry paints an ambiguous picture of the modern city. While *Reflejos* directly address the hullabaloo of the modern city the voice of *Nostalgia* seems isolated by it and from it.

Villaurruitia's fellow *contemporáneo*, Salvador Novo was more overt in his reaction to the modern metropolis. Novo's poetry is extremely erudite and full of encyclopedic allusions that denote a strong interest in intellectual history and a familiarity with the inner workings of society's upper echelons. Merlin H. Forster (92) and José Joaquín Blanco (157-58) agree that his early poems suffer from a desire to imitate the influential verse of López Velarde and González Martínez, while noting that Novo begins to find his own voice with the publication of *XX Poemas* in 1925. Eva Castañeda notes that in *XX Poemas* "[l]os elementos de la ciudad moderna son retratados con humor e ironía" (482). Similarly, Anthony Stanton writes that elements of

vanguard modernity, mostly allusions to technological modernity, abound in *XX Poemas*, though at the most superficial level, lexically and thematically (156). Yet unlike his stridentist rival, Maples Arce, Novo does not kneel before the machines of technological modernity, choosing instead to depict the experience of the modern city as overwhelming and absurd. In "La ciudad," the final poem from Novo's subsequent collection, *Espejo* (1933), the poet who would later become one of Mexico City's most celebrated chroniclers describes the city as a great door leading to a place whose vastness marginalizes the one who speaks:

> Por esta puerta grande hemos llegado,
> yo les temía a esos hombres rápidos de la estación,
> todos ellos se ofrecen para algo
> y los automóviles…
>
> Yo me perdería aquí, solo,
> en tanta calle lisa y larga;
> ninguna persona sabe quién soy,
> las luces son más fuertes,
> las ventanas más altas y cerradas… (80)

As though intended to directly contradict the exuberance with which Maples Arce describes the speed and cadence of the modern city, Novo's poetic voice finds it isolating. The voice seems intimidated by those "fast men" who offer their services, by the cars, the lights that shine brighter, and the windows that reach higher and are sealed off. The anonymity that modern cities offer is less than appealing to the voice, who confesses that they would become lost and alone in the endless streets, where the voice's identity is unknown the city's inhabitants.

A thirty-three-line poem, "Las ciudades," also from *Espejos*, describes quotidian happenings in Mexico City and several northern Mexican cities: Chihuahua, Jiménez, Parral, Madera, and Torreón. People come and go, passing "grandes edificios en que no vive nadie" while the personified train station "a diario deposita y arranca gentes nuevas" (67). The train brings new blood to fill empty buildings and continue the work cycle and be absorbed by the

cities, which Novo describes as sand, where people, "como una gota de agua / mezclarse con la arena que la acoge." (67). The poet's simile of the city is not necessarily one of unity, as a drop of water becoming part of a larger liquid body, forming part of a whole might be, but rather, an image of waste and consumption. A drop of water in sand ceases to exist as such, the water temporarily satisfies the thirsty soil, providing it with a bit of much-needed moisture, but the sand quickly uses up its precious resource. Novo's cities openly welcome new people, but swiftly uses them up or wares them out.

In 1934 Novo publishes *Poemas proletarios*, a short collection of five poems that read the ideology of Mexico's revolution and post-revolutionary government with touches of satire and irony. Stanton notes that this work embodies "una crítica paródica de la retórica política de la Revolución mexicana y una sátira atrevida de los afanes demagógicos del populismo y de la cultura proletaria" (172-73). The first and longest poem from Novo's 1934 collection, "Del pasado remoto" traces the course of Mexican history from pre-Columbian times to his present, symbolizing the passage of time with the image of "polvo de las tumbas" (115). He criticizes revolutionary literature that is categorized as such simply for name-dropping the likes of Villa along with specific brands of weapons, and for writing about the *campesino* and their subverted Eden (111). Novo attacks the idea of the radio as tool of dissemination for propaganda, "los radios al servicio de los intelectuales proletarios / al servicio del Gobierno de la Revolucion / para repetir incesamente sus postulados / hasta que se graben en las mentes de los proletarios / - de los proletarios que tengan radio y escuchen." (111). The irony of using radio to teach propaganda is that only the proletariat who own them can be indoctrinated. "Del pasado remoto" paints the city is the source of modernity and leftist ideology, where even the poets speak to the *campesino*, telling him take up his sickle and carve out his own destiny, but in parentheses

Novo's poetic voice sarcastically notes, "(Se lo dicen en la ciudad, o por radio / y él no puede escucharlos.) (113). The peasant, a symbol of the leftist Mexican government and intellectuals, celebrated in the city, painted in murals on the walls of the national palace, in whose name many proclamations are made and policies enacted, completely ignores the way he is theorized by intellectuals in the city, a place where he comes from time to time in order to sell some artisanal products to "pensadores proletarios" or some *sarapes* to "míster Davis" and make a bit of money (113). Novo's peasant, despite the way he is theorized by the progressive left, still believes his Catholic faith, for him the city is a site of peregrination where he can light a candle to the Virgin after walking to "la Villa de Guadalupe" because "en su atraso y su ignorancia / no sabe que ya no hay Dios, ni santos, / ni cielo, ni infierno," (113). Novo satirizes thoroughly modern subjects, the intellectuals and government officials who ignore the fact that their chosen symbol, *el campesino,* –who comes to the city "vestido de manta, descalzo y callado, / miedoso de los automóviles raudos" and returns home on shambled highways– is the antithesis of everything they stand for, he is the anti-modern (113-14). Novo criticizes the revolutionary government that idealizes the lives and politics of indigenous and working class peoples while at the same time courting foreign investors that flood Mexico with their money and modern products. The city is the locus from which Marxist theory is disseminated and depicted, but not practiced, the *campesino* still lives in the countryside. Novo makes clear that while the indigenous person and the worker are appropriated to further a nationalist political message, they are ignorant "de lo que dijeron los pródigos pensadores," and as anti-modern subjects, they probably don't care (115). Thus, Novo's ruinous image that connotes the meaninglessness of it all, "Crece el tiempo en silencio / hojas de hierba, polvo en las tumbas / que agita apenas la palabra" (115).

One of Novo's final poems, "Decimos 'Nuestra tierra," published in 1949, celebrates Mexico with patriotic overtones lacking Novo's characteristic irony. His poetic voice sincerely praises the countryside of his youth, nostalgically celebrating the soil of Mexico's provinces, which nurtures and protects the nation, represented here as a tree. However, while interrogating the phrase "nuestra tierra," the one who speaks establishes a binary wherein the city opposes the land, resulting in a kind of ecocritical reading that paints the city in a negative light. Returning to some themes Novo uses in *Espejo*, the one who speaks describes the enormity of the city where the individual is completely anonymous, where machines fill the air with noise from which trees and birds flee, and the personified city "cierra los ojos a la Luna" ignoring its natural beauty (147). The modern city, with all its rushing about and anguish, explains the voice, reduces quality of life. But worse still, it isolates its inhabitants from and destroys nature, a tree cannot thrive or even grow in cement or asphalt. The voice's critique of the modern city reaches its apex starting with the penultimate line of the fourth stanza and ends with the fifth stanza:

> el agua muda y ciega, y opresa y derrotada,
> ya no río, ni lago, ni lluvia, ni caricia, ni espejo.
>
> No es ésta, nuestra tierra
> donde la tierra ha sido sepultada,
> desterrada, olvidada
> y cubierta con mármoles de asfalto. (148)

The city pollutes its water supply and paves over the soil that gives life to its trees to the point that its residents forget what it truly means when they say "Nuestra tierra". The soil that protected the nation, the tree, as it grew has been paved over and forgotten in the modern metropolis. But Novo's poem does not limit the destructive force of the city to nature, the province's social values and customs, such as reciprocated courtesies and polite greetings are also lost in the modern metropolis. "Decimos 'Nuestra tierra'" initially appears to reiterate

Bartra's subverted Eden theme, but after the stanzas cited above, the voice reminds us that the province still exists outside the city and even invites the reader to travel there and sink their hands into the life-giving soil. The voice also provides another option, imploring the reader to at least gaze upon it, from the window of an airplane if nothing else: "Nuestra tierra," says the voice "es la provincia. Mírala, viajero: / desde el avión si quieres," and the kind, sweet province, now personified, will wave back at the traveler that looks upon it (148).

In their poetry, Maples Arce, Villaurrutia, and Novo explore the city as a symbol of modernity. While Maples Arce initially celebrates the modern metropolis and technological modernity in his stridentist poetry, his later works reveal a more ambiguous attitude toward the city. From the outset, Villaurrutia and Novo's verses expresses uncertainty *vis-à-vis* modernity's highest expression. Their poetic voices reject technological modernity as a symbol of utopia and, unsure how to react to the city, keep their distance from it, writing it as an instrument of isolation rather than unification. Novo even prefigures dystopian ecocritical readings of the city would abound in Mexican literature after the mid-century. As the twentieth century progresses and Mexico City grows at an alarming rate, other poets begin to read the capital city itself as a ruin of modernity.

VI. Mexico City as Modern Ruins

Efraín Huerta is commonly referred to as the poet of the city, his verses portray Mexico City as a bustling metropolis, charged with eroticism and potentiality combined with a genuine affection for the city as a kind of flawed, urban *locus amoenus*. In a sense, López Velarde, Maples Arce, and Villaurrutia are Huerta's poetic precursors in that, like him, they wrote poems expressing both love and hate for the modern city (Mendiola 532). David Huerta writes that *Los hombres del alba* (1944) is the centerpiece of his father's work "porque en sus páginas recoge y

proyecta la experiencia poética de la ciudad moderna en que se ha convertido la capital de nuestro país…" (Prólogo 9). While in this collection Huerta often shows the seedy underbelly of modern city life and portrays aspects of the capital in a ruinous and polluted state, those images are balanced with expressions of profound love for his version of Mexico City, which, as it approaches the mid-twentieth century is far from becoming a modern utopia or dystopia.

The two most frequently commented poems from *Los hombres del alba* are "Declaración de odio" and the poem for which Huerta's 1944 collection is named. "Los hombres del alba" contrasts the urban working man's experience by day and night. The tattooed, rough men, whom the poem describes, and whose shoulders have born the weight of Mexico City's modernizing projects, populate the darkest bosom of the old city. They are "Los hombres más abandonados, / más locos, más valientes: / los más puros." (137). The night serves as a refuge for these marginalized burley figures who gather and speak of the day "que no les pertenece, en que no se pertenecen, / en que son más esclavos…" (137). The one who speaks portrays these poetic subjects as hard working slaves, human ruins, men worked nearly to death and close to becoming cadavers. The night offers them asylum from their miserable existence in the modern city, but in the penultimate stanza with "un dolor desnudo y terso / aparece el mundo" and the *hombres del alba* rise to the occasion, put on a bold face, and repeat the process once again (138). Throughout *Los hombres del alba* the night represents escapism, often in the form of alcohol consumption, sexual gratification, or other vices, while the day, often announced by Huerta's central motif of the sunrise, reveals the brutal reality of the city and its demands on the working man.

Los hombres del alba explores the nature of love in the modern city but also notions of love and hate for the city itself. The voice in "Declaración de odio" at once expresses wonder and hate for the city, "…esta negra ciudad. / Esta ciudad de ceniza y tezontle cada día menos

puro, / de acero, sangre y apagado sudor" (129). The city, forged out of steel with the blood and sweat of *los hombres del alba* serves as a catchall for all kinds human suffering and misery, it feeds upon cowardice and cynicism, pimps, prostitutes, and empty souls (129-30). The fourth verse sees a change in tone as the voice praises the "Ciudad negra y colérica o mansa o cruel" as the center where militant communists organize, much like Maples Arce's *Vrbe* (130). Huerta's complex representation of Mexico City depicts the metropolis as a place of admirable but flawed workers, but also a vulgar bourgeois, toward whom the poetic voice declares its hate: Te declaramos nuestro odio, magnífica ciudad. / A ti, a tus tristes y vulgarísimos burgeses, / a tus chicas de aire, caramelos y films americanos…" (131). The voice repudiates the upper class, who want to expand the city, emphasizing growth, north American imports, all based on economic theories that are anything but autochthonous. The voice pulls no punches and the poem reads as a laundry list of problems with the modern city. But Huerta, the poet and lover of Mexico City, follows with "Declaración de amor" a poem whose contradistinctive themes present a voice that praises the city's "calles recién lavadas / y edificios-cristales" (134). Process of development and progress in Huerta's poems are messy, while new infrastructure and beautification projects improve the city, at least on the surface, modernization, expansion and growth tricky at best, and the population sometimes suffers as a consequence. In "Esta región de ruina," the one who speaks portrays Mexico City as a wasteland of sorts where the only thing that gives life to the city are recently uprooted people who relocate from the countryside (149). However, they arrive to "Esta región de ruinas," where suffering is more common than happiness, the voice describes the old city center as "la antigua, / la agotada raíz de la ciudad" (150). The used up section of the city also uses up the people that reside there; love is hard in Huerta's poetic city which is not just a ruin itself, but also a maker of human ruins. Despite the burden of living in the modern city,

"Esta región de ruinas" closes on a hopeful note. From without the ruinous imaginings of the poetic self, a woman's soft voice calls to him and invites him to live (151).

While Huerta's version of Mexico City in *Los hombres del alba* approximates ruins, both human and concrete, there is still hope for a brighter future. In "Avenida Juárez," from *Estrella en alto* (1956) Huerta's poet-flâneur meanders down the poem's eponymous street only to feel like a foreigner in his own land, as the street is populated with *gringo* tourists. Ricardo Aguilar describes the downtown area in "Avenida Juárez," as a concrete jungle wherein "la ciudad se vuelve devoradora, aplastante" (87). The poetic voice feels that his nation has sold its soul to the colossus to the north, "Todo parece morir, agonizar / todo parece polvo mil veces pisado. / La patria es polvo y carne viva, la patria / debe ser, y no es, la patria…" (250). By seeking foreign investment and prioritizing economic and development and modernization, the one who speaks feels that Mexico's politicians have destroyed the country that once was. "Pues todo parece perdido, hermanos, / mientras amargamente, triunfalmente, / por la Avenida Juárez de la ciudad de México / -perdón, *Mexico City*- / las tribus espigadas, la barbarie en persona / los turistas… / … / … / pisotean la belleza…" (251). Huerta was not alone in seeing Mexico's embrace of capitalism as a destructive force that begins to wear on the capital city.

In the second half of the twentieth-century Mexico City was in constant flux, ever expanding, ever changing and with frightening speed. In *The Decline & Fall of the Lettered City* (2002), Jean Franco writes of her own experience with the rapidly changing capital. In 1957 she left a city "of clear air and breathtaking views of the volcanoes and the Ajusco mountain, a city where people travelled on public transport to the center to meet friends, to go to concerts, to shop. But 1957 was also the year Volkswagen began its assault on the city while Mayor Uruchurtu pushed his program of modernization…" (186).[9] When Franco returned only ten years

later the city she knew, "the Mexico of street vendors, of uncrowded streets and unhurried pedestrians," like in Elena Poniatowska's *El ultimo guajolote*, had almost completely disappeared (186). Franco admits that mid-century Mexico City, like José Emilio Pacheco's version of the same in *Las batallas en el desierto*, was "already in a state of subtle erosion," but the speed with which it transformed into a polluted, crowded megalopolis, still shocks Franco upon her return. The effects of development were not all negative of course, the mid-century saw the construction of important cultural sites such as university campuses and the National Museum of Anthropology.

Claudio Lomnitz makes clear that nationalism relies greatly upon "ideological constructs that tie 'tradition' to "modernity'" (132). Thus, while forging a national utopia in its urban capital, Mexico's politicians seek to strike a balance between their program of progress and development and a respect for the nation's indigenous origins. However, doing so is easier in theory than praxis, especially because in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mexico's "fundamental and eternal aspiration [is] modernity and modernization" above all else (Lomnitz 133). For this reason, because they balance the indigenous past with the modern present and future well, certain public works projects are seen as "crown jewels of Mexican state nationalism" among them, the National Museum of Anthropology (Lomnitz 133). The Museum of Anthropology at once represents Mexican nationalism and modernity and, in theory, would instill pride in the nation's citizenry, though it did not always have its intended effect, as Carlos Pellicer's "13 de Agosto, ruina de Tenochtitlán" demonstrates.

Pellicer (1897-1977) begins writing poetry at the age of fourteen, in his native Tabasco. He was well traveled and his early poems reveal a budding Pan-Americanism that will be displayed in full force in 1924 when he publishes *Piedra de sacrificios: Poema iberoamericano,*

a precursor to and possible influence on Pablo Neruda's *Canto general* (1950). Pellicer associated with and made significant contributions to the *contemporáneos* group, though he was much more prolific than many of them, and his themes differed drastically from their common inward focus. Paz writes that rather than reject *modernismo* Pellicer incorporated it into his works and rediscovered the beauty of the world (*Poesía* 365). In *Cuerdas, percusión y alientos* (1976), the Tabascan poet explains that his collection of poems is unified by themes of honor, heroism, and the protest of social injustices (455). Among the poems that explore the latter is "13 de Agosto, Ruina de Tenochtitlán," a poetic response to visiting Mexico's national Museum of Anthropology.

At poem's end, "13 de Agosto, ruina de Tenochtitlán" indicates that is was written on the day alluded to in the title, and in the year 1964. The date refers not only to the time of authorship, but also to the day on which Cuauhtémoc surrendered the Aztec capital to Cortés (in 1521) and the year in which the National Museum of Anthropology opened. While the one who speaks never explains the object of its gaze, the title and date of composition insinuate that some form of Aztec ruin, perhaps an artifact on display in the anthropology museum, inspires this poetic response. Pellicer's composition includes three main stanzas, all preceded by the refrain: "Me da tristeza, / no por mexicano, / sino sólo por hombre," which serves as a lament for the lost city and culture of Tenochtitlan (480-82). The poem opens in the poetic present of 13th of August, 1964, indicated by the use of the present participle by the one who speaks: "Estoy mirando la ciudad destruida / flor aplastada por un pie de sombrío. / Estoy mirando el agua en los canales, / vacía, ciega de tanto ver / lo que jamás debió haber visto." (480). The poetic voice is at once greatly impressed by what it sees, and saddened by the realization of what once was. The poetic voice soon stops describing what it sees begins to describe what it does not see: "El

Destino Escondido entre las ruinas," then synesthetically smells "gritos / entre la sangre heroica de la fecha. / La fecha funeral…" (480). Looking upon the ruin, the one who speaks seems to see and smell the disappeared world of the Aztecs.

Pellicer's poem employs the ages-old trope of *ubi sunt* discussed in the introduction, however, ironically, a ruin displayed in a utopic nationalist project in modern Mexico triggers this response. In the second stanza the voice speaks of the Spaniard's ambitions and motivations for destroying Tenochtitlan, but also seems to the echo the notion of the Revolution and the building modern utopic projects as processes of ruination: "Bueno, sí: ¡la ambición! / Destruir, matar para obtener y poseer. / Esta es la razón de tanto duelo, / de tanta ruina, de tantas lágrimas oscuras" (480). The voice emphasizes this point toward the end of the second stanza, wondering why such a marvelous civilization was destroyed: "De todos modos / me pregunto el por qué de este desastre. / Y me responde lo que me rodea." (481). The poet's nostalgic longing for the past is possible precisely because the voice now sees ruins in place of the modern cityscape. The one that speaks understands that modern Mexico exists only because Tenochtitlan was destroyed and comprehends that the city is a palimpsest, at once a symbol of modernity and the ruins of Tenochtitlan.

The final stanza finds the voice lamenting the mythical past, Bartra's subverted Eden with Tenochtitlan substituted for the nineteenth-century countryside: "Yo sé que todo se perdió. / que todo es nada. / Pero de esa nada todo había / ¿Cómo puede matarse todo un hecho / que existía, y así, de todo a todo?" (481). In the previous stanza the poet began to see the modern city as the remnants of the city that once stood in its place. The final four lines of the stanza describe a coming rain storm and the voice inverts the notion of the ruin, referring to Mexico City as a ruin: "(Después llovió toda la noche / y amaneció lloviendo sobre las ruinas.)" (481). The poem

closes with a variation on the refrain is repeated before stanza's 1-3, it reads: "Trece de Agosto. Bronce. / Me da tristeza, / no por mexicano, / sino solo por hombre. / (¡Dios mío!)" (481-82). The initial phrase of the refrain suggests that the poetic self is reading a bronze plaque with the poem's eponymous date on it, again, an allusion to the date in which Tenochtitlan fell. This reinforces the idea that the one that speaks is observing some sort of model, artifact, or monument in memory of the Aztec city. Comprehending how completely it was destroyed and covered by the colonial and then modern Mexico, the one who speaks is shocked, and can only utter the phrase "(¡Dios mío!)" (482). Again, the irony of Pellicer's poem is that within the walls of the Anthropology Museum, a triumphant symbol of Mexican modernity, an Aztec artifact, likely exhibited within leads the voice's realization that the city itself is a kind of modern ruin that sits upon the ancient ruins of Tenochtitlan. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Mexican modernity cannot seem to escape the specter of ruins. Only four years after Pellicer pens his poem, modernity and ruins would converge once again in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*.

Though much of the poetry responding to the events at Tlatelolco in 1968 does not seek to represent the city either as a symbol of modernity or a ruin of the same, the massacre takes place at a site that invites such a reading. Also, the events of October 2nd, 1968 occur in part because the Mexican government perceived student protests as a threat to the utopic image of a developed, modern nation that it was so concerned with projecting to the world via the 1968 Olympic games. The city's new freeways and infrastructure, the Olympic venues and the games themselves would embody Mexico's modernity before the eyes of the world, but the student protests, it was believed, would damage that idealized image. In his characteristic sardonic tone, Jaime Sabines' poem "Tlatelolco 68," from his collection *Maltiempo* (1972), criticizes the

government that prioritized development over justice, pretending that the events of Tlatelolco did not occur. In the sixth and final poem of "Tlatelolco 68" he writes,

> El Gobierno apadrina a los héroes
> El peso mexicano está firme
> y el desarrollo del país ascendiente.
> Siguen las tiras cómicas y los bandidos en la televisión.
> Hemos demostrado al mundo que somos capaces,
> respetuosos, hospitalarios, sensibles
> (¡Qué Olimpiada maravillosa!),
> y ahora vamos a seguir con el "Metro"
> porque el progreso no puede detenerse. (355-56)

To paraphrase Claudio Lomnitz, in the twentieth century Mexico's highest aspiration is modernity and modernization above all else (133), even the lives of its citizens, whose deaths will forever haunt the discourse of modernity in Mexico. The single mindedness with which the country's leadership pursues industrialization and modernization and the exponential growth rate of the nation's capital city was not without consequences, as Eduardo Lizalde makes clear in *Tercera Tenochtitlán* (1982-2000).

Lizalde published the first part of his extended meditation on modern Mexico City in 1983 and has felt compelled to return to and expand his poem periodically. Introducing the most recent version, published with his poetic works in 2005, Lizalde writes, that Mexico City "hoy es tan angustiosamente extensa, compleja y cambiante que ya no la conocemos sus hijos sino fragmentariamente," even the most dedicated study, he notes, could only ever provide an insufficient birds eye view (311). "Tercera Tenochtitlán" is wholly comprised of free verse and divided into two parts, the first includes forty-seven stanzas of varying length and the second forty-one stanzas. The first section is completely devoid of any punctuation, occasionally employing large spaces between words in place of commas, as in this example which describes airplanes flying over the city, "Gordos fantasmas naves holandas ponderosas" (314). The

second section, however, makes frequent use of periods and commas. The poems elegiac tone is sustained throughout, "Tercera Tenochtitlán" is an extended and thorough meditation on destruction, decay, failure, and ruination.

Lizalde's Mexico City is the largest metropolis in the world, incomprehensible, heavily polluted, an ever shifting Rorschach stain of petroleum in the center of the valley (313). In modern Mexico, time is marked by the passing of airliners, "Gordos fantasmas" that blacken the sky as they fly over the remnants of Lake Texcoco "ese cadáver de una vieja laguna corrompida" (314). Lizalde reads his version of Mexico City as a ruin, which, like the first and second Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), will one day form the ruinous foundation of a third Tenochtitlan: "Otros sobre estas ruinas ya de ruinas / sobre los despojos emplumados / de la gran Tenochtitlán / y sus floridos opresores / alzarán ciudades / antes del terremoto devastadas / restos desde el nacimiento / El nonato retoño desde su primer fulgor / mordido ya su fruto" (316). In *Miro la tierra* (1986), Pacheco reads the city devastated by the 1985 earthquake as a ruin, Lizalde's poetic voice already saw it as such, a ruin from its inception.

Lizalde sees little except ruins in the city, a metropolis constantly eroding, the air so polluted that the sun appears black (317). Lizalde's voice sees modern apartment buildings and skyscrapers as little more than haughty rubbish, not houses, but cellars (318). The city is populated with rats and ruins pierce the earth's skin throughout, a "Dolorosa inhumación de espectros / de nahuales dioses menos que insepultos / monolitos respirando a flor de tierra / templos mutilados…" over which the cathedral presides (320-21). The first section closes with a meditation on how the city has paved over what remnants of nature were left, "Nada queda en los barrios," says the voice, before explaining that the trees, palms, poplars, and eucalypts, that once shaded Mexico City's neighborhoods have disappeared (323-24). Vicente Quirarte correctly

notes that Lizalde's descriptors evoke hostility and chaos and reflect the city as his poetic self sees it (88). "Tercera Tenochtitlán" echoes Huerta's "Declaración de odio," but is more severe in its critique finding no good in the ruinous modern metropolis, only death, decay. For the voice even civic development and growth are a form of destruction.

In the second section, Lizalde's poem becomes self-aware, not only of its existence as a poem, but as an impossibly long elegy that, will haunt its author, begging to be finished while knowing that it never will be (236). "Este poema crece y se deforma como la ciudad, / como ella se degrada y se envilece, / se excede y descoyunta acaso en gusto y en carácter…" (325). The reader soon realizes that Lizalde's poem aspires to become like the map in Borges's fiction, "Del rigor en la ciencia," that grows and grows until it matches the city in size, encompassing its entirety, only to fall into disrepair and become a ruin itself (119). The voice recalls its youth, "Los dos éramos niños la ciudad y yo, / desde andábamos, de barrio en barrio al sur," when the city and its bard would pass time in the meadows with cows drinking pure milk, before Nestlé took over (326-27). The voice echoes Bartra's subverted Eden, but then instructs the reader not to cry for the ideal past, because the form of the city "es ésa: el cuerpo de lo informe y lo expansivo / La desaparicón, la evanesencia permanente, / son su manera de ser y crecer" (327-28). The one who speaks begins to reconcile itself to the notion of the city as an organic being in constant flux.

Making peace with the reality of constant change, growth, tearing down and building up that characterizes modern Mexico City, Lizalde's poetic voice, much like Pacheco's narrator in *Las batallas en el desierto*, encourages the reader to abandon a nostalgic view of the city and instead embrace the monstrosity.

> La ciudad, ya lo dijimos, perfecciona a diario
> el plan maestro de su demolición

de su regreso hacia el embrión, las breñas, las piedras del principio.
No lo conseguirá: se emputeció a morir la innúmera
con su gigantismo, desde los sesenta,
y seguirá creciendo la arrastrada y cobijándonos tierna,
con su tórpido manto cochambroso,
al pistolero y al turiferario, al payaso y al santo,
al potentado y al mendigo, al escribiente y al ladrón. (335)

Lizalde's poetic voice reconciles itself to the fate of modern Mexico City, which will never die, but continue to change, develop, and grow, tenderly enveloping its inhabitants in a blanket of filth, as only the largest city in the world can. "Tercera Tenochtitlán" initially embodies the culmination of years of anxiety and unease, critiques and criticisms that the burgeoning metropolis rightly stirs in the hearts of its poets. But in the second section, the one who speaks works toward a metonymic understanding of the city, because it cannot be understood in its entirety. Accepting the vertiginous reality of the ever-changing megalopolis as it is, Lizalde's poetic voice encourages the reader to love Mexico City for what it is, a dystopia.

VII. Conclusion

After the dust of the Revolution settles, as Mexico's political leaders shift their focus to utopian modernizing projects, progress and economic development, Mexico City begins to grow. The capital adapts, reinvents itself, and expands with each new group of residents it accepts from the impoverished countryside, eventually ballooning into the megalopolis it is today, the world's largest city. The nation's poets rightly looked upon the city with suspicion, trying to make sense of a city that changed before their eyes, becoming a metropolis that laid waste to residents that could not adapt to their new surroundings. At the end of the century, Eduardo Lizalde crystalizes a century of poetic approximations to the city, describing it as it was, is, and will be: the high symbol of a modern nation, a living ruin in constant flux, filthy but new, cruel and magnanimous, polluted and glorious all at once. Ignacio Sánchez Prado believes that with the

publication of Pacheco's *Las batallas en el desierto* (1981), and other novels in the neoliberal era, the Mexican literary canon experiences a kind of paradigm shift toward a politics of literature that works against the grain of Mexico's tendency toward totalizing nationalistic narratives (391). For Sánchez Prado, Pacheco is a kind of democratic intellectual whose novel works more specifically as a form of resistance against the discourse of Mexican Modernity (391). He explains as follows:

> Tras décadas de mitificación de lo nacional y de definiciones esencialistas de lo mexicano, y tras el amargo y agonizante despertar iniciado en 1968, la historia deja de ser espacio de héroes y plenitudes y se transfigura en vacíos, ruinas y fantasmas y en el espacio de hombres comunes y corrientes, que, como el ángel de la historia de Benjamin, son arrastrados por el torbellino del progreso, a espaldas del futuro, mirando el pasado y dejando una pila de escombros atrás. […] el apocalipsis que se anuncia es la implosión de la modernidad mexicana. (397-98)

While I agree with Sánchez Prado's critique, I believe that in the field of poetry, the demythification of the nationalist discourse he speaks of begins much earlier. If nothing else, the poetry examined in this chapter reveals that early on, some of Mexico's poets noticed cracks in their country's nationalist discourse that celebrated the city as a bastion of progress and modernity. Reading the capital city against the grain they hinted at what was to come, the ruins of modernity.

Notes on Chapter 1

[1] In fact, Evodio Escalante believes that Maples Arce actually encourages his readers to not accept the official history of Mexico at face value (44).

[2] Urbe garnered attention from North American poet John Dos Passos, a left-leaning poet, who traveled to Mexico to meet with Maples Arce. Rashkin notes that Dos Passos returned to the U.S. with a copy of his fellow poet's Bolshevik poem "which he translated and published in New York as *Metropolis* in 1929" (122). Coincidentally, German expressionist film maker Fritz Lang's movie of the same name, also about a worker uprising, debuted in New York just two years earlier in March, 1927.

[3] Rashkin explains that the city of Maples Arce's *Vrbe* "is not the same as Mexico City; in fact, the poem's port and maritime imagery, perhaps inspired by…Veracruz (a city and state associated with the radical labor activity in the 1920s), prevents us from reading *Vrbe* as a portrait of a specific urban center. The site depicted, is rather, a kaleidoscopic swirl of ships, trains, telephone wires, streetcars, shop windows; an international city, now connected by ocean liners to 'remote meridians'". (116)

[4] The original edition of *Vrbe: Super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* was illustrated by Louis Henri Jean Charlot, a French painter and illustrator that was particularly active in Mexico. Rashkin notes that his woodcuttings "Like Maples Arce's text…convey a profound sense of instability and ambivalence in their portrayal of modernity and modernization" (120).

[5] Interestingly, Tablada was considered an ally of *estridentismo* and his nephew, Enrique Barreiro Tablada, was a member of the group. See Rashkin, Elissa J. *The Stridentist Movement in Mexico: The Avant-Garde and Cultural Change in the 1920s*. Lexington Books, 2009.

[6] Maples Arce's waning support for his own movement and his twenty-year silence is probably due in part to the fact that he attained a position with the state government of Veracruz.

[7] For more on this topic see: Guillermo Sheridan's *México En 1932: La Polémica Nacionalista*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999. Print.

[8] The surrealists borrowed the notion of the subconscious from Freud and inverted it. Rather than interpreting the curious manifestations of the subconscious as a means to cure psychosis, the surrealists celebrated its strange and disorderly nature and made it into an aesthetic program of the avant-garde. In poetry and literature, surrealism was manifest as "technical forms like free verse and unrestricted verse…and the free association of words, polyphonic prose and the interior monologue" (Poggioli 132). However, against the official version of surrealism championed by Breton, Villaurrutia writes his own personal version. Paz explains that "el poeta no es el que oye el dictado del inconsciente sino el que guía a ese murmullo, lo somete a una forma y lo transforma en un lenguaje inteligible" (Generaciones 268). In other words, Villaurrutia's dream world, while still surreal, is carefully constructed and meticulously elaborated.

[9] For more on Mayor Uruchrutu's reforms and the controversy surrounding them see Diane E. Davis. "The Modern City: From the Reforma-Peralvillo to the Torre Bicentenario: The Clash of 'History' and 'Progress' in the Urban Development of Modern Mexico City" in *Mexico City Through History and Culture*. Edited by Linda A. Newson & John P. King. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 55-82. Print.

Chapter 2: The Ruins of Disaster

La historia, en fin, es la conciencia de la destrucción: la poesía de la historia culmina siempre con un canto ante las ruinas.

-Octavio Paz, "Poesía e historia: *Laurel* y nosotros"

Nada altera el desastre: llena el mundo
la caudal pesadumbre de la sangre.
¿Filo de qué inminencia, o ya frontera
del viento que amanece y los aguarda?

Con un hosco rumor
desciende el aire
y baja inconsolable, desmedido
a la más pétrea hoguera
y se abandona.

-José Emilio Pacheco, *El reposo de fuego*

"[E]l desastre social que le ocurrió a Ciudad Juárez de 2006 a 2012, que fue el sexenio de Felipe Calderón…prácticamente terminó con la vida social de Ciudad Juárez"

-Jorge Humberto Chávez, Interview with Alberto Cabezas

I. Introduction

American poet and professor Nicole Cooley writes that “Disaster is…often discussed in terms of silence and the inability to speak.” Indeed, for years academic circles have examined natural and man-made disasters through the lens of trauma studies, a field that Cooly is likely alluding to. Pioneers of trauma studies, such as Shoshana Felman argue that “There are never enough words or the right words” to fully capture a traumatic experience (78), while Cathy Caruth writes that trauma stems from "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events” becoming inaccessible as it is buried deep in the subconscious (11). Felman and Caruth focus more on the psychological effects of disaster and their work has frequently been used to claim that disasters, natural or man-made, are impossible to fully represent because of the trauma they induce. As Cooley puts it, “a common way we speak about disaster” is to say that “Disaster shuts down language. Disaster cannot be fathomed. Disaster stops all speech because the suffering it causes is so total and complete” (“Poetry of Disaster”). Yet, we have poetry about the Mexican Revolution, dramas about the Spanish Civil War, and novels about the Dirty Wars in South America. The mere existence of literary works that portray tragedy, disaster, and trauma seems to refute the intimation that language cannot speak the disaster. Further, rather than prevent speech, Cooley notes that disaster “produces speech, writing, and testimony…[disaster] is reproduced through language…[as] poetry that arises in direct response to a disaster, a poetry of disaster” (“Poetry of Disaster”). This chapter examines two works that I read as poetry of disaster. That is, collections that were penned as a direct response to two disasters in Mexico, one natural, the other a result of politics. Before delving into those verses, I will examine notions and theories of disaster in order to establish a framework from which to examine poetry of disaster.

"In its broadest sense," writes Mark D. Anderson, "*disaster* simply connotes disordering, a breaking of limits or structural norms in which nonhuman nature may or may not be implicated" (3). Regardless of whether they are natural occurrences or of our own making, disasters are not awaited, they rupture the fabric of the routine, interrupt planned futures and disorder what we organize and experience as normal. As José Emilio Pacheco writes, "El mundo se sostiene en la creencia / de que la muerte y la tragedia pactaron / nada más con nosotros y nos dejan tranquilos / para que todo siga mediobien, mediomal / -hasta que un día irrumpe la catástrofe." (325). Pacheco describes a common human assumption, based on our quotidian experience. If nothing terribly wrong happens today, there is no reason to believe that something terribly wrong will occur tomorrow, or the next day. Our assumptions about the future, based on past experience, are what make the suddenness of disaster so tragic. Assuming that tomorrow will be a normal day, we tend not to prepare for tragedy, and generally speaking, we do the opposite. Disasters disrupt the order that humans impose on nature and establish their own, chaotic order.

Etymologically, the notion of disaster is understood as an occurrence in nature, -the root of the Italian *disastro* stems from the Greek word for star, *ástron*- this derivation of meaning stems from the old belief that "an unfavorable position of a star or planet was thought to cause such mishaps or calamities" (Chambers 282). Though we better understand the underlying causes of natural disasters and know that they are not caused by misalignment of distant stars or vengeful deities, they are nonetheless unexpected or devastating. Another type of disaster, perhaps more tragic because of its inherent evitability, are disasters created by human kind. The notion of man-made disasters may immediately conjure thoughts about global climate change, destruction of fragile eco systems, or industrial pollution. Such phenomenon might even be

considered another category of catastrophe, man-made natural disasters. While such phenomenon are important and merit investigation, the second type of disaster encompassed in the framework of this study are man-made disasters whose repercussions, for the most part, are felt among human populations in ways unrelated to the surrounding environment. For the purpose of this study I will refer to such phenomenon as social disasters. Though, regardless of the type of calamity that befalls us, irrespective of how or when it occurs, disasters, by their very nature, have ruinous effects.

Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* could be described as an enigmatic collection of interconnected aphorisms. The text explores the disaster as it relates to human tragedy, literature, otherness, the holocaust, and the limits of language, among other things. Blanchot's text is opaque, its meaning is seemingly in continual flux. However, if there is a unifying thread that runs through his treatise, perhaps it could be summed up in the opening maxim, "The disaster, ruins everything, all while leaving everything intact...To think the disaster...is to have no longer any future in which to think it...The disaster is its imminence..." (1). The French philosopher's cryptic introduction is at once a play on the meaning of the noun *disaster*, "[a]nything that befalls of ruinous or distressing nature," but also the timing of disaster, "a sudden or great misfortune, mishap, or misadventure; a calamity" (OED). Disasters, of course, lay waste and make ruins and rubble. But, as Blanchot insinuates, the immediacy and suddenness with which they occur leaves surviving structures and people under the ever-looming threat of disaster. He writes, "'I' am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me" (1). Thus, even the survivors of a tragic event are damaged by it as it reorders their understanding of normalcy, the possibility of reoccurrence always on the horizon.

Mexico, unfortunately, is no stranger to disaster. Whether subject to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes, or man-made disasters, such as the conquest, human rights violations, revolution, or the recent drug war, the country has seen more than its fair share of tragedy. The following pages focus on two works of poetry that attempt to "think the disaster" and find some semblance of meaning and order among the chaos left in their wake. First I examine José Emilio Pacheco's extended poem "Las ruinas de México: Elegía del retorno" from his 1986 collection *Miro la tierra* (Era) a poetic response to the September 1985 earthquake that left some parts of Mexico City in ruins. I then turn to more recent events, analyzing Jorge Humberto Chávez's 2013 collection, *Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto* (FCE), an almost testimonial reaction to the violence that plagued the northern border's second largest city, Ciudad Juárez, during Felipe Calderon's presidency. Both works could be considered political poetry in that Pacheco's extended poem and Chávez's collection both overtly criticize their government's policies which, in the case of both disasters, resulted in many avoidable deaths. But perhaps more than political poetry, "Las ruinas de México: Elegía del retorno" and *Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto* are elegies, the central theme of each being lamentation for the dead. In each work the poetic voice endeavors to make sense of the violence and destruction witnessed by their respective poetic voices, and both implicitly answer the question of how to respond to such violence. Whereas Pacheco reduces the disaster to its elemental level, approaching it philosophically and metaphorically before reading the rubble as a kind of ruin he uses to memorialize the victims of the quake, Chávez internalizes the calamity that surrounds him, relating to the catastrophe on a personal level through his own individual tragedy then attempting to understand its seemingly boundless expansion. Though each work approaches

disaster differently, they both arrive at poignantly similar conclusions, confronted with such violence and misery, there is no answer. In thinking the disaster the both learn, as Maurice Blanchot might say, that "The disaster ruins everything" (1).

II. José Emilio Pacheco – "Las ruinas de México: Elegía del retorno"

Born in Mexico City in 1939, José Emilio Pacheco casts a long shadow in Mexican literature. A well respected critic and professor of Mexican and Latin American literature, he is also the author of two critically acclaimed novels, three collections of short stories, and fourteen collections of poetry. As a young man he studied at UNAM and edited periodicals in Mexico before earning professorships at several universities. He was awarded many prestigious literary awards, including the Premio Miguel de Cervantes, and tragically, suffered a fatal heart attack in 2014 at his home in Mexico City.

Pacheco's first collections of poetry, *Los elementos de la noche* (1963) and *El reposo del fuego* (1966), were critical successes and some noted thematic similarities between the work of young Mexican poet and that of Jorge Luis Borges. The young Mexican poet continued to develop his own voice and with *No me preguntes como pasa el tiempo* (1969) he firmly established the unrelenting passage of time as one of his poetic obsessions. As Merlin H. Forster and David P. Laraway write, "Pacheco se seinte perturbado por el pasar inexorable del tiempo y de la vida. Tanto el amor físico como la creación poética hacen más aguda esa percepción" (269). In the last quarter of the 20th century Pacheco's poetry reveals an appreciation for the natural world that contrasts with a sense of horror that stems from observing the unending conflicts of the contemporary world (Forster and Laraway 269). These themes noted by Forster and Laraway, as well as Pacheco's obsession with the passage of time, are manifest in *Miro la*

tierra (1986) and combined with an increased preoccupation for ruination and destruction as the poet contemplates one of the most terrifying disasters in the history of Mexico.

On September 19th, 1985, at 7:18 a.m. zona centro-time, an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale struck approximately 30 kilometers off the coast of the Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán.[1] The United States Geological Survey reports that "At least 9,500 people were killed, about 30,000 were injured, more than 100,000 people were left homeless, and severe damage was caused in parts of Mexico City and in several states of central Mexico." Despite capital city's distance from the epicenter, because it is built on land reclaimed from the former Lake Texcoco, the temblor's effects on the city were particularly destructive. On the Mercalli intensity scale, which quantifies how an earthquake effects the earth's surface, the September 19th quake registered a IX out of X. In the rather dry scientific description of the USGS, a nine on the Mercalli scale would be "violent," causing "[considerable] [d]amage…in specially designed structures [while] well-designed frame structures [would be] thrown out of plumb. Damage [would be] great in substantial buildings, with partial collapse [and] [b]uildings [would shift] off [their] foundations." All of the above occurred in Mexico's capital the morning of the earthquake. The USGS reports that "Four hundred twelve buildings collapsed and another 3,124 were seriously damaged in Mexico City." While Mexican seismologists were aware of the potential for a large quake in the Michoacán region, a report issued by the UNAM-based Instituto de Geofísica and Instituto de Ingeniería six days after the quake admits that "la intensidad con que fue sentido a una distancia de 400 kms [del epicentro], (el Distrito Federal) superó cuanto cabía esperar para un sismo de esta magnitud" (*El sismo…*). The day after the initial earthquake, an aftershock measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale shook the city once again. The Federal District's historic downtown center and many of the neighborhoods whose

foundations sat precariously on reclaimed ground where the former Lake Texcoco had been, were reduced to rubble.

With these statistics and descriptions in mind, I want to return to Blanchot, "The disaster," he writes, "ruins everything, all while leaving everything intact...To think the disaster...is to have no longer any future in which to think it...The disaster is its imminence..." (1). In 1985 José Emilio Pacheco was working at the University of Maryland, College Park as a distinguished visiting professor. Born in raised in Colonia Roma, in Mexico City, one of the areas hardest hit by the seismic eruption, he was profoundly affected by the earthquake. *Miro la tierra* is comprised largely of an extended poem titled "Las Ruinas de México (Elegía del retorno)." The subtitle is explained in a footnote wherein the poet explains, "El 18 de Septiembre yo estaba en Maryland; logré volver a México el 21 y pasar aquí la primera semana posterior al terremoto. *Las ruinas de México* intenta aproximarse a esa doble experiencia" (*Tarde o temprano,* 307). Pacheco's poem attempts to understand the rupture and incongruity of leaving a city intact and returning to a city in ruins. The poetic voice speaks from among the rubble, figuratively sifting through the remains of buildings and people, searching for meaning and some sort of order in the chaos of the earthquake's aftermath. In the words of Blanchot, José Emilio Pacheco's poem is an attempt to "think the disaster" (1).

Before delving into the poem itself, I want to pause and lay the groundwork for a discussion of Pacheco's choice of ruins as a poetic device. The western tradition of ruin gazing and writing poetry about ruins dates at least as far back as the 8th century Common Era. Poems about ruins typically explore, either individually or in concert, two contemplative modes of thought, *memento mori* and *Ubi sunt? Memento mori* is Latin for "remember death," and can also be interpreted as "remember that you must die." A ruin, once integral now fragmented,

reminds the poet of the passage of time and their eventual death. *Ubi sunt?*, Latin for "where are they", is a shortened version of the phrase "*Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerent?*" meaning, "Where are those who were before us?". It was a common question in medieval poetry and like *memento mori* is a contemplation of the passage of time and one's own mortality, often spurred by an object such as a ruin or the death of another person. When used in a poem about ruins, *Ubi sunt?* allows the ruin gazer to ask where have they gone, those who built or inhabited this structure before its fall into ruination.

Though these two came into vogue once again during the Romantic era, during which, according to Francine Masiello, it was typical for the Romantics to use ruins for "the fiction of meditation. Pondering a *memento mori* or the theme of Ubi sunt?, they lingered in states of melancholia and paused for self-reflection" (28). According to Brian Dillon, this penchant for melancholic ruin gazing "culminated with the elaboration in the late eighteenth century of a Romantic aesthetics of fragmentation, failure and picturesque decline" (11). The Romantic notion of the ruin as an aesthetic, beautiful object is continued into the 20th century. In his 1911 essay titled "The Ruin," German critic and philosopher Georg Simmel theorized that a ruin is beautiful because it is a collaborative work created by man and the forces of nature, who "transform[s] the work of art into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for art" (262). Further, Simmel praises the aesthetic value of patina which, makes man-made objects "more beautiful by chemical and physical means" (262). What all of these conceptions of ruins have in common is the assumption that a ruin is at least partially intact, thus allowing the ruin-gazer to imagine an integral structure based on the remaining fragments, or, in the words of Gastón Gordillo, recognizable forms (9). "While 'the ruin' certainly evokes rupture," he writes, "it also evokes a unified object that elite sensibilities often treat as a fetish

that ought not be disturbed" (6). Unlike these recognizable forms that are aesthetically pleasing, slowly decay over time, develop an attractive patina, and are fetishized and memorialized, a different type of object results when, in mere seconds or minutes, a natural disaster unleashes its concentrated, destructive energy, turning a once integral structure into rubble. Gordillo explains that Simmel, and other thinkers of ruins seek to "create a hierarchy of debris, in which rubble is looked down upon as a lesser, *inferior* type of matter, as 'material without significance' that is 'destined to be removed,' as Helmet Puff put it" (10). Puff's description perfectly matches what Pacheco must have seen upon his return to Mexico City on September 21st, 1985. Heaps of rubble, "material without significance…destined to be removed". Why then, the poet choose to read the rubble of his home city as a ruin? I believe it is precisely because he did not see the fallen buildings as "material without significance" but rather, material with tremendous significance. Also, perhaps the knowledge that the rubble was destined to be removed, spurred him to return and memorialize it, or, in his own words, "[inscribir] 'Las ruinas de México (Elegía del retorno)'…a la memoria de los muertos" (307).

Pacheco's poem, like its subject material, is fragmented. A collection of interconnected melancholic musings, nostalgic remembrances, occasional criticisms, philosophical observations, and horrific descriptions of the destruction, to use Gordillo's phrase, it has no recognizable forms. However, the poet gives some sense of order to the rubble as the poem is organized into five sections, each numbered with roman numerals. The five sections begin with one or more aphorisms and are each divided into twelve poems individually numbered using Arabic numerals. Absent of rhyme or meter, the number stanzas in each poem varies they range anywhere from three to thirty-one lines, the length having no apparent significance. Accounting for the uniform number of 12 individual poems that comprise the larger sections, Jacobo Sefamí

postulates that they may correspond to the months of the Gregorian calendar, and therefore, allude to the continual passage of time, a constant theme in Pacheco's poetry (55). While I agree with Sefamí, that the number 12 is an allusion to the passage of time, another possibility is that the twelve texts of each larger section represent hours of daylight. Historical data indicates that in September 1985, the average length of a day in Mexico City was just over 12 hours. Further, the earthquake wrought havoc on the power grid and out much of the city was without electricity for weeks. Sefamí notes that "Las ruinas de México" is a very visual poem, the poetic voice emerges from the destruction as the poet walks among the rubble and witnesses the devastation first hand, an activity that only could have been carried out during daylight hours. Finally, a footnote on the first page of the poem indicates that Pacheco arrived in the city on a Saturday and spent the following week there. While this warrants further investigation, it is possible that the week he refers to was simply five days, a work week. Thus, the five sections of the poem may represent five days spent among the rubble, witnessing the destruction so as to better memorialize the event. Regardless, the form of the poem plays an important role by imposing a sense of order on the piles of debris, figuratively giving them some semblance of a recognizable form,[2] which in turn facilitates his reading of the rubble as a ruin.

Section I is characterized by the suddenness of disaster, but also the primal, volcanic, brute-force of nature and the earth itself. Pacheco opens his poem with an epigraph from the book of Acts, alluding to an earthquake that shakes the foundations of a prison and ultimately frees two of Christ's disciples from their bonds: "Y entonces de repente vino un gran terremoto" (Acts 16.26 qtd. in Pacheco 307). The irony, of course, is that in contradistinction to the quake in the book of Acts, for many Mexicans, the 1985 earthquake, did just the opposite, either killing them or trapping them in a metaphorical prison comprised of rubble. The scripture serves a twofold purpose as it introduces the suddenness and unexpectedness of an earthquake, something that occurs "de

repente", while also hinting that the geological event represented by "Las ruinas de México" is one of biblical proportions.

Pacheco's extended poem opens as the voice reduces disaster and its material remnants to an elemental level: "Absurda es la materia que se desploma, / la penetrada de vacío, la hueca. / No: la materia no se destruye, / la forma que le damos se pulveriza, / nuestras obras se hacen añicos." (307). Speaking in the plural *nosotros* form in this first poem, the voice introduces the notion that things are not what they previously seemed, an idea that builds throughout the first section. Matter is not destroyed, rather, the man-made structures and the building materials of which they are constructed are simply reduced to dust, a fundamental symbol in "Las ruinas de México." The voice then depicts the Earth in its geological reality, a thin surface that floats on a molten core that, like a store of gunpowder next to a bonfire, could explode at any time (308). The infernal core of the earth "late en su sima," while tectonic plates continue to move, reminding us that the Earth, whose creation we supposed complete, continues to evolve and change shape. Bedrock becomes de-petrified and "rompe su pacto con la inmovilidad" resulting in an explosion "de lo que suponemos inmóvil" (308). There is sense that the earth's seismic activity betrays its inhabitants, but more importantly, the voice understands that as a people, humans failed to understand the truly chaotic and violent nature of the earth and the universe in general.

In the 5th poem of the first section, the voice compares the earthquake to Mount Vesuvius, the volcano that erupted in 79 c.e., and quickly destroyed Pompeii, killing its inhabitants and burying them under several feet of ash. But unlike the volcanic eruption almost two millennia before, "El Vesubio estalla por dentro. / La bomba asciende en vez de caer" (308). The Earth's affront does not overtake the city from above, like the ash of Vesuvius or an

invading enemy's bomb falling from the sky, but from beneath the planet itself, reducing the city to rubble. The sixth poem has six lines that each end with the word *muerte*: "Sube del fondo el viento de la muerte. / El mundo se estremece en fragor de muerte. / […] / […] / De su jaula profunda escapa la muerte. / […]" (309). If the reader was swept up in the voice's philosophical analysis of the earthquake, the 6th poem's epistrophic repetition serves as a stark reminder that the end result of the Earth's trembling, like the conclusion of each line in the poem, end in death.

The second half of section I reemphasizes that we, the *nosotros* invoked by the voice, misunderstood the reality of our planet. Thus, the disaster undermines and ruins our conceptions what surrounds us. Poems 7 and 8 reveal the inversion of expected outcomes as "el día se vuelve noche, / el polvo es el sol," and "lo más firme se quiebra, / se tornan movedizos concreto y hierro, / el asfalto se rasga, se desploman / la vida y la ciudad," and worse yet "Triunfa el planeta / contra el designio de sus invasores" (309). The voice categorizes humans as invaders, whose plans and designs –subduing nature in order to build cities– are not in harmony with the Earth's and are destroyed as a result. Poem 9 tells the reader that in the wake of the earthquake, the nature of things continues to change: "La casa que era defensa contra la noche y el frío, / la violencia de la intemperie, / el desamor, el hambre y la sed, / se reduce a cadalso y tumba." (309). This theme continues in poem 10, the voice hints that in a disaster, even religion fails to fulfill the purpose of its creation as many victims are not only just beyond the reach of "[el] agua de la vida," –a biblical allusion to Christ's salvation– but like their supposed savior, are entombed. Speaking as one trapped in the rubble, lines 16-18 feebily confess: "Hoy entendemos lo que significa / una expresión terrible: / sepultados en vida" (310). Like their own god, many were buried in a sort of cave, the way out blocked by stone. However, unlike Christ, these victims, buried alive, will not rise again but instead will slowly suffocate, starve, or bleed to

death, as their religion fails temporally. As if to drive this point home, poem 11 clearly states that when confronted with the earthquake, prayers fall on deaf ears. What is more, the quake itself replaces our own gods and itself desires to be worshiped:

> Llega el sismo y ante él no valen
> Las oraciones ni las súplicas.
> Nace de adentro para destruir
> Todo lo que pusimos a su alcance.
> Sube, se hace visible en una obra atroz.
> El estrago es su única lengua.
> Quiere ser venerado entre las ruinas. (310)

The disaster ruins everything within its reach, speaking through its destructive power and rubble-making, it implores the collective *nosotros* of the poem to worship it among the ruins. Unlike the Romantic's conception of the sublime, here terror and horror are completely devoid of any pleasure.

The poetic voice admits defeat in the 12th and final poem of section I. We greatly misunderstood the nature of the universe, it claims, "Cosmos es caos pero no lo sabíamos / o no alcanzamos a entenderlo." (311). The voice then returns to the image of dust that was introduced in the opening stanza of Pacheco's poem: ¿El planeta al girar desciende / en abismos de fuego helado? / ¿Gira la tierra o cae? ¿Es la caída / infinita el destino de la materia? / Somos naturaleza y sueño. Por tanto / somos lo que desciende siempre / polvo en el aire." (311). Throughout "Las ruinas de México" the voice employs imagery of dust falling through the air, a symbol of our frail existence in a universe that gives life and just as easily takes it away. Arguing that the oft-repeated spectacle is a central concern of Pacheco's extended poem, Sefamí reads the falling dust as a symbol for death itself, since dust is "la única sustancia física que permanece después de la destrucción de cualquier objeto" (56), and because it evokes a well-known biblical passage –"for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (King James Bible, Gen. 1.19). Indeed, in several

instances, the voice insinuates that the physical remains of many people have been reduced to little more than dust. The aptly chosen passage from the book of Genesis combines the poet's preoccupation with the unrelenting passage of time, ruination, and his melancholic cosmovision. But it also introduces the idea of the cosmos whose nature tends towards a falling motion, or ruination. "Las ruinas de México" itself follows a downward trajectory as the poetic voice eventually reads the telluric movement as a heralding of the Earth's apocalypse. The emphasis on downward motion is strengthened by the poet's choice to read the rubble left by the quake as a ruin. The word *ruina* finds its etymon in the Latin verb *rue*, meaning to fall, but it is also associated with notions of devastation, destruction, and the collapse, downfall or decay of a person or society (OED), all images that feature prominently in Pacheco's poem. Though the voice also uses the word "escombro" (Spanish for "rubble") quite frequently, etymologically it is something to be cast off, as rubbish. As the poem's title indicates, the ruins of Mexico are not to be cast off, but eulogized and remembered. The constant imagery of downward motion emphasizes the voice's reading of the earthquake's aftermath not simply a mass of rubble, but a ruin, worthy of contemplation and memorialization.

Like the prior section, section II opens with a biblical epigraph[3] then reiterates the theme of dust delicately floating in the air. After the earthquake "Crece en el aire el polvo, […], Se hace de tierra y de perpetua caída. / Es lo único eterno. / Sólo el polvo es indestructible." Restating the notion dust's indestructability, the voice quickly foreshadows the conclusion of "Las ruinas de México" before appearing as a *yo poético* in the second poem, speaking as an embodied voice for the first time: "Avanzo, doy un paso más / miro de cerca el infierno" (16). The idea of hell was previously hinted at, but on the ground, among the rubble, the voice sees hell up close. Walking through the streets of Mexico City on September 21st, surveying the destruction, the

voice once again dissolves into a first-person plural subject while helping sift through rubble in hope of finding survivors: “Arañamos las piedras y brota la sangre. / […] / La palabra *desastre* se ha hecho tangible” (16 Emphasis original). The voice speaks for tribe, a Pachequian trope, using the first person plural form, which symbolizes solidarity with those affected by the Earth’s movement. Abandoned by their government, they must unite against the disaster, interrogated as a philosophical concept in section I, in section II it is nothing less than the Lacanian Real, in all its terrible power.

Still trying to grasp the magnitude of the earthquakes destructive power, Pacheco’s autobiographical voice examines the rubble that once was Colonia Roma, “aquella parte de la ciudad que…puedo llamar la mía” only to see that “no queda piedra sobre piedra” (17). Where Pacheco’s house once stood, there is simply a void: “Esa allí que no ves, que no está / ni volverá a alzarse nunca, / fue en otro mundo la casa / donde nací” (17). Emphasizing the non-presence of his former house, the voice, perhaps inadvertently, echoes the process of ruin gazing, wherein meaning is derived from the absence of a whole. Among the rubble the voice contemplates his fleeting existence, “Terminó mi pasado” and over the course of the three subsequent poems, the voice realizes that he and his compatriots may also have no future. Solid ground is the foundation of any possible future, upon which to rebuild the city, but the voice, now very aware of the telluric reality of plate tectonics, confesses, “Nuestra tierra no es tirra firme” (18). The one who speaks understands that the disaster not only ruins the present, but, because it may strike again at any moment, it also erodes any possible future (Blanchot 1).

Contemplating his own mortality and the non-presence of people and places he once knew, the voice seems to respond to an implicit *Ubi sunt?* Where are those who were here before? The terrible answer, of course, is that they are entombed in the rubble of their homes and

places of work. Thus, in the 7th poem the one who speaks begins to memorialize the dead, dedicating a poem "A los amigos que no volveré a ver." He describes two everyday people, unknown to the poet, to represent all victims of the quake: "la desconocida que salió a las seis / […] / para ir a su trabajo de costurera o mesera" and "la que iba a la escuela para aprender / computación e inglés en seis meses" (19). Their mundane jobs, described by the voice represent the daily routine violently interrupted by the earthquake. The voice then asks the dead for forgiveness for the terrible fate they suffered before their anonymous death, and for their improper burial "Ruego que me perdonen porque nunca encontraron / su rostro verdadero en el cuerpo de tantos / que ahora se desintegran en la fosa común / y dentro de nosotros siguen muriendo." (19). The voice recognizes that poetry and solidarity are meaningless in the face of the earthquake's aftermath and thus, asks forgiveness for the mere fact they died and the voice lived, "Perdón por estar aquí contemplando, en donde hubo un edificio, / el hueco profundo, / al agujero de mi propia muerte." (20) Even Pacheco's attempt to memorialize the deceased suffers a process of ruination as he concludes with a *memento mori*, thinking of his own death.

Though the dead are mentioned here and there throughout the remainder of "Las ruinas de México," Pacheco's memorial seems rather weak. But it continues, in a way, as he celebrates those who tried to save the dead, and condemns those who are partially responsible for their premature end. He moves on in poem 8, celebrating and expresses gratitude for the great number of private citizens who, of their own volition, helped in the aftermath of the earthquake. They understood perfectly the phrase "el otro soy yo, yo soy el otro, / y tu dolor, mi prójimo lejano, / es mi más hondo sufrimiento" (20). The extended poem then becomes a remembrance not just for the dead, but for the survivors who did their best to save their neighbors or, at least, find their remains and give them some semblance of proper death rites. These two poems contrast sharply

with a third, biting, negative remembrance that the poet writes to condemn those whose actions increased the suffering of the victims and their families: “Reciba en cambio el odio, / también eterno, el ladrón, / el saqueador, el impasible, el despótico, / el que se preocupó de su oro y no de su gente, / el que cobró por rescatar los cuerpos, / el que reunió fortunas de quince mil millones de escombros / donde resonarán eternamente los gritos / de quince mil millones de muertos.” (21). Pacheco’s strong accusation of profiteering, government corruption, thievery, and despotism are followed by a curse of sorts as the voice wishes nothing less than eternal torment and a haunted existence for those who violated the trust of those they were elected to protect.

Poem 11 sees the voice admit that words, poetry even, fail to capture the brute reality which surrounds him. Before the disaster it seemed so easy to speak, in poems, “del polvo, la ceniza, el desastre y la muerte,” but among the ruins and rubble, he concedes that “ya no hay palabras / capaces de expresar qué significan / el polvo, la ceniza, el desastre y la muerte” (22). Despite accomplishing his stated task in section II, to memorialize the dead, the voice continues to be haunted by the disaster and the remainder of the poem reveals a steady descent into anguish and despair, a metaphorical hell.

Section III is prefaced by an epigraph from Francisco de Terrazas’s unfinished epic poem Nuevo Mundo y Conquista, “Llorosa Nueva España que, desecha, / te vas en llanto y duelo consumiendo…” (24). Pacheco’s choice of epigraph introduces the image of country in mourning, cast aside, which reflects the destruction personally witnessed by the voice in section II. But also, by virtue of citing Terrazas’s poem as an epigraphic text, the poet invokes the notion of an incomplete creative process in connection with the suffering of Mexico, an allusion to the planet’s continual, and therefore unfinished, process of evolution and the very source of the 1985 earthquake. Indeed in section III of “Las ruinas de México” the author of Mexico’s sorrow is the

earth itself, which knows no pity and "Sólo quiere / prevalecer transformándose" (24). Despite personifying the earth as an object that seeks its own supremacy and cares only for itself and its perpetual transformation, the voice, speaking once again in the first-person plural, is quick to negate the Earth's persona. Contrasting the planet's own process of creation and evolution with destruction, it states "La tierra que destruimos se hizo presente. / Nadie puede afirmar: 'Fue su venganza'" (24). The first line hints at an ecocritical reading of the quake as the planet's response to man-made pollution, only to negate it in the second line. The one who speaks explains that, as the old maxim of the three wise monkeys, the Earth is deaf, dumb, and blind. It neither hears the screams of its victims nor observes their deaths, however it speaks in a unique way, "habla or ella el desastre" (24).

Though Pacheco seeks to memorialize the dead with "Las ruinas de México," confronted with the sheer brute force of the earthquake and its capacity to distort any seemingly solid form that man gives to matter (steel rebar, cement, buildings, etc.), the voice, almost with a sense of awe and wonder, tends to focus more on the destructive power of the quake and the way it ruins whatever lies in its path. The Earth's presence and the disaster's immanence often supersede the absence of its victims. Thus section III is replete with images of rubble: "La ciudad de repente demolida / como bajo el furor de los misiles." (24-5). Another theme of ruination that emerges in section III is the idea of safe and comforting spaces, homes, gardens, etc., replaced with emptiness. In poem 3 "harapos de concreto y metal que fueron morada / [ahora] forman el desierto de los sepulcros" while in poem 5 "El lugar de lo que fue casa lo ocupa ahora / un hoyo negro (y representa al país entero)." (25). As in section II, when the voice gazes at the emptiness where his home once stood, staring into the nothing leads the voice to despair, imaging a Mexico without a past, present, or future. Thus, now evoking a kind of nihilism, the voice reads

emptiness as a black hole in place of a home, which for him, functions as a synecdoche for the country as a whole. The once who speaks seems to imply that if sections of the capital can be destroyed so thoroughly and so quickly, the country is little more than a void where a country once stood.

Once again, the voice's focus seems to move away from the dead as it experiences a surreal *memento mori* among the ruins. Drawing near to the abyss where a dwelling once stood, the voice sees something shiny among the garbage and rubble. "Me acerco a ver qué arde amargamente en la noche," he says, "y descubro mi propia calavera." (25). In a Nietzschean exercise, the one who speaks gazes into the abyss only to find that in doing so, "the abyss also looks into [him]" reminding him of his own mortality (Nietzsche 279). As stated above, m*emento mori* was commonly associated with ruin gazing in the Romantic era, and the tradition continued well into the 20th century. Of course, other objects, corpses even will remind one of their own eventual death. In fact, struggling to focus on his memorialization of the dead and not his own tenuous existence, in the11th poem of section III, the voice sees his own demise reflected in the eyes of the dead:

> Hay que cerrar los ojos de los muertos
> porque vieron la muerte y nuestros ojos
> no resisten esa visión
> Al contemplarnos
> en esos ojos que nos ven sin mirarnos
> vemos al fondo nuestra propia muerte. (28)

The uncomfortably lifeless eyes of the deceased become another abyss that stare right back at the living, forcing the survivors to confront the ugly reality of disaster, while also realizing that they too must die. The voice's *memento mori* reframes Pacheco's memorialization for the victims of the 1985 earthquake. He effectively reads the rubble as a ruin and in section II and commemorates the dead in his poetry, but section III shifts its focus to the inevitable death of

every living thing, even the one who speaks. Hence, the voice claims "Esta ciudad *no tiene historia*, / *solo martirologio*," and it reads Mexico itself as "El país del dolor, / la capital del sufrimiento, / el centro deshecho," by an earthquake that, rather than a singular event, becomes an "inmenso desastre interminable." (29). The voice, perhaps traumatized by what it witnesses, sees no end to the disaster. Thus, themes of perpetual descent and "desplome que no acaba nunca" become more prominent in the remainder of "Las ruinas de México." (25).

Section IV sees an intensification of the apocalyptic tone that begins to build in the previous section. Mexico City becomes a "ciudad / manchada por el desastre" itself, an interminable force that continues to cover everything with dust. The voice asks, "¿No ha de llegar el fin de la catástrofe?" or will dust and flies become "…los amos de la Nueva España?" (30). The one who speaks is increasingly plagued with survivor's guilt and everywhere he sees reminders of his own precarious mortality. The moon, a dusty desert planet, prefigures the eventual fate of the Earth, fallen leaves represent the ruin of trees and become metaphor for the city itself, which "jamás renacerá como estas hojas" (31). Poems 7-11 explore the idea that the very act of living requires that we suppose ourselves to be invulnerable. "El mundo se sostiene en la creencia / de que la muerte y la tragedia pactaron / nada más con nosotros y nos dejen tranquilos / para que todo siga mediobien, mediomal / —hasta que un día irrumpe la catástrofe." (31) But the disaster, despite being unanticipated, tends to arrive when least expected, ruining everything. The voice wonders why we, as a human race, bother to build cities, master the arts, avoid vices, and cultivate virtues if everything can be destroyed in mere minutes. In what is, perhaps, the poem's most nihilistic moment, the voice concludes section IV claiming that all that exists now is the desert of ruins, "y entorno suyo / lo que aún sigue en pie se afantasma" (34). As the memory of a city the voice once knew slowly disappears, for a moment Pacheco's poetic

voice forgets the temblor's victims and delves deeper and deeper into its own psyche, becoming seemingly incapable of perceiving anything other than ruins, dust, and death.

The last epigraph, which precedes section V, comes from Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose title, "The Kingdom of the Dead," foreshadows the tone of the poem's concluding section. The epigraph itself does the same, it reads, in Latin, "*Facilis descensus Averni*" which, loosely translated, means the path, or descent into hell is easy.[4] Encumbered with the weight of what he witnesses –a once great city, reduced to dust, thousands of people entombed in the ruins of what was their home or place of work, the bodies of thousands more disintegrated, never to be identified or properly buried– the voice retreats into a childhood memory, now colored by the disaster. The voice recalls digging up clams at a beach and realizes that in doing so they transformed the clam's place of rest into a place of torture and death. "Aquella noche no pensamos en esto, / Mucho menos en que algún día / la ciudad iba a correr la misma suerte / de la almeja en la playa" (35). After the earthquake, the voice ignores the scale of the catastrophe, all disasters, big or small, are still disasters and severely affect those involved.

Thus, he compares the sinking of the Titanic (whose remnants were discovered at the bottom of the sea a week before the quake), in which approximately 1,500 people died, to the sinking of Mexico City as it crumbles under the telluric force of the earth: "la ciudad zozobró en la tierra, / se estrelló contra un témpano invisible" before sinking into the profound depths of the dust (35). The voice returns once again to the image celestial entities falling through the void, stating that for those who died or suffered because of the earthquake, everything collapsed:

> el universo cayó
> se derrumbaron planetas.
> Fue una catástrofe cósmica:
> galaxias desplomándose, hoyos negros
> devorando el espacio entero.
> El espacio entero fue un hoyo negro que consumió

la vida como hasta entonces la entendimos. (36)

For many, including the voice, all that is left after the quake is nothing. All that they knew, their house, perhaps their place of work, and even their family, is reduced to nothing, and only dust remains. The one who speaks, still trying to find meaning or simply grasp the earthquake's imminence, revisits and restates ideas presented earlier. The city will never be the same, laments the voice, the Earth and the morning light betrayed those affected. Night, an invention of our ancestors, is reserved for evil and death, but light is a symbol of life and renovation, catastrophes are not supposed to happen at dawn "Así pues, nos duele como una doble traición / el terremoto de las siete" (37).

Surrounded by decomposing corpses and the inevitable swarm of flies born of the decay, the voice believes that the future belongs to parasitic beings, rats, flies, and ants. "No he vuelto a ver gorriones ni palomas. / Hoy esta es la ciudad de las moscas azules" (39). Their reign begins precisely because, alluding to Virgil's *Aeneid*, Mexico City is now "la ciudad de los muertos" and the flies sole purpose is to "ultimarnos, para limpiar / el mundo de la carroña que finalmente somos" (39-40). In the end, the voice reminds the reader, we are little more than carrion, food flies, maggots, rats, and other scrounging beings that are the only life remaining after what the voice reads as an apocalyptic end of Mexico, and even the universe. Man kind's symbolic descent into hell is seemingly complete, but the process of ruination is not concluded until ants consume the bodies of the flies and become "las dueñas del mundo," having participated in the biblical prophecy, returning dust unto dust. Strangely, though, Pacheco's poem does not end on this bleak note.

The eleventh poem in section V once again seeks remembrance of the victims of the 1985 earthquake. Refusing to simply accept what happened and move on, the one who speaks mimics

a government bureaucrat who might say “Lo que pasó pasó y es mejor olvidarlo. / Pudo haber sido peor. Después de todo / no son tantos los muertos.” (40). and then defies the invitation to simply move on as if nothing happened, choosing instead to obstinately remember the victims, “Estaremos de luto para siempre. / Los muertos / no morirán mientras tengamos vida.” (41). The last poem of “Las ruinas de México” is curious in its tone, not just because it is preceded by a metaphoric apocalypse and descent into hell, but also because it radically breaks with the what Pacheco’s readers know, melancholy, pessimism, and unwavering cynicism. His poem concludes with what Sefamí aptly refers to as a “lema de acción cívica” (56). After telling the destruction of Mexico and leading the reader to believe that all is lost, the voice simply states: “Todos sufrimos la derrota, / somos víctimas del desastre. / Pero en vez de llorar actuemos: // Con piedras de las ruinas hay que forjar / otra ciudad, otro país, otra vida.” (41). Sefamí rightly points out that in the context of Pacheco’s long tradition of irony and critical irreverence, the concluding lines of “Las ruinas de México” seem out of place (57). Especially when one considers the stated purpose of the poem, to memorialize the dead, the voice’s didactic call to rebuild and move forward is unusual. Unexpectedly, the voice claims we are all victims, that this specific disaster was somehow universal. Even if the collective voice with which the voice speaks is limited to the victims of the disaster, it feels as though the invitation to move on “en vez de llorar” comes too soon after the voice’s lament and apocalyptic descriptions earthquake. What is more, the call to civic action in the last three lines echo the process of construction that occurred after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, when several buildings in Mexico City were constructed using the stones of ruins. Strangely, the irony of rebuilding with the stones of ruins seems to be lost on Pacheco’s poetic self.

The ruination of hope

Readers familiar with José Emilio Pacheco's poetry are likely aware of his penchant for returning to and editing his work. The third edition of his complete poetry, *Tarde o temprano* (2000), was revised, corrected, and augmented, adding six tomes of poetry that had been published since the initial 1980 edition.[5] Additionally, as a note on the text indicates, for the third edition each page was revised. But far from undergoing a simple and straightforward process of revision to ensure faithful reproduction of the poems as they originally appeared, many poems "aparecen en lo que puede considerarse una nueva versión" (7). Unlike Octavio Paz, who changed his poems substantially, most of the changes Pacheco makes to his poems are inconsequential, replacing conjunctions with commas, substituting a word with its synonym, and an overall tendency toward brevity. However, in the case of year 2000 revision of "Las ruinas de México: Elegía del retorno," many allusions to specific places and times were omitted, and, more significantly, lines that exuded an almost optimistic sense of community, nation, and triumph over the earthquake, were removed.

By removing allusions to specific dates and times, Pacheco effectively removes himself and his own experience from the poem, making it more universal and concentrated on the quake's victims rather than his own personal tragedies, such as the trauma of seeing his childhood home reduced to rubble. For example, in section II, poem 2, the line "Muere el 21 de septiembre" was replaced with "Muere el día de septiembre". Though the earthquake occurred on the 19th, Pacheco himself didn't arrive in Mexico City until the 21st. Expunging that bit of autobiographical information creates distance between the voice and the poet himself, which may allow the poem to better speak for the dead. Another instance where Pacheco's elisions result in a more universal poem is the omission, in the revised version, of a specific place-name. When the voice asks forgiveness for those he could not save, in poem II.7, the original mentions

an unkown woman “que salió a las seis / de la colonia Granjas-Esmeralda o de Neza / para ir a su trabajo…” (19). The revised poem omits specific names of neighborhoods, allowing the unknown woman to become whoever the reader might imagine. However, the most significant changes to “Las ruinas de México” occur in the final and penultimate poems.

The two closing poems of the original and revised versions of “Las ruinas de México,” reproduced below, demonstrate one of Pacheco’s more drastic elisions. To be clear, the revised versions do not include large spaces between after the poem or between the section heading and the lines of poetry (as with poem 12, below). Rather, they are aligned in order to show how they coincide while emphasizing the amount of material that Pacheco omitted in the final version:

11
Jamás aprenderemos a vivir
en la epopeya del estrago.
Nunca será posible aceptar lo ocurrido,
hacer un pacto con el sismo, decir:
“Lo que pasó pasó y es mejor olvidarlo.
Pudo haber sido peor. Después de todo
no son tantos los muertos.”
Pero nadie se traga estas cuentas alegres.
Nadie cree en el olvido.
Estaremos de luto para siempre.
Los muertos
No morirán mientras tengamos vida. (40-1)

11
Jamás aprenderemos a vivir
en la epopeya del estrago.
Nunca será posible aceptar lo ocurrido,
hacer un pacto con el sismo,
olvidar a los que murieron. (333)

The revised version of the penultimate poem completely removes any reference to the “cuenta alegre” in the original, which is a possible reference to the government’s insistence on a quick return to normalcy after the temblor, as if nothing had occurred. But it also clarifies the one of the purposes of the poem, as Pacheco’s final line in the revised version of poem 11 is a statement of obstinate memory against forgetfulness. Poem 12, in its revised form, reveals a more radical change in meaning.

Pacheco's uncharacteristic call to civic action is completely omitted. Also absent is the claim that the loss of life and home affected all. Even the call to rebuild a new city, country, and life from the rocks of the ruins is changed. Rather, the voice questions whether or not the collective *nosotros* will or should do so. Then, in true Pachequian fashion, the voice cynically subverts its own question with a line of poetry that is completely new to "Las ruinas de México," "De otra manera," it says, "seguirá el derrumbe" (333).

12	12
No quiero darle tregua a mi dolor ni olvidar a los que murieron ni a los que están en la intemperie. Todos sufrimos la derrota somos víctimas del desastre. Pero en vez de llorar actuemos: Con piedras de las ruinas hay que forjar otra ciudad, otro país, otra vida. (41)	Con piedras de las ruinas ¿vamos a hacer otra ciudad, otro país, otra vida? De otra manera seguirá el derrumbe. (333)

Not only does the revised ending better fit Pacheco's poetic style, it also is more appropriate to the apocalyptic tone of "Las ruinas de México," which becomes more prominent as the poem nears its end. In the new version of the poem, there is no reason to rebuild, whether because of another disaster, or simply because the time never ceases to flow, the collapse and downfall will continue.

"The disaster ruins everything" (Blanchot 1). Faced with the mass of debris left by the earthquake, piles of cement, bricks, twisted steel beams and rebar, fallen apartment buildings, collapsed hotels, and the fragments of hospitals atop human remains, Pacheco chooses to read the aftermath of the earthquake not as a massive collection of rubble, but as a ruin. Thinking the disaster in this way, reading rubble against the grain, the poet figuratively gives it recognizable form, effectively monumentalizing the debris as a site of contemplation, memory, and, following

the age-old practice of ruin-gazing, a site to question one's own mortality as well as the mortality of those who once inhabited the ruin.

III. Jorge Humberto Chávez - *Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo para llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto*

Jorge Humberto Chávez, a native of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (b. 1959), published his first book of poetry, *De 5 a 7 pm*, in 1980, followed by eight intermittently-published collections of poems and two translations. His fifth book, *El libro de los poemas* (1996), exemplifies Chávez's lyrical tendencies. A connoisseur of Mexico's poetic canon, his verses pay homage to the works of José Juan Tablada, Ramón López Velarde, and, to a degree, the tradition of *modernismo*. For example, "El poema chino," the opening poem from *El libro de los poemas*, resembles a late 19th century orientalist gaze. Chávez's poem functions as a laudatory apostrophe to Huang-ti, a figure credited as the progenitor of contemporary Chinese culture. An ensuing poem, dedicated to Guillaume Apollinaire, paints 19th century France with a nostalgic brush while recalling the *modernista* fascination with French poetry and culture so common among Latin American bards of the modern era. The generally joyful tone of *El libro de los poemas* celebrates beauty, love, life, and exemplifies the notion of poetry for the sake of poetry. Despite the more or less joyful character of his poetry, Chávez's earlier work reveals shadows of things to come. For example, the second section of *El libro de los poemas* titled "intermedio: el poema triste," signals an abrupt change in tone from previous verses and demonstrates the poet's penchant for melancholy while foreshadowing his most recent work, which makes an even more radical leap into dark territory. Seventeen years after publishing *El libro de los poemas* Chávez's bleak lines appear in his 8th book, *Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto* (2013), a collection that serves, in part, as a response to the violence

that has long plagued Ciudad Juárez and reached its apex during President Felipe Calderón's war on drugs work.

Calderón was sworn into his office on December 1st 2006, despite a narrow and contested electoral victory. Not two weeks into his *sexenio* as President of Mexico, he ordered 4,000 troops to his home-state, Michoacán, to combat a spike in violence stemming from infighting among drug cartels (BBC News). Similar increases occurred nation-wide as the Mexican president "increased the deployment of troops and police on the streets to almost 50,000" after only 10 days in office (Watt and Zepeda 2). Unsurprisingly, Calderón's policy of militarization and escalation led to a steady growth in violence. The sight of a turf war between competing cartels, Chavez's home state and native city became the center of Mexico's drug-related violence. In March 2009, responding to the dramatic spike in violent crime, Genaro García Luna, Mexico's chief of public safety, dispatch 1,000 more federal police and 2,000 soldiers from the Mexican military to Ciudad Juárez (Ellingwood). As *Los Angeles Times* reporter Ken Ellingwood explained at the time:

> Those soldiers were the first of an expected 5,000 additional troops who will be sent to help perform basic police functions. The military reinforcements will bring to more than 7,000 the number of soldiers in Ciudad Juárez. […]. About 425 federal officers already had been posted in Ciudad Juarez, where the death toll last year exceeded 1,600, the highest in a country racked by drug-related violence. (3 Mar. 2009)

The increased police and military presence, meant to put an end to cartel violence in Juárez once and for all, did not work; in fact, the problem worsened. Jean Franco explains that the army simply became "another abusive power," adding to the death toll, murdering and raping some of

the very citizens they were sent to protect (215). In 2009 there were 2,082 deaths related to drug trafficking in the state of Chihuahua, the bulk of them in Ciudad Juárez. The mortality rate of deaths linked to narco violence peaked in 2010 when the state tallied 3,185 such deaths (Watt and Zepeda 224). During Calderón's presidency, Mexico's official discourse would associate each one of these deaths with lawlessness on the part of the victim, implying that those who die, must be involved with the drug trade in some capacity. However, as Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda write, "Most of the violence…seems to have been directed towards civil society in order to create a climate of fear and terror" (185).[6] Jorge Humberto Chávez's latest tome of poetry responds to the atmosphere of fear and violence created by Calderón's politics of escalation.

The poetic name of the collection *Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto* evokes images of drought and desiccation. Chávez's title is punctuated by the cover-photo which depicts the remnants of a rusted-out automobile frame resting on its side in a litter-strewn desert-landscape while the Sierra de Juárez stands in the distance, visually separated from the wreckage by a razor wire fence.[7] The image along with the collection's title announce to the reader that they have arrived in an inhospitable landscape, a veritable wasteland. Chavez's title could be read as a poem itself.[8] The image of a dried up río Bravo –which is the main source of water and life blood for the drought stricken Juarez Valley– serves as a metaphor for the tears of the living, those who survived and live with the violence of the drug war. They are witnesses of a man-made disaster that has taken many lives, transformed their own, and caused so much mourning that they can no longer cry, their tears shed so frequently that the source, like the river, has completely dried up. Chávez presents his reader with a city suffering from a drought of humanity, no longer able to express emotion or properly mourn for the dead, their capacity to do so used up.

Te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto (referred to henceforth as *Te diría*) deservedly won the 2013 Premio Bellas Artes de Poesía Aguascalientes. The jury, whose decision to awarded Chávez's *poemario* was unanimous, noted his themes of a thirsting landscape and parched emotion and were particularly won over by what they describe as the poet's "lenguaje seco y de alta densidad poética" which presents the reader with "una crónica precisa de la atmósfera trágica que vive una zona de México" (7). The Aguascalientes jury's description of *Te diría* as a chronicle is notable given that the work functions as a kind of fragmentary testimonial account the horrible violence resulting from a man-made disaster that is Mexico's war on drugs under Felipe Calderón. Divided into four sections –Crónicas, Fotogramas, Poemas desde la autopista, and Dagas– the first section, more than others, deals primarily with human tragedy as it relates to victims of drug-related violence in Ciudad Juárez and is the focus of this study. The poetic voice of Crónicas, as the section-title hints, employs a largely narrative style characterized by a dry and terse informational tone similar to that a newspaper reporter might use. The majority of poems in *Te diría* are devoid of punctuation and rhyme, many of them composed of doublets (perhaps meant to evoke the idea of elegiac couplets) or tercets with no apparent syllabification. Along with the dearth of punctuation, frequent enjambment give the verses a flowing feeling, as a river with no beginning or end. Chávez's chosen form forces the reader to actively examine each poem, searching for the beginning or end of a sentence or phrase, demanding the reader's close attention. The voice, often speaking autobiographically, serves as a witness of sorts, testifying as though it were the voice of an eyewitness, frequently conveying information about violent happenings after they occur.

Overall, *Te diría* gives the reader a sense of things breaking down and changing their nature. Words occasionally fail to signify what they normally do, policemen hunt citizens rather than protecting them, religion fails to save, morgues can't store the bodies of the dead because their sheer number is overwhelming, and the feeling of normalcy that is an extensions of the mundane routine is interrupted as violence imposes a new order. As the reader progresses through *Te diría* they notice a society breaking down, the quotidian slowly erodes as public entities, along with the city itself, fail to fulfill the purpose of their creation, as if an irreversible process of ruination as slowly eating away at the order of things. Specifically because he shows what is already ruined –the aftermath and remnants of violence in a society crumbling under the ever-looming threat of death– I read Chavez's particular depiction of Juárez as the ruins of disaster. Contrasting Pacheco's apt metaphor for our tenuous existence, dust falling through the air in a constant and continual process of destruction, Chávez's poetry chronicles a completed process of ruination. Replete with imagery of fallen bodies, broken families, and a damaged civic system, *Te diría* reflects a metropolis that Jean Franco describes as "a corrupt society in which institutions were already compromised and offered collusion rather than resistance to the drug trade" (215).

An interesting result of the poet's focus on the ruins of disaster is that, despite the thematic focus on drug-related violence, Chávez's poetic representation of Ciudad Juárez is one devoid of the perpetrators of violence themselves. Indeed, this collection does not depict any narcos, and includes only scant allusions to assassins or corrupt policemen. The poet's tacit refusal to represent the narcos themselves is part of what Oswaldo Zavala characterizes as "una potente crítica al discurso oficial sobre el narco" in recent Mexican poetry (Crítica…). According to Zavala, the official discourse surrounding narcos –cartels cobbled together in the mountains of

Sinaloa and Chihuahua comprised of bosses richer than Donald Trump, surrounded by legions of hitmen, self-taught financial geniuses, and military strategists– is not only disseminated in narconarratives, corridos, and the press, but also by the Mexican government, which uses the narrative as a way to justify its actions related to the drug war (Crítica…). Zavala's critique echoes that of Watt and Zepeda, who write that "one of the most insidious and self-justifying insinuations of Mexican political discourse is to associate all those who have been killed [since December 1st, 2006] with improper activities" (185). If the dead have connection whatsoever to the cartels, in the view of his administration, Calderón's actions and the resultant escalation of violence would be justified. Whether the majority of those who died in Juárez during Calderón's presidency had associations with the cartels or not, many who died were, undeniably, innocent bystanders. In fact, according to some accounts, the very police and military forces sent north to protect the citizens of Juárez, were responsible for some of their deaths (Watt and Zepeda 192-93).

Regardless of the accuracy of Zavala, Watt, and Zepeda's critiques, Chávez has no interest in perpetuating narco lore, rather, the Chihuahuan poet presents the reader with his own suffering and that of the community arguably most affected by its federal government's policies. He shows his reader the aftermath of the narco's presence and the remnants of their violence: corpses, families that are torn apart, empty streets, and lingering fear. Chávez describes the focus of his award-winning *poemario* as "el desastre social que le ocurrió a Ciudad Juárez de 2006 a 2012, que fue el sexenio de Felipe Calderón y que prácticamente terminó con la vida social de Ciudad Juárez" (Cabezas). It is no mistake that Chávez describes the period of Calderón's presidency as a social disaster, more than 15,000 people were killed in Juárez alone, a staggering and incomprehensible number by any measure. Jean Franco used similar language to describe Mexico under Calderón as a "showcase for disaster" (*Cruel Modernity* 215).

I return to the earlier point that disasters, human or otherwise, are makers of ruins. As a direct result of the tragic deaths of so many people, drug-related violence threatened the border-city in other ways, among them Chávez includes, "la extinción del nexo social,...la deserción urbana, [el] descenso dramático de la renta y [el] empleo en Ciudad Juárez, y...un fenómeno que nos hizo vivir la vida hacia adentro" (qtd. in Cabezas). By many accounts, each night the looming threat of random bloodshed in Juárez turned a bustling city of 1.5 million people into a seeming ghost town, a city in social-ruin. Many fled, and those who stayed tended to avoid leaving their homes unnecessarily, especially at night. Thus, claims Chávez, *Te diría* is a collection of poems that reflects a "*polis* [que] ya no era para el uso diario de las personas," a city that, in a few short years, "ha sido depredado" (qtd. in Cabezas). Interestingly, the verb depredate emerges from an etymology that denotes a thing made into the booty or prey, and by definition, a thing plundered and pillaged. Chavez's careful choice of words not only evokes an image of the perpetrators of drug-related violence as profiteers, but also reflects a city whose inhabitants have been preyed upon, their city laid to waste, or made into ruins.

The opening poem of Chavez's award winning collection, "Satán," introduces the idea of an evil so epistemologically incomprehensible that it could only be the work of the archetype of evil himself, the devil. The 18-line narrative poem in free verse begins with a rather innocuous image of a delicate butterfly overzealously pinned to some unnamed surface, perhaps as part of an amateur entomologist's collection: "105 alfileres han detenido el curso de tus desnudos pétalos farfala" (15). The voice speaks as an apostrophe to a butterfly, whom the reader later learns is not an insect, but a five-year-old girl from Ciudad Juárez, "farfala / de cinco años del Río Bravo del Norte / como un barco en medio de la luz avanzando la tarde al flanco / de los cerros del poniente jugabas por ahí en la acera" (15). As those familiar with the city know, in

1987 the hills to the west of Ciudad Juárez, behind which the sun sets, were emblazoned with a pro-Christian message that reads "Cd. Juárez: La Biblia es la verdad. Léala!"[9] However, after the sun sets the unlit message disappears and as the poem's title insinuates, under the cover of darkness the devil descends upon the city. The following lines describe a scene in which the girl's mother and a neighbor from across the street take care of some mundane task, "de las nadas que llenan nuestras vidas," while the sun begins to set, and devil begins to exercise his influence: "el sol cae ruedan los autos por la calle de tierra y el aire crepuscular / lleva como acordes las palabras del Dios malo / a los oídos de la mujer que te ve jugar a diario enfrente de su casa" (15). The voice then depicts the kidnapping of the young girl, whose busy mother has temporarily left her alone in order to accomplish some other routine task, "Vuelvo," she says, to her daughter, as she had likely done countless times before. Only this time, as the voice explains to the young girl, "nunca más [le] volverá a ver" (15).

> la mujer se acerca y te toma de la mano y atraviesa contigo el polvo
> levantado por los automóviles
>
> llegan a la estancia miserable donde la voz de Dios insiste en
> su propósito ponle un alfiler y otro alfiler
>
> y otro alfiler hasta llegar al 105 para que se detenga la voz y el sol
> termine por entrar bajo los cerros
>
> y el polvo de los coches se asiente sobre el mundo (15)

The tragedy of the kidnapping and murder of this young girl is that the mother was betrayed by her trust in a routine. She had likely left her daughter to play alone on the sidewalk for a moment many times before while she ran a quick errand, upon her return, finding her daughter where she had left her, safely playing on the sidewalk. However, disasters, man-made or otherwise, are unexpected, they interrupt the very routine we come to rely upon.

To paraphrase Pacheco, tragedy strikes when it is least expected, when the routine fails us and there is a rupture between an action and its expected result. The thing which had occurred countless times before, does not in one instance and chaos, the disaster, replaces order. The brutal murder of a five-year-old girl is hardly routine. And yet, in Chávez's poem, as they do every day, cars continue to pass by, stirring up dust, which, as always, uneventfully settles back in place.[10] The real tragedy here is that despite the mariposa's death, the world goes on and, as Franco notes, such horrible acts form part of the new normal in Juárez (216).

As I mentioned, the opening poems title, "Satán" insinuates that for Chávez the only possible explanation for such a horrendous reality is that the devil inspired it. The poetic voice hopes to lend some meaning to this pointless death by tenderly referring to the five-year-old girl as a butterfly. Yet, when contrasted with the brutal and methodical murder of the child by a schizophrenic woman, in the name of God nonetheless, the one who speaks fails to create meaning where there can be none. Satan has made his presence known, how else could the violence that plagues Ciudad Juárez be explained? Chavez's collection of poetry attempts to make sense of the senseless, give meaning to meaningless deaths, and codify the ruins of this man-made disaster. However, as the title indicates, the voice ultimately fails, and simply explains that in the face of such horror, such evil, even the ability to mourn is gone, "te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber que ya no hay río ni llanto."

The subsequent poem, "Crónica de mis manes," introduces what will become a central theme of *Te diría*, the death of the poet's father. The first three lines follow: "Mi padre tuvo la sabia idea de refugiarse en un hospital / y morirse el mismo día / en que el pueblo votó al nuevo gobierno" (16). Chávez's curious image of his father as a refugee in a hospital makes sense as the poem continues, as does the reference to a new government. By dying, the poem explains, his

father “no alcanzó a ver / que empezaron a caer como moscas” (16). Despite the lack of a temporal referent, the voice likely refers to the escalating violence in Juárez after Calderón implemented his strong anti-drug policies. Lines 6 through 11 approximate the experience of the city’s growing violence, which initially only affects the far side of Juárez, but creeps closer, first into a neighboring barrio, then affecting people the voice knows, followed by the neighbors themselves, and “finalmente el atardecer nos regaló la muerte del amigo / y del hermano” (16). Like many who read about crime in their cities, the voice initially perceives it as a phenomenon that happens to others, those who live on the other side of the city. Yet here it grows nearer until it affects voices *manes*. The poet’s use of the Latin loan word *manes* in the poem’s title is interesting in that it could be read multiple ways, including a possible critique of Mexico’s government.

Both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the RAE’s *Diccionario de la lengua española* define *manes* as the souls or spirits of the dead, while the OED specifies that *manes* are specifically the souls of one’s dead ancestors, so the poetic voice could be referring specifically its kindred dead, his father and brother, as its *manes*. Another possible reading of Chávez’s use of *manes* draws on an older definition that emphasizes the benevolence of the deceased souls. As discussed above, the official story regarding narco-related crimes asserts that only those involved in the drug trade are subject to the violence that envelopes Juárez. Thus, by implication, the poet’s *manes* died because they were somehow involved with the narcos. If Chávez is using the older definition of *manes*, his verbiage casts a wider net, including not just his kindred dead, but all the victims mentioned in the poem –neighbors, acquaintances, and even those on the other side of the city– as the voice’s own. Additionally, referring to those mentioned as his *manes* testifies of the benevolence of the dead souls included in his poem, a claim that directly opposes

and resists the Mexican government's official story that those who die in the aftermath of Calderón's escalation of the drug war are involved in illicit activities.

Chavez's poem then chronicles the atmosphere of fear, described by Watt and Zepeda above, that overtakes his city as the threat of death becomes omnipresent:

> [Y] la ciudad como un animal en cacería y los automovilistas que
> avanzan pronto pronto observando de reojo al conductor de
> al lado que vigila por el retrovisor al conductor de atrás
> mientras el policía el magistrado y el ladrón se ponen de acuerdo
> y dicen ahora vas tú y luego sigues tú y el animal empezó a perder
> el resplandor de su pelaje y más tarde la piel. (16-17)

The violence changes Juárez from a livable city into one whose residents feel they cannot trust anyone, like an animal being hunted who will eventually be caught, and killed. They fear not only their fellow citizens but also the police and their superiors, who are likely on the take with thieves. Perhaps the most chilling line of "Crónica de mis manes," quoted above, describes how corrupt authorities arbitrarily decide the fate of the very citizens they are charged with protecting. As they disappear one by one, the animal's fur coat, a metaphor for the city, begins to lose its splendor and beauty, it undergoes a slow process of ruination. While this may not necessarily reflect reality, the air of fear that hangs over the city changes its citizen's perceptions, inverting and reordering things under a new regime of disaster, under which rules break down and people are reduced to their animal instinct to simply survive. Chávez closes his poem alluding to this very idea, "mírate ahora convertido en un pequeño animal / con los ojos en las cuencas de sus hijos / vagando ciego y sin corazón por las ciudades" (17). The *tú* here is enigmatic. Does it refer once again to the city and its people, who look at the eyes of other drivers in their rear-view mirrors rather than watching where they are going? Or is the *tú* alluding to the corrupt police, who like a "pequeño animal," looks into the eyes of Juárez's citizens as he

decides who the next victim will be? Regardless, there is a sense that the people of Juárez are being watched

"El hombre de shorts blancos me hace pensar en mi padre" demonstrates how one's perspective shapes perception, how one's tragedy can mean something else for another. Several brief autobiographical memories from the poet's youth comprise the bulk of verses. Images such as a relative cooking bread, the young poet washing his grandfather's truck on a Saturday, and hoping to skip church the next morning paint the border region in a picturesque tone, describing it as "un espléndido animal tirado en el pasto cultivado / con el lomo irradiante de luz" (18), an unusual metaphor that contrasts the bright sunlight and tranquil images with what is to come.[11] The voice reveals that through the lens of a child, words such as "war" and "deportation" take on a different meaning. For example, rather than associating "war" with the harsh realities and suffering it represents, for the young poet it meant seeing "los jóvenes reclutas de Fort Bliss con sus largos automóviles / despidiéndose de sus chicas como si fueran de paseo a la línea / de fuego" (18). Further, the young Chávez associated the word "deportación" with the inverse of what it symbolizes for many today, the return of his father to the family home, and happy reunions. Lines 11-18 depict such an occasion:

> recuerdo estar limpiando el parabrisas y verlo asomar en la esquina
> remota con una pequeña caja en las manos
>
> me recuerdo diciendo en voz alta mamá alguien viene yo creo que
> ese hombre es mi padre y así fue
>
> lo habían detenido un día antes en Denver mientras tomaba un lunch
> en la fábrica de colchones de Stuart Street
>
> y pidió el favor de ir por su caja al locker porque en ella estaban
> nuestras tarjetas de esa navidad y algunas fotos (18)

After sharing these two memories, the voice confesses that they now seem like postcards cards from some far off paradise because in the past, "guerra y deportación eran sin duda otra cosa" (18). In the poem's present, however, there is no mistaking ugly realities for something they are not. The doublet's turn darker as one who speaks describes slowing his car down to see that "ese hombre de pantalones cortos blancos / está acostado nada más ahí con un tiro que le ha hecho un pequeño / agujero sin sangre en el pómulo izquierdo/ mientras voy a verte" (19). The grizzly scene witnessed by the one who speaks signals an abrupt change in tone and the closing line reveals that the poem is an apostrophe to an unidentified "tú." To whom is the poem directed? Also, as the title indicates, why does the fatally-wounded man in the white shorts remind the poet of his father? Chávez's poem leaves the reader with two unsolved mysteries. "El hombre de los shorts…" is dedicated to Miguel Ángel Chávez Díaz de León, the poet's brother, who, one could justifiably argue, is the "tú" referenced in the final line. But this doesn't shed on light on the poem itself, unless it is simply an apostrophe to his brother, comprised of three memories, two positive and one negative, that the voice associates with his father. Since the identity of the "tú" is opaque, I appealed to Chávez, who explained that "El poema es una serie de charlas dirigidas a mi novia. Mi padre ya había muerto. Cuando vi al hombre de shorts blancos caído en la acera yo iba a la casa de mi novia a verla. Y cuando lo vi, recordé a mi padre pensando: 'qué bueno que murió y ya no alcanzó a ver esto.'" (Cluff). Considering this revelation, the focus of the poem, is the notion of disassociation. The voice associates the word "Viet Nam" with fancy cars and suave soldiers, the word "deportación" with happy reunions, and the phrase "hombre de los shorts blancos" with his father. The disaster inverts and confuses the nature of things. Fond postcard memories are replaced with macabre images of murder. The world, innocently viewed through the eyes of a child is replaced with the cynical gaze of a world-weary adult who is

grateful for his father's passing, because things have only gotten worse. The personal disaster of losing one's father is subtly affected by the social disaster of Juárez as the two tragedies begin to overlap and coexist in *Te diría*. We have previously seen the poet's relief that his father didn't live to see the man-made disaster that overtook Juárez during Calderón's presidency. The theme continues in a short poem titled "2006."

The eighth poem of Chavez's collection, "2006," consists of four three-line stanzas, and has no apparent meter or rhyme scheme. The year 2006 is immediately recognizable as the beginning of Calderón's presidency, the same year he implemented a policy of escalation that resulted in an explosion of drug-related violence in Mexico. As is the case with many other poems in *Te diría*, "2006" works toward an understanding of disaster through the lens of individual experience. Chavez's poetic voice, drawing upon autobiographical elements, first reads the national tragedy that begins in 2006 on the personal level, the experience of a son losing and burying his father. The poem begins, "En el año 2006 mi padre adelgazó tanto / que pudimos meter su cuerpo en una caja / de 1.70 por .65 m" (25). The death of Chavez's father is a motif that appears throughout his most recent collection. However, this particular retelling of his death is unique in that it emphasizes the corporeal aspect of death. The father's thinning body, presumably once larger, fits in a coffin that is approximately five and a half feet tall, and just over two feet wide at the time of death. The second stanza repeats the image of a thinning body as the poetic voice notes that "con el demonio muy adentro" its own body lost 17 kilos. Yet, rather than repeat the verb *adelgazar*, as in the first stanza, the voice uses a metaphorical phrase, "yo mismo empecé a perder humanidad" (25). The notion of losing weight due to distress and mourning is instead characterized as the loss of one's humanity. The theme of diminishing humanity continues in the third stanza, wherein the year 2006 sees love itself grows so thin that

even a slight breeze could blow it to the other side of the river, out of Juárez and across the international border. The final stanza presents the idea of a thing thinning out and losing its humanity in its final development:

> En el año 2006 mi país empezó a adelgazar
> La calle y la noche más flacas cada vez
> La ciudad crecida de cadáveres (25)

The concluding stanza reflects the spread of violence alluded to in "Crónica de mis manes" but also demonstrates Chávez's particular attempt to think the disaster of Calderón's Mexico. Beginning with a personal tragedy, the poem "2006" reveals how grief and sadness, as if they were a disease, seem to naturally branch out from the father, through the son, to the idea love itself, to Ciudad Juárez and ultimately the whole country. In the context of the poem, Chavez's use of *adelgazar* as a metaphor is quite rich. The word's etymology emphasizes the notion of an object becoming delicate, even fragile. The final stanza sees the city growing thin, perhaps shedding dead weight, but also losing a part of itself and becoming less integral, less whole, a city ripe for ruination. Further, the city and night, which are described as "más flacas cada vez," devoid of people to give them life, are contrasted by the last image of a city swelling with cadavers. The message is clear, 2006 is a turning point for the metaphorical body of Mexico, which grows thin by losing love and humanity, only swell, or grow fat with cadavers. Mexico's body politic is unhealthy and in a state of crisis.

While several poems deal with drug war violence indirectly, or even in the abstract, two poems address it head on, "Otra crónica" and "Crónica de El Campanario." Both poems draw from the poet's personal experiences with the drug war and also include references to events that were widely reported in the press. Though similar in subject matter, the poems differ in the way they portray the victims of drug war violence, "Otra crónica" uses the names of deceased where

possible, while "Crónica de El Campanario" imitates the bureaucratic discourse of law enforcement that dehumanizes the dead, labeling them as body A, B, C, etc. Yet both poems are equally tragic in their content. "Otra crónica" opens with a reference to the first murder of a news reporter who covered the police beat for *El Diario* in Ciudad Juárez. The first two doublets follow:

> El 6 de octubre de su año Armando El Choco nos comentó en
> una fiesta que habían ido a buscar
>
> y lo encontraron un mes más tarde esa mañana que calentaba el motor
> de su auto para llevar a sus hijas a la escuela (20)

Armando "El Choco" Rodríguez was a close personal friend of Chávez who for fifteen years wrote about crime, and eventually corrupt public officials and the drug war in Juárez. The morning of November 13th, 2008 he was assassinated in the driver's seat of his car while, as the poem says, he warmed up the car in order to take his daughter to school. The poem omits the horrible detail that Rodríguez's 8-year-old daughter Ximena was in the passenger's seat when her father was murdered. Journalist and essayist Charles Bowden dedicates his book[12] on the violence in Juárez to Rodríguez, "who was gunned down…after filing 907 stories on the murders of that calendar year. Like the rest of us [reporters], he was a dead man walking" (viii). To this day those involved in Armando Rodríguez's murder have not been brought to justice.

The next doublet introduces the metaphor of the río Bravo as an indicator of the city's humanity. Both quite robust initially, later dry up completely. The voice indicates that in 1967, when Chávez was the same age as Rodríguez's oldest daughter, there was enough water in the river that bifurcates Juárez and El Paso that the poet's family could go there to wash their cars. In 1990, the voice continues, "los policías iban al río Bravo para pescar muchachas / que esperaban en la orilla para cruzar a El Paso" (20). The verb *pescar* is open to multiple meanings, the voice

may be indicating that the police would go to the river to literally fish the bodies of young would-be immigrants out of the water. Or, perhaps they were poaching the girls, for their own nefarious motives, as they waited to cross, a possible reference to the Juárez femicides that began to draw attention in the 90s. Both interpretations reveal the poems pathos and indicate its movement towards tragedy. The fifth doublet emphasizes the desiccation of the río Bravo, which corresponds to the increasingly horrible incidents that occur on and around its shores: "en el año 2010 ya sin río casi un migra y Sergio Adrián de 13 años / pelearon él con una piedra en su mano y el agente con un revolver" (20).[13] The event referenced here occurred in June 2010. U.S. Border patrol Agent Jesús Mesa Jr. apprehended a teenager who, along with his friends, was suspected of smuggling people into El Paso. While Mesa had one suspect in custody on the U.S. side of the cement-lined river bed, Adrián and his friends began to throw rocks at Mesa, who then fired his weapon across the river at the teenagers on the Mexican side, killing Adrián. Footage of the incident shows a river so small one could leap across it. But while the physical border that separated the U.S. and Mexico was shrinking, it seemed to stem the wave of violence, containing it on the Mexican side of the border.

Like the river, the tone of the poetic voice grows dryer as it chronicles other incidents that occurred in 2010, a store clerk who was murdered, shot in the face, for refusing to give in to extortion, and 17 youth who were "cazados uno a uno" while they celebrated a sports victory in the Salvárcar neighborhood (20). The voice then cries out in lamentation, likening the suffering on the northern Mexican border to that described in Greek mythology, "oh jóvenes hijos de Cadmo yo sé que quiseran estar en otra parte / pero hoy están aquí cantaba el viejo Ovidio" (20). In Greek mythology Cadmus is the founder of Thebes, a city that initially thrived but later gave way to civil unrest. Chávez references Cadmus's children because each of them befall tragic

fates and some, like the citizens of Juárez, lose their children to overly violent and untimely deaths (Hamilton 372-75). Further, in their old age, after the death of their grandson Pentheus, Cadmus and his wife Harmonia flee their home city "as if trying to flee…from misfortune. But misfortune followed them" and the gods turned the royal couple into serpents (Hamilton 375). Edith Hamilton writes that since Harmonia and Cadmus were not guilty of any wrongdoing, their fate was not a punishment, but "proof that…the innocent suffered as often as the guilty" (375).

Hamilton's poignant summation of Cadmus's misfortune denotes a kind of fatalism that could describe Juárez during Calderón's presidency. Indeed there seems to be no logic to the widespread grief that spreads through the border town, death blindly chooses its victims from the innocent as well as the guilty. Chávez's reference to Greek mythology echoes Pacheco's invocation of the Bible in *Miro la tierra*, the Chihuahuan poet writes of events so terrible they are akin to the archetype of sorrow, Greek tragedy. The two doublets that conclude "Otra crónica" are not unlike Greek tragedy, in that they involve a sort of sacrifice and are at once disturbing and truly sad. Nameless perpetrators (identified only by verbs conjugated in the third plural form) threaten to kill a woman's husband if she refuses to get in their automobile for what will be her last ever car ride, presumably because, for some unknown reason, she is to be driven to an anonymous location where her body will be dumped after she is murdered:

> y a ti mujer que sacaron de su casa y amenazaron con matar
> a tu marido su no subías a tu último paseo en auto
>
> te diría que fuéramos al río Bravo a llorar pero debes saber qua ya
> no hay río no llanto (20)

Of course the last doublet serves as the title for Chávez's collection and takes on a deeper meaning in the context of "Otra crónica". Throughout the poem the río Bravo functions as a metaphor for what one might call the civic health of Ciudad Juárez. That is, a city that functions

as it should, as a place for its citizens to live, work, and love in relative safety. The river's water level drops as the poem develops, ultimately drying up completely. As discussed above, the dried river symbolizes a city suffering from a drought of decency and humanity. Those who are yet to die, have suffered and cried so much already that have lost the ability to do so. It is impossible to grieve and mourn the dead given that their emotions, and the source of tears are completely spent, much like the river that gives life to the city and valley of Juárez has completely dried up. "The disaster ruins everything," and its effects are especially taxing for those who survive it (Blanchot 1).

"Crónica de El Campanario" borrows its name from the eponymous neighborhood in south east Juárez, which has been the site of some disturbing murders. Chávez's poem recounts an event that occurred in El Campanario on November 3rd, 2009, outside the Pedro E. Medina González elementary school, just off of Calle Paseo de los Compositores. According to eye witness reports, some armed men arrived in a car and detained for young men in their twenties, forcing them to stand against the exterior wall of the elementary school before executing them. "Crónica de El Campanario," as other poems in *Te diría*, emphasizes the disruptive nature of violence. Chávez describes what could be an average day en El Campanario or any other neighborhood in Juárez:

> El meridiano acaba de pasar entre los escasos árboles de esta calle
> que está por entrar a su estamento oscuro
>
> suenan los motores de los autos en la esquina de la colonia
> El Campa un perro se detiene antes de cruzar a otra acera
>
> cuatro muchachos están de pie con las espaldas en la barda de
> la escuela Pedro Medina creyendo aún que nada ocurrirá (26).

The quotidian happenings of El Campanario could be those of any day. The routine, unremarkable goings on denote a sense of normalcy. Like the mother in "Satanás," the four

young men believe that the routine will continue as it had before and that nothing extraordinary will happen. Yet, as Anderson writes, "*disaster*…connotes disordering, a breaking of limits or structural norms" (3). In an instant, someone yells and the dog begins to flee. Once again, Chávez does not depict the perpetrators, only their victims.

What follows in verses 11 through 28 are dry, informational descriptions of the violence and four victim's bodies, injected with a pathos that exhibits the mental toll of having witnessed the worst of humanity: "el cuerpo A cae de inmediato tez morena clara de veinte años / complexión regular vestido en su color azul / algunas balas atraviesan los bloques de argamassa del muro y caen / en al patio donde los niños juegan básquet" (26). All four bodies are described in similar manner, is if the poem were taken from a crime scene investigator's report. With "Crónica de El Campanario" Chávez's dry tone, with which he describes the atmosphere in Juárez during the Calderón presidency, reaches its apex. After three corpses are describe in terse, police-talk, a single image breathes some humanity into the poem, as a young girl, hearing the gun shots "sale sin alma / a buscar a su hija en la tienda de abarrotes" (27). The voice's description reminds the reader that people live and buy groceries in these neighborhoods that so frequently become crime scenes. Despite the violence goes on somehow. Yet rather than find her daughter,[14] the young woman leaving the store is faced with the gruesome scene of a dead twenty-year old:

> el cuarto muchacho alcanza a correr pero cae bañado de balas y sol
> en el centro de la calle y su rostro queda en un hueco del asfalto
>
> ahí la joven mujer lo encuentra y nota que sus respiraciones levantan
> una fina nube de tierra que sube al aire desde su nariz
>
> mide 1.60 de estatura es también moreno viste camisa y tenis grises
> vivió solamente veinte años: cuerpo D (27)

In spite the poem's elegiac subject matter, the voice, here a simulacrum of bureaucratic disinterest, seems incapable of expressing any real emotion when faced with describing four prematurely truncated lives, resulting in what feels like a half-hearted lament drawn from a police report. In fact, the voice allows an intradiegetic soundtrack to heighten the sense of lamentation as it describes a song playing on a nearby radio: "*los caminos de la vida no son como yo esperaba* nos está cantando / ahora un ballenato [sic] melancólico / que surge lejos desde un estéreo entre las angostas casas que han / tendido que cerrar ventanas y puertas" (27). One of few intertextual references in Crónicas, the song alluded to in these verses, "Los Caminos de La Vida," was written by the Colombian *vallenato* musician Omar Geles, better known as the founding member of Los Diablitos.[15] Geles's lyrics tell of hardship that he and his brother experienced as children raised by a single mother and express the singer's desire to provide for his tired mother now that he is grown, "Por ella lucharé hasta que me muera / Y por ella no me quiero morir". The sad irony of Chávez's reference to the Diablitos's song of course, is that the four young men from El Campanario depicted in his poem will not have the opportunity to care for their aged mothers. Their lifeless bodies litter the road, giving new meaning to the Diablitos's lyrics which echo through the neighborhood, as if to express the melancholic regret that the deceased might share if only they could speak:

> Los caminos de la vida
> No son como yo pensaba
> Como los imaginaba
> No son como yo creía
>
> Los caminos de la vida
> Son muy difícil de andarlos
> Difícil de caminarlos
> Y no encuentro la salida

The last line of "Los Caminos de la Vida" seems to speak for the neighborhood and even the city as a whole, our path is difficult and we can't find a way out. For a moment El Campanario is transformed by the violence, which superimposes its own order upon the quotidian. But soon a bus passes by, interrupting the mid-day sun and "rompiendo / el orden que la muerte ha instalado en esta calle" (27). A sense of normalcy begins to take root once again, but something is different, as if the disordering effect of disaster and violence leaves some sort of trace in El Campanario. As Chávez writes, "los árboles que ven desde la acera se mantienen inmóviles pero en / este día de noviembre se negarán a dar so sombra" (27). The closing line of "Crónica de El Campanario" gives the impression that this incident has somehow changed the very nature of the neighborhood. The poet's metaphor of a personified tree refusing to give shade lyrically echoes Blanchot's statement that "The disaster ruins everything" (1).

We have examined poems that explore personal tragedy as well as social disaster on a regional level. As if trying to make sense of the violence in Juárez, as it expands and encompasses his whole world, Chávez begins to think the disaster of Ciudad Juárez through the lens of other significant man-made disasters: the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco and September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City. The sixth poem if *Te diría,* "Cumpleaños," revisits the notion of a young boy's particular word associations, his growing his lexicon, and the refinement of his own understanding of certain signifiers. In this case, he explores the cardinal directions. "El mundo es sencillo cuando tienes nueve años," says the one who speaks, "la lluvia poe ejemplo / siempre corre del poniente lavando los guijarros de la calle" (22).[16] In the second doublet, the boy explains that for him, there is no east, just north and west, "la palabra sol es del poniente / la palabra río queda en el norte la palabra mojado norte también" (20). The voice lists other signifiers and what he understands to be their corresponding referents, once again

demonstrating a naïve understanding of the world, as in “El hombre de shorts blancos me hace pensar en mi padre”. “Cumpleaños” is consists of nine doublets, in the fourth doublet, the young voice confesses that he doesn’t quite grasp the concept of a country or nation, “la palabra país era difícil no era poniente ni norte país / parecía decir ciudad algunos la usaban major como barrio” (20). Then, in the fifth doublet, the heart of the poem, disaster interrupts and permanently changes the 9-year-old voice’s understanding of the world, for in the relative safety of Franklin Mountain’s shadows, “apareció la palabra sur” (20). Here it is important to note that Chávez was born in 1959 and would have turned nine years old in 1968.

The same day that the word *sur* interrupts the young voice’s world, another word arrives: “ese mismo día llegó la palabra masacre: significaban trescientos / estudiantes abaleados de pronto en una plaza / país no era entonces la casa era más bien una extraña frontera donde / pasaban cosas que no se podían decir” (20). The one who speaks is, of course, referring to the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco, something so horribly incomprehensible to his young mind that it should not be discussed. The trauma of learning about the student massacre, as well as the difficulty of comprehending such things at a young age lead the voice to, once again, understand the complex adult world on his own terms: “madre es como una gran charola de pan dulce y la palabra país más / bien se trata de que no tengas panes en la mesa / no es difícil entonces comprender lo son a los nueve años / la palabra masacre la palabra sur la palabra país” (20). Even at a young age the voice begins to comprehend the concept of massacre, a form of disaster that interrupts the quotidian. Massacre violently erupts through the fabric of the banal and, as understood by the young and innocent mind of the voice, permanently separates the students at Tlatelolco from their mothers. As a nine-year-old the one who speaks has a vague understanding of what the word country means, but he knows that his own country is implicated in the 1968

student massacre, and thus associates the idea of massacre with the notion of country. The poem raises a poignant question, what new words might young children raised in Juárez during the height of the drug war learn, and how it will color their understanding of their experience as Mexican citizens? In *Te diría* Chávez explores notions of personal disaster, the death of his father, as well as local and regional disaster, the drug-related violence as it expands in Juárez. "Cumpleaños" and the subsequent poem, "Esa mañana había dejado de fumar (11-9-01)," represent and expansion of disaster's boundaries as the poet's interrogation of the meaning of disaster grows to include events that occur on the national and even international stage.

"Esa mañana había dejado de fumar (11-9-01)," is a narrative poem made up of 18 doublets that re-emphasizes how the disaster interrupts the mundane, as in "Satán". Unlike some poems in *Te diría* that seem to hold their weight in reserve only to punch the reader in the gut with tragic revelations toward the end, the seventh poem of Chávez's collection announces its main referent, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in the title. As in other poems from this collection, the incomprehensibility of disaster interrupts the quotidian. The First four doublets depict a scene that could take place in any apartment, in any city, on any Tuesday, the most uneventful of all the days of the week. The voice, embodied as a hungover man, wakes up and begins to shake off the effects of the previous night's "resaca" with a cold shower as his girlfriend sleeps on the bed. Having decided to quit smoking, the one who speaks struggles against the taste of smoke that lingers in his mouth. This personal struggle fades in his mine as from the television the voice hears "voces rápidos" and "palabras encimadas" which draw his attention to the image of a flaming tower on the screen (23).

The voice urgently wakes his partner saying, "algo / está pasando en la nueva yorka esto no puede ser" (23). As in "Satán," and "Crónica de El Campanario," despite the disaster's

interruption of daily routine, the world continues to turn. The voice's girlfriend can't be bothered by the TV and contunies dreaming of the most mundane aspect of contemporary life, a sale at a local shopping mall. Not until the second plane crashes into the world trade center does the disaster, mediated by the television screen, reach an intensity that interrupts her slumber: "en eso apareció el segundo avión volando muy bajo y sin prisa para / que lo siguieran bien las cámaras / y tómala contra la Torre Sur" (23). The one who speaks sees what seems to be a desk ejected from the tower, and subconsciously begins to search his own desk for a pack of cigarettes, only to remember he'd quit smoking. What was previously a source of serenity is off limits on the day he needs it most. "[N]ecesitas despertar ahora mismo" says the voice, "el mundo está cambiando frente / a nosotros ahí en la misma televisión" (23). Within the context of *Te diría* the idea of a man-made disaster in the United States (which the voice later refers to as "la casa del vecino"), mediated by television, and perceived by Mexican viewers is important. It implicitly asks if North Americans will react in a similar manner less than a decade later, as they view the disaster of the distant Mexican drug war on their own televisions, from the safety of their homes. Will they, like the voice, feel as though the world is changing forever, will they feel such empathy for their neighbors?[17]

In the tenth doublet, the one who speaks tries to make sense of the horror witnessed on the television, how can such a thing happen? His only answer is that "Dios haya renunciado / a su oficina esa mañana en la casa del vecino" (24). When a disaster strikes all safeguards fail, the false sense of safety that we derive from our routine and public security measures that create more peace of mind than actual results are laid bare, and the even quiet comfort of religion crumbles under the weight of disaster. Thus, there is no other explanation, God must have quit his job the morning of September 11th, 2001, and he must have been on vacation during the

Calderón presidency, and perhaps he slept in the morning of the 1985 earthquake. Or, as Chávez's poem intimates, there is no God. Even poetry fails in such circumstances. Recalling Theodor Adorno's polemic statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34), the voice says "no hay símil o metáfora para esto: el piso 85 de la Torre Sur cayó / sobre el piso 84 y luego ambos sobre / el piso 83…" (23). Devoid of rhyme, syllabification, simile, and metaphor, and largely bereft of figurative language, poetry is reduced to a simple telling. In the aftermath, as the voice drives to work, "todo era normal" except for a few small synecdochal changes that represent the larger effects of the terrorist attacks: "cerrado el consulado americano cerrado el puente internacional / cerrado el aeropuerto Abraham González / y después las filas de coches coralillos cruzando la frontera inmóviles / por horas con sus colores bajo el sol" (23). The world, it seems, is at a standstill, a stark contrast to the voice's claim that everything was normal. As the tree that refuses to give shade at the end of "Crónica de El Campanario," a new normal, as the product of disaster, emerges in the closing lines of "Esa mañana había dejado de fumar," everything is more expensive: "la gasolina a la alza los pasajes de avión a la alza los bolsos louis vuitton a la alza los cigarillos al doble de su precio" (23). Chávez's closing lines emphasize how the banal, represented by market capitalism here, seem to embrace the disaster, adapt to it, and sometimes thrive on it. His subtle critique could also apply to the drug trade and the drug war themselves, which, despite the human cost and suffering, put profit above all else. In exploring disaster on a grander scale, "Esa mañana había dejado de fumar" reveals one if its terrible truths, despite the poet's personal loss, despite the anguish of those who lose loved ones in the excessive violence of the drug war, despite the tragedy of Tlatelolco, the earth continues to spin on its axis, life goes on, and the routine adapts to a new norm.

The antepenultimate poem of *Te diría*, "Morgue de la Avenida Escobar," reveals a world weary voice, tired of mounting violence and its devastating effects. The poetic self speaks from inside a city morgue, surrounded by so many corpses that there is not enough room to keep them for long. The voice laments that the bodies which entered from the north are so numerous that they barely have time to lie on their backs before being forced out of the doors to the south, as if they are the end product of some macabre assembly line: "las puertas no han cerrado desde que me acuerdo / y aquéllos que entraron por el norte debían desocupar pronto pronto / por la salida que da al poniente / apenas con tiempo para yacer de espaldas" (29). The voice cries for the departed upon realizing the heartbreaking circumstances of their postmortem state, even in death, the dead of Juárez cannot rest. Worse still, for many there will not be a proper burial, no fond remembrance, not even a bitter grave-side goodbye from their loved ones. In part, because the unexpected cost of funerals is beyond the financial reach of many families, several bodies go unclaimed and are reduced to sharing their eternal rest in a mass grave with other unclaimed corpses (Bowden 106).[18] Chávez's poignantly captures this sad reality from the point of view of the dead, who lay waiting for someone to arrive that might identify their bodies:

> esta muchacha se llama Rocío este señor es Julián aunque ya no
> pudieran responder de tanto estar dormidos
>
> escuchando los pasos que llegaban de la acera entre el ruido de
> los autos y el estruendo de la propia disolución
>
> en un intento de reconocer el ritmo de un andar y así advertir qué
> tan cierto es no saber tornar la vigilia (29)

The deceased wait, listening and hoping to recognize the footsteps of someone entering the morgue so that they may warn their friend or loved one just how difficult it is to come back to life. However, after contemplating what the corpses might be thinking, the necromantic voice opens the antepenultimate doublet by saying, "esto es lo que hay," before describing the grisly

morgue scene: a breeze that carries the smell of decaying flesh, dead bodies that seem to sleep, lips that can no longer smile, "y esa muchacha rubia de senos desnudos que tiene su boca en tu oído / y te narra los sueños que perdió en la eternidad" (29). The female corpse that speaks to the voice in closing lines of "Morgue de la Avenida Escobar" may very well represent one of city's many victims of femicide, perhaps a blonde tourist from the U.S., or another fatality of the drug war, innocent or otherwise. Yet the brute physicality of her lifeless body, as described by the voice, reminds us that it doesn't matter, this is all that's left, and her dreams are lost forever. If someone comes to identify her remains and claim them, she will receive the appropriate death rites, a proper burial, and her family will have a measure of closure. But in ominous tones the poem reminds us too frequently, bodies go unclaimed and must be removed quickly in order to make room for others. Thus, their remains will decompose in a communal grave with the remnants of other truncated lives that were cut short by Ciudad Juárez's own holocaust. This is, after all, a social disaster, one that continues to haunt the dead as well as the living.

The final poem from Crónicas, "El derrumbe," reads as an apocalyptic apostrophe to the reader, one last testimony from Juárez before the fall. The poem's title evokes images of destruction and ruination, the fall of a city under siege from an outside enemy. Though, strangely, in an almost fatalist tone, the voice simply and straightforwardly describes the fragility of the human body against the destructive power of a bullet, "un filo recto y suave un mínimo y lento crepitar cálidos dedos que / son casi caricias / abriéndote músculos y sentidos / es tan frágil la piel tan vulnerable el paso de la sangre" (33). Life is precarious, especially for those living in Juárez during Calderón's drug war. *Te diría* attempts to make sense of the violence, reading it through the lens of personal, national, and international disaster, but ultimately fails. "El derrumbe" brings Chávez's exploration of suffering back to the individual level. The fall, alluded

to in the title, is that of a human body, collapsing to the ground after being shot. This is, perhaps, the ethos and central image of *Te diría,* depicting fallen bodies and lives taken in senseless acts of violence. Yet, there is no recourse except to tell what has happened: "en este largo día de sol," concludes the voice, "desde esta ciudad que se calcina yo te hablo / del llanto y de la herida" (33). Thus, no real resolution or answer to the violence depicted in Chávez's collection presents itself. Outside of the first section, "Crónicas," the drug-war simply fades into the background to make way for road poems and allusions to figures such as Emily Dickinson, Apollinaire, Heraclitus, Hegel, and William Carlos Williams, subject matter that approximates Chávez's earlier poetry. Yet, even within the first section of *Te diría,* which, as I mentioned, mostly deals with Calderón's drug war, there are thematic departures that seem at odds with the heavy subject matter. For example, "Tríptico de Austin, Dic. 31," tells of time spent in Austin, Texas, searching for and eventually finding a specific bar. Hoping to make some sort of tangible connection to Jorge Luis Borges, the voice postulates that, perhaps his waiter, Martha Harding, served Borges a drink in that very bar during his tenure as a visiting professor in Austin (31). It is not difficult to see how the poem feels thematically incongruous with pervious material. As Jorge Terrones writes, "¿Cómo vertebrar a Borges con el señor de los shorts blancos? No hay relación. Sería muy arriesgado decir que sólo por ser localizados en algún punto de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México tienen conexión." However, repeated readings reveal a connecting thread that runs through this and other poems that comprise the rest of *Te diría*, a poetic voice that seeks to escape Juárez. Be it through, vacations to Acapulco, literally driving away from the city –a common theme in the third section– or through escapist musings such as "La ventana," wherein the poetic voice explains that the window is a door "por la que puedo escaper sólo mirando," after Crónicas the one who speaks seems to be in constant motion,

physically or mentally moving away from the border town so prominently featured in the first section of *Te diría*. Whether or not this theme is deliberately present, it reflects an autobiographical element of the poet's life. A resident of Ciudad Juárez his entire life, after half a century Chávez moved to San Luís Potosí in 2010. Distancing himself from his hometown allowed the poet to see "la visión del poemario en su conjunto" and through his poetry purge pent up memories and experiences in order to "cantar el desastre de la ciudad" (Cabezas). But even after fleeing Juárez and writing *Te diría* Chávez has not been able to exercise his demons. He continues to be haunted not only by what he witnessed, but also by what he wrote, "Lo único en lo que pienso ahora, se va a oír mal, es en tomar vino, en sentir el sol con mi mujer un rato porque me pongo a escribir y simplemente el registro de lo que escribí me dejó un poquito en crisis en el sentido de que no quiero decir nada todavía" (Cabezas). The process of thinking the disaster (re: Blanchot) was, for Chávez, a process of ruination. Paradoxically, in giving voice to the tragedy, the Chihuahuan poet temporarily lost his own. The disaster compels silence.

IV. Conclusion

The drug trafficking-related violence which escalated during Calderón's presidency peaked in 2010, and steadily dropped each year during the remainder of his term. President Enrique Peña Nieto, the P.R.I. candidate who won the presidency in 2012, has seen an overall reduction in violence related to the drug trade, though questions remain as to why peace seems to be prevailing or whether or not it will last. Regardless there is now a sense in Juárez that things are returning to normal. The social disaster described by Chávez seems to be drawing to a close as businesses emerge out of formerly vacant buildings, people return to the streets and nightlife as before, and what violence does still occur, seems to affect the innocent much less (Wilkinson). Whether perception or actual reality, we may not know for some time. But after the horror of

Calderón's *sexenio*, what is normal? Can the city ever truly return to normalcy, or are the scars of the drug-war's peak violence too deep? As was the case with the Spanish Civil War, the Dirty War in South America, numerous dictatorships, and other man-made disasters in Latin America and Spain, the wounds left by the ongoing drug war and its related violence have already begun and will continue to emerge as a topic of exploration in literature that is marked by trauma, history, and remembering.

Despite the tragedy of the 1985 earthquake, relatively few have written about it in the literary world when compared with the drug war.[19] Likely because they are preventable, and perhaps because of their duration, man-made disasters seem to more profoundly affect the collective psyche. We will not know the full effect of the violence in Juárez for years, but we know that the brunt of the emotional and mental burden will be carried by the survivors. As Blanchot reminds us, it is they who are most affected by disaster (1).

Notes on Chapter 2

[1] According to the Instituto de Geofísica and the Instituto de ingeniería at UNAM, the coordinates of the epicenter are 17.6 N y 102.5 W.

[2] Gordillo makes clear that rubble is never, in fact, formless, "for the simple reason that…no material object lacks form." (10).

[3] Pacheco quotes from Job 28: 4-5 but "translates" the verses into one of his versions (creative translations of poetry that he admires). The Mexican poet's version of Job 28 personifies the rocks as they, in the dark shadow of death, "abren minas lejos de lo habitado" where they suspend and balance themselves (311). The bib verses rendered as so revisit the idea of a living earth that acts of its own volition, without regard for human life.

[4] Whether intentionally or not, Pacheco actually cites *The Aeneid* incorrectly. His quote is from book VI, but not line 58. Rather, the quote appears in line 126. Further, he uses the plural form of Avernus (Averni), as the original reads *Facilis descensus Averno*. That Pacheco would make two such errors seems unusual and his apparent errors may contain a deeper meaning.

[5] The additional collections of poetry included in the 2000 3rd edition of *Tarde o temprano* are: *Los trabajos del mar* (1983), *Miro la tierra* (1986), *Ciudad de la memoria* (1989), *El silencio de la luna* (1994), *La arena errante* (1999), and *Siglo pasado* (2000). The 4th edition, from 2009, adds *Como la lluvia. Poemas* (2009) and *La edad de las tinieblas* (2009). Beginning with the 3rd edition, Pacheco's "translations" or "'aproximaciones' a…textos ajenos," his versions of poems by other poets, were omitted from his complete poetry.

[6] For a number of years before Calderón's presidency, Ciudad Juárez had been the scene of an alarming amount of femicides. Unfortunately, as Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda explain, part of the campaign of fear and terror directed toward Ciudad Juárez's civil society, discussed above,

includes a sharp in the number of femicides: “In Juárez alone, the number of femicides (*feminicidios*) reached unprecedented levels in 2009 and 2010, a 50 per cent increase on all those committed in the previous 16 years (Villalpando and Castillo García 2011). Around 10 per cent of these *feminicidios* were committed against children and female teenagers.” (207)

[7] Cars and trucks play an important role in Chávez’s collection. At times they function as memory triggers, sweeping the poetic voice into a bergsonian cone of memory, but also, in a very real way, they are devices by which, in other sections of *Te diría…*, the one who speaks flees the violence that surrounds him. The rusted automobile frame on the cover seems to insinuate that such an escape from the omnipresent violence is impossible and, perhaps, will eventually end in destruction. At the same time, it could simply function as another symbol of things used up or abandoned. Ciudad Juárez is full of discarded automobile carcasses left to be picked apart, until they eventually become part of Juárez’s desert ruinscape. Like any ruin, they raise the question *ubi sunt?*

[8] Chávez’s title also evokes the last tercet of the Argensola brother’s celebrated “blue sky” sonnet, which exhibits the characteristic *engaño* so common in baroque poetry, “Porque ese cielo azul que todos vemos, / ni es cielo ni es azul. ¡Lástima grande / que no sea verdad tanta belleza!” (256). The complete poem can be fon in: Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola. *Rimas, II*. Ed. José Manuel Blecua. Madrid: Clásicos Castellanos, 1974. Print.

[9] The evangelizing invitation to read the Bible was initially painted on the Sierra de Juárez in 1987, with the city’s permission, where it remained until 2014. Juan de Dios Olivas, of El Diario, reports that since its initial installment the message has been repainted every two years by the group that created it. However, in 2014, when another religious group painted the phrase “50 años apóstol S.J.F.” on the hill without the city’s permission, the Dirección de Desarrollo Urbano

announced that permission to touch up the original "Cd. Juárez, la Biblia es la Verdad, Leéla" sign would no longer be granted and it has since faded from sight.

[10] Interestingly, a central image of Pacheco's "Las ruinas de México," dust falling through the air, is one of the first used by Chávez in *Te diría*. While for Pacheco the notion of dust falling through the air symbolizes our constant and continual ruination vis-à-vis the passage of time, for Chávez it simply functions as a symbol of banality and routine normalcy. Despite the tragic death suffered by one family, for the other 1.3 million residents of Juárez, life goes on.

[11] Chávez's interesting personification of the border as an animal with a shiny back and, presumably, a healthy coat of fur, stands in contradistinction to his description in "Crónica de mis manes," of Juárez, as an animal whose coat, and later its skin, begin to lose its radiance (17).

[12] *Murder City: Ciudad Juarez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*. New York: Nation Books, 2010. Print.

[13] According to an AP article published in the Los Angeles Times, Sergio Adrián Hernández Guereca was 15 years old at the time of his death. It is unclear whether or not Chávez intentionally refers to him as a 13-year-old. See "Family of boy killed by Border Patrol can't sue agent in U.S., court rules." *Los Angeles Times* 25 April, 2015: NP. Web. http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-border-patrol-shooting-20150425-story.html

[14] The voice does not reveal whether or not the girl finds her daughter, we can only assume that she does not fall victim to the assassins since in real life, only the four young men die.

[15] In 1996 the Mexican banda group La Tropa Vallenata, covered and named their album after Geles's song. "Los Caminos De La Vida" subsequently became a hit in Mexico and topped the U.S. Latin music charts.

[16] The idea of water as a cleansing element is repeated several times in *Te diría* and deserves further inquiry.

[17] The use of the word "vecino" in the poem recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan, which Jesus shared after being asked, "Who is my neighbor?" See Luke 10:25-37.

[18] According to a 2008 New York Times article, another likely reason for the abundance of unclaimed bodies Juárez's morgues is that some of the dead are cartel members from south Mexico who came north as participants in the drug trade and turf wars. Thus, their families may not even know they are dead. For more, see McKinley Jr., James C. "Drug War Causes Wild West Blood Bath, Killing 210 in a Mexican Border Town" *New York Times* 16 April 2008: A10. Print.

[19] The most well-known literary works on the earthquake are Pacheco's poem, studied herein, Elena Poniatowska's *Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor*, and Marco Antonio Campos's *Hemos perdido el reino*.

Chapter 3: Resisting Ruination: Contemporary Mexican Poetry in Indigenous Languages

Como en pocos sitios de México, en Juchitán una práctica (la resistencia cultural) influye considerablemente en la política misma. Quienes se consideran descendientes de los antiguos *binizá*, creen diferenciarse de la mayoría de los mexicanos cuya prosapia es la nación misma.

> Carlos Montemayor, *Entrada libre: Crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza*

Ca xiiñé zutiipica diidxa' guní jñiacca'ne zazarendaca' / sica ti mani'ripada ndaani' gui'xhi', ne guiruti zanna / tu laaca'.
Tal vez soy la última rama que hablará zapoteco / mis hijos tendrán que silbar su idioma / u serán aves sin casa en la jungla del olvido.

> Natalia Toledo, *Guie' yaase'* / *Olivo negro*

"Imperial projects are themselves processes of ongoing ruination, processes that 'bring ruin upon,' exerting material and social force on the present"

> Ann Laura Stoler, "The Rot Remains: From Ruin to Ruination"

I. Introduction

Miguel León Portilla writes that "In contrast to the blossoming of Mesoamerican literature during the colonial period, indigenous voices were almost silent during the first hundred years of independent Mexico" (13). Due to state policies toward indigenous peoples and their languages this near silence continued well into the twentieth century. In 1910, as part of the centennial celebration of Mexico's Independence, the International Congress of Americanists held its 17th annual conference in Mexico City. Justo Sierra delivered the inaugural address, and his speech, titled "Política Arqueológica", discusses what was then a recently adopted law designed to protect ruins and prevent cultural artifacts from being taken out of the country. He begins by explaining to those present that Mexico had embraced and adopted its Indian past: "…todo ese mundo precortesiano...es [de México], es nuestro pasado, nos lo hemos incorporado como un preámbulo que cimienta y explica nuestra verdadera historia nacional, la que data de la unión de conquistados y conquistadores para fundar un pueblo mestizo..." (431). Sierra's statement rhetorically bridges the gap between his modern Mexico and its pre-Columbian past while simultaneously appropriating the history and culture of Mexico's indigenous peoples. As his speech continues, addressing the ruinous and crumbling state of many ancient indigenous edifices within Mexico's borders, —which, for the most part, were rediscovered in the nineteenth century— Sierra sustains his oratorical claim upon Mexico's indigenous past by once again asserting that they are "ours", that is, the physical and cultural property of the mestizo: "*nuestras* ruinas morían, eran la ruina de las ruinas" (emphasis my own, *Obras Completas V*, 434). Sierra explains to the audience—composed largely of foreign archeologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, historians, and so forth— that such cultural treasures should not remain in such a ruinous state, thus, Mexico's *política arqueológica* also includes an effort to "preservar las

ruinas de la destrucción, y no reedificarlas sino reconstruirlas con sus propios elementos para retardar indefinidamente […] su desaparición" (435). However, despite the federal government's enthusiasm, in the early twentieth century, for preserving indigenous cultural artifacts, little effort was made to preserve the languages of those same cultures with which it was so enamored. On the contrary, considering them an obstacle to progress and countrywide unification, national education programs intended to teach Spanish to Mexico's indigenous population simultaneously sought to put an end to the use of their native languages. During his tenure as the Secretary of Public Education, Sierra explained that the end goal of his policies was to "enseñarles a los maestros de los indios [con] el objeto capital de destruirlos, de enseñar a todos el idioma castellano y de suprimir así esa barrera formidable opuesta a la unificación del pueblo mexicano." (qtd. in Ramírez Castañeda, 88). This striking statement reveals that, in the name of national unity, Mexico's Secretary of Public Education sought outright the systematic destruction and ruination of Mexican indigenous languages. In general, this exclusionary attitude toward Mexican indigenous languages prevailed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period during which, according to León Portilla, many native languages died, and the number of speakers of Mexican indigenous languages began to decline (13).

Such processes of exclusion are what Ann Laura Stoler refers to as imperial formations, a concept that, she claims, provides a critique of Empire that is more relevant to the present than those that have emerged from postcolonial discourse. Though her explanation of the term is lengthy, Stoler succinctly summarizes the notion of imperial formations as "relations of force" that "harbor those mutant, rather than simply hybrid, political forms that endure beyond the formal exclusions that legislate against equal opportunity, commensurate dignities, and equal rights" (8). Rather than explicit segregation, as in the case of African Americans in the United

States, imperial formations result in a subtler forms of marginalization of certain historically disenfranchised groups, often to the point of ruination, whether they be distinguished by their ethnicity, language, or otherwise.

Seeking to move past the romantic view of ruins as a site for pondering a *memento mori*, Stoler's work reads the notion of ruins against the grain, rethinking ruins vis-à-vis a postcolonial analysis of empires that "reposition[s] the present in the wider structures of vulnerability, damage, and refusal, that imperial formations sustain" (9). Inspired by Derek Walcott's poem, "Ruins of a Great House," Stoler departs from Benjaminian political aesthetics, suggesting that a focus on the process, *to ruin*, rather than its end product, a *ruin* itself, permits a timelier analysis of the remnants of colonial empires. The poetic voice in Walcott's poem, "Ruins of a Great House," explains that while early colonists and the era of their insidious deeds are long gone, "The rot remains with us," (qtd. in Stoler, 1). This rot, claims Stoler, is an ongoing process, a lingering byproduct of colonization that she explains as follows:

> "…ruination is more than a process that sloughs off debris as a by-product. It is also a *political project* that lay waste to certain peoples, relations, and things that accumulate in specific places. To think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations, neglect, and tragic and active positioning within the politics of the present" (11).

Whereas thinkers such as George Simmel foregrounded the process of ruination made manifest on buildings and man-made structures, Stoler uses the term to describe the politics of empires and processes by which remnants of the past are used by present regimes in their dialectics of power. In short, "Ruination is an act perpetrated, *a condition* to which one is subject, and a *cause*

of loss" (emphasis original Stoler, 11).[1] With this in mind I suggest that in nineteenth and especially twentieth century Mexico, the systematic oppression and appropriation of indigenous cultures functions as a deliberate process of ruination whose goal was to eradicate indigenous languages and appropriate the remnants of indigenous culture as part of Mexican national identity.

Despite opposition and a culture of oppression, in the twentieth century Mexico's indigenous communities resisted ruination as they had already done for 400 years. They continued to use their languages in what Carlos Montemayor refers to as "contexts of cultural resistance or continuity" (*Words of the True Peoples…I*, 2), such as "agricultural ceremonies, weddings, changes of authorities, or feasts for patron saints" (*Words of the True Peoples…II*, 2). Montemayor does not explain his use of the term cultural resistance, and while I believe the implication is obvious, it is necessary to establish a clear definition of the term. Stephen Duncombe provides a succinct description, which fits with Montemayor's usage. He explains that cultural resistance is, "culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure" (*Cultural Resistance Reader* 5). Duncombe's explanation can be used to describe the actions of Mexico's indigenous peoples during the twentieth century with respect to the nation's *política del lenguaje*. In the face of continued educational and political practices that sought to make Mexican indigenous languages a relic of the past, and through several different and independent grass roots movements, direct political action, as well as the involvement of native speakers of indigenous languages in the design of educational policy and practice, laws were enacted near the end of the twentieth century that gave protection and economic support to Mexican indigenous languages.

In 1975 the first *Congreso Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas* was held with the express purpose of demanding that Mexico create a Mexican Institute of Linguistics "para el estudio de las lenguas indígenas que existen en el país" (qtd. in Hernández *El despertar* 81). The National Congress of Indigenous Peoples requested that President Echeverría declare Mexico's many indigenous languages to be official languages, along with Spanish, while in 1977 these demands were ratified at the *Encuentro Nacional de Maestros Indígenas Bilingües* and then sent to presidential candidate José López Portillo (*El despertar* 81). In Chiapas, in 1974 the first *Congreso Estatal Indígena* promoted the idea of training teachers to instruct students in indigenous languages along with Spanish and to create a newspaper written by and intended for indigenous people (*El despertar* 82). In another show of solidarity, in October 1977 several indigenous groups met at the humanities building of the *Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México* and signed the *Pacto del Valle Matlatzinca,* which reads as follows:

> Nosotros, matlatzincas, otomíes, mazahuas y tlahuicas, habitantes milenarios de esta tierra que ahora forma parte del Estado de México, nos comprometemos a estar unidos en la lucha por el respeto a nuestra identidad.
>
> No somos curiosidades antropológicas, ni objetos de museo, somos seres humanos que pensamos y sentimos, que poseemos una identidad cultural que reclama respeto y estamos en una realidad socioeconómica de explotación que requiere ser abolida. (qtd, in *El despertar* 82)

In the 1970s several more grass roots efforts among different indigenous groups led to similar statements and demands, pushing back against education policies that made learning Spanish, and learning in Spanish compulsive. The furor continued to grow in the 1980s as indigenous groups resisted policies that marginalized their cultures and languages. These events culminated

in the reform of the fourth article of Mexico's *Constitución Política* on November 28th, 1992 (just a few days after the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean). The fourth article states: "La nación mexicana tiene una composición pluricultural sustentada originalmente en sus pueblos indígenas. La ley protegerá y promoverá el desarrollo de sus lenguas, culturas, usos, costumbres, recursos y formas específicas de organización social, y garantizará a sus integrantes el efectivo acceso a la jurisdicción del estado." (qtd, in *El despertar* 82). After 1992 the Mexican constitution not only protects indigenous languages and cultures, but also promotes them, an occasion that would strengthen and foment interest in the roll of Mexico's indigenous languages not only in the public education system, but also in the realm of arts and letters.

A direct result of indigenous people's cultural resistance and the legal recognition and protection of their languages, summarized above, is that in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a surge of interest in these long-marginalized languages led to a veritable boom in the writing, publication, and dissemination of new literature in Mexican indigenous languages. Miguel León Portilla describes this phenomenon in the following manner:

> Something unexpected and quite wonderful happened during the last quarter of the twentieth century: A growing number of Mesoamericans took up pen, typewriter, or computer and produced widely varied literary works. At first they were influenced, perhaps overly so, by what they had read of their own ancient literature. They went back again and again in poetry and narrative to describe the sufferings of their people, and to denounce, with good reason […], the injustices that had been committed against them. It was a necessary and important beginning. Little by little, they have opened new windows to seeing and

> expressing their experience. Today, prestigious publishing houses are finding an audience for their work. (14)

As León Portilla notes, much of the contemporary poetry in Mexican indigenous languages deals with the persecution endured by the poets and their people while utilizing Pre-Colombian poetry as its model, both in theme, symbol, and form. Indeed, the poetic voice that emerges in some collections of indigenous poetry published in the 1990s is one that aspires to speak for an entire people and fuses mythology and ancient religious traditions with contemporary concerns of indigenous peoples. Such is the case with Jun Tiburcio's *X'tachuwin Chu X'tatlin Li Tantatanu: Palabra y canto de los totonacos*. Nahua poet and essayist Natalio Hernández explains that this was one of the purposes of the emergent indigenous literature; in 1990 indigenous language writers began to meet regularly with the express purpose of creating a literature that would not only speak to their own people, but to the larger mestizo population of Mexico. He writes, "En fin, nos proponíamos, por medio de la palabra, llamar la atención de la sociedad mexicana sobre la presencia contemporánea de los pueblos indígenas y la necesidad de superar la visión arqueológica, mítica y folclórica que de ellos se tiene en amplios sectores de la sociedad nacional" (*La palabra*, 139). To overcome the archeological gaze that marginalized Mexico's indigenous peoples, in the 1990s indigenous language writers sought to make their presence known through the publication of literature in their own languages. Given the precarious state of these languages, and their systematic oppression by the national government since the late nineteenth century, it is not surprising that, as Jean Franco notes "…in Latin America contemporary writing in indigenous languages and the defense of those languages are viewed as crucial to survival and continuity" (456). For the majority of these authors, the notion of writing

in their mother tongue is synonymous with a defense of the language, it is a form of cultural resistance that they hope will reverse or at least slow the process of ruination mentioned above.

Returning to Hernandez's statement, referring to the implied readers of contemporary indigenous language literature as both indigenous and mestizo, it is important to address the manner in which these texts are presented to the public. Beginning in the mid to late 1980s, literature in indigenous languages is almost entirely published in a bilingual format, the indigenous text on one page and the translation on the facing page.[2] The result in a phenomenon that Paja Faudree refers to as seeing double, that is, the necessity "to pay attention to the different assumptions that go along with writing for different audiences" (198). Writing for two audiences and publishing a bilingual text results in a sort of double-text which is then read differently than a monolingual text. Faudree explains:

> Like authors, readers of indigenous texts participate in a peculiar form of double vision: they use two languages at once, or they treat one as largely irrelevant. In the latter case, the text in the indigenous language becomes an emblem representing something about the author's identity, thus framing the work in certain ways, but they do not interact with it beyond reading it as a symbol. Readers of indigenous language-texts also engage in a more pervasive kind of double reading, however, as the bilingual nature of the text is linked, in ways that shift for different types of readers, to different discourses about indigenous identity, national belonging, modernity, and tradition. (198-99)

While readers that do not speak or read indigenous-languages will likely regard the indecipherable text as a token of its authenticity or indigeneity, bilingual readers, or those willing

to explore and compare the text in both printed languages are rewarded with a rich experience as the process reveals new levels of meaning that emerge from the choices made in translation.

This chapter examines three collections of poetry, printed between 1994 and 1996, that belong to the first wave of indigenous language poetry published in Mexico during the boom of the 1990's. Given these processes of ruination mentioned above, it is not surprising that among the early poems of the resurgence in indigenous language literature the subject of resistance emerges time and time again. Among the variations on this theme of resistance are poems about the defense of indigenous languages, defense of the environment, which, as a result of neoliberal economic policies, has been polluted and neglected, as well as the notion of an indigenous uprising and resurgence, even to the point of reclaiming Mexican territory as Indian land.

II. Natalio Hernández (Nahuatl)

Of the three poets included in this chapter, Natalio Hernández is perhaps the most well-known, and has played a fundamental role in the development and dissemination of indigenous language literature in Mexico. Born Natalio Hernández Hernández in Naranjo Dulce, Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz in 1947, he was raised in the culture of the Gulf Coast Nahua. Hernández is an educator by trade and earned his credential at a "Nahuatl-Spanish bilingual normal school for elementary education teachers" (Frischman 153). He worked in Mexico City as "assistant director of the office of Indigenous Education of the Secretariat of Public Education from 1978 to 1989" (153). It was during the early years of his residence in Mexico City that Hernández began to write poetry in his mother toungue: "Cuando empecé a radicar en la ciudad de México," he explains, "una gran nostalgia invadió mi corazón: lejos quedó mi pueblo, mi lengua, mi cultura y los saberes de mi comunidad. Empecé a escribir para no morir" (*El despertar…* 59).

His first collection of poetry, *Xoxhikoskatl/Collar de flores* (México: Kalpulli), a Nahua/Spanish bilingual edition, was published in 1985 under the pseudonym José Antonio Xokoyotsij, an homage to his grandfather, José Antonio. Under this pseudonym, Hernández published another bilingual collection in 1987, *Sempoalxóchitl/Veinte flores: Una sola flor* (México: UNAM), which consists of many of the same poems that comprise his first collection. In 1989 Hernández published a third dual-language collection, *Ijkon ontlajtoj aueuetl/Así habló el Ahuehuete* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana). Having gained some notoriety, he was named "Vocero Distinguido" by Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum in 1993 and worked with her to coordinate two World Summits of Indigenous Peoples (Frischman 153). In 1994 Hernández published *Canto Nuevo de Anahuac/Yancuic Anahuac Cuicatl* (Diana), an anthology of his previous collections –which in some cases features refined versions his earlier poems– was later expanded and republished in 2007 by Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas. With the publication of his fourth book of poetry, *Papalocuicatl: Canto a Las Mariposas* (Editorial Praxis) in 1996, Hernández's work takes a new turn as some poems in this collection are only published in Spanish. In the introduction the poet explains that *Papalocuicatl* concludes a chapter in his life that began with *Collar de Flores*: "El libro marca el final del canto y también el inicio de un canto nuevo en donde el náhuatl y el español se armonizan dentro de mí…Este libro reúne a José Antonio Xocoyotzin y a Natalio Hernández para quedar fundidos en un solo personaje, en un solo hombre: el *cuicapihqui*, forjador de cantos" (qtd. in *Canto Nuevo*, 109).

This new self, the forjador de cantos, resides simultaneously in two linguistic worlds and thus expresses himself exclusively in one language on occasion. His most recent collection of poetry, *Semanca Huitzilin/Colibrí de la Armonía/Hummingbird of Harmony* (CONACULTA, 2005), explore the poet's obsessions but with new perspective and urgency while continuing in

this vein of *Papalocuicatl: Canto a Las Mariposas* as several poems are published solely in one language. Yet, as a collaboration with translator Donald Frischman, *Semanca Huitzilin* sets itself apart as a trilingual book of poems. While the early poetry of Natalio Hernández was filled with nostalgia for his culture, language, and the mythos of his people, Hernandez's most persistent themes are the virtues of indigenous languages, cultures, and identity. More recently his thematic focus has been dominated by notions of harmony and peace.

One of Hernández's more well-known poems, "Caminemos solos," —originally titled "Tenemos que caminar solos"— is a twelve-line poem in two stanzas whose use of the imperative form of the verb *caminar* in the title divulges its didactic tone. In the first stanza the poetic voice muses on the status quo of his people: "A veces pienso que los indios / esperamos que llegue un hombre / que todo lo puede, / que todo los sabe, / que pueda ayudar a resolver / todos nuestros problemas." (*Canto nuevo* 25). Though the situation of many indigenous peoples at the time of publication was not favorable, according to the voice of the poem, the indigenes are waiting to be acted upon by a sort of messianic figure rather than actively seeking to improve their situation and overcome the unspecified problems alluded to in the sixth line. However, in the second stanza, the poetic voice goes on to deny that such a figure will ever arrive, and instead urges the implicit indigenous reader to action, as, it claims, the will to power is in them: "Pero ese hombre que todo lo puede / y que todo lo sabe, / nunca llegará: / porque vive en nosotros, / se encuentra en nosotros, / camina con nosotros; empieza a despertar: aún duerme." (25). The voice affirms that this messianic figure who knows and can accomplish all things, is not an outsider, but rather, lives in the indigenous people and, as the last line of the poem suggests, despite his slumber, is beginning to wake, perhaps insinuating a future indigenous uprising.

"Caminemos solos" has a somewhat irredentist tone, a common trait of indigenous poetry in the late twentieth century. This is likely because, while the process of writing verse in his own language initially served as an outlet to ease Hernández's longing for home, it soon evolved. "[P]oco a poco," he writes, "el dolor se transformó en un grito de rebeldía y de creatividad" (*El despertar…*61). As the therapeutic effects of writing ceded to frustration with the social and political situation of indigenous peoples in Mexico, Hernández embraced the notion of poetry as a form of protest, rebellion, and cultural resistance. Thus, "Caminemos solos" was born out of a desire to express that which the political discourse of the *indigenista* movement in 1980s Mexico could not (*Exclusión…* 22-3).

While the poem is rather straightforward, a comparison between the original Nahua verses and their translations into Spanish, carried out by Hernández himself, uncovers layers of meaning that are absent in the Spanish translation alone. For example, in the lines cited above, the word *indios* is translated from the Nahua word *masehualme*, the plural form of the name that the Gulf Coast Nahua use to refer to themselves (Rodríguez López and Valderrama Rouy, 161).[3] Hernández's translation of *masehualme* to a rather general term, *indios*, loses its specificity to the Gulf Coast Nahua and allows the poetic voice to speak to other indigenous peoples who may not speak or be familiar with Nahua. Additionally, as Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischman make clear, the word *masehual* carries the connotation of alluding to "common [or] rustic people" and "[d]uring the Colonial Period also carried the meaning of 'vassal,' 'servant of a lord,' [or] 'farm laborer'" (154 note 1). Thus, a possible interpretation of the use of *masehual* is that of a stigmatized label with socioeconomic connotations, similar to the way the term *indio* is colloquially used as a derogatory term in Mexico and much of Latin America. However, in the original Nahua poem, it is likely a simple ethnic identifier.

Similarly, the term *tlacatl* in the second stanza, appropriately translated as *hombre* in the Spanish version, has a deeper meaning that does not come through in translation. Montemayor and Frischman write that, *tlacatl* "refers to all type of people," while, as noted, *masehual* "refers only to common people" (154 note 2). While one is a catchall, the other has a specific cultural connotation. However, according to Rémi Siméon's *Diccinoario de la lengua nahuatl o Mexicana*, the noun *tlacatl* is defined as an "Hombre, noble, señor," a connotation which establishes a binary opposition between the noble *tlacatl*, very liking a land owner, and the peasant *masehual*, a peasant laborer (561). Yet, this layer of meaning may not be signified in contemporary usage as Montemayor and Frischman clarify that the notion of *tlacatl* as nobleman addressed with the respectful title "sir" was more commonly used during the Colonial Period and that present-day usage is to be understood as a catchall for all types of people (154). What is important though, is that in the Nahua version of the poem, it is more readily apparent that this messianic figure that the indigenous peoples wait and hope for, is an outsider, likely of higher economic means. "Caminemos solos" functions as a poem of cultural resistance, the voice presents an imperative to the implicit ingenious readers who, through colonization, have been conditioned to rely on outsiders rather than themselves to solve their problems. The one who speaks implores the reader to resist such a notion, and instead, let us –the indigenous peoples– walk alone (as the title says) and become the solution to our own problems. This one who will save us, who is us, "empieza a despertar: aún duerme." (25). The idea of awaking and empowering the indigenous mind is a common theme of Hernández's early poetry, as we will see below.

Another poem by Hernández that is frequently anthologized is "Yo soy indio." It explores the historical origin of the derogatory ethnic moniker *indio* and its etymologically incorrect

usage to describe the peoples of the new world. Comprised of fourteen stanzas, each starts with the refrain "Yo soy indio" and is followed by verses which criticize the usage of the word *indio* to describe the inhabitants of the new world as erroneous and ignorant: "Yo soy indio: / porque así me nombraron los hombres blancos / cuando llegaron a esta tierra nueva. / Yo soy indio: por ignorancia de los hombres blancos / al llegar a las tierras que gobernaban mis abuelos." (17). *Indio,* explains the one who speaks, is a term used to justify discrimination and the sociopolitical dominance of the white man. However, the poem takes a turn in the fifth stanza as the poetic voice appropriates the term as its own identity: "Yo soy indio: / ahora me enorgullece esta palabra / con la que antes se mofaban de mí los hombres blancos. / Yo soy indio: / ahora no me avergüenza que así me llamen, / porque sé del error histórico de los blancos." (17). When a white or mestizo addresses an indigenous person as *indio* usually the former is in a position of power. However, the poetic voice in Hernández's poem inverts the binary power relationship implied by the use of the word *indio* as a derogatory term by transforming the label into something positive, a change which occurs when the voice realizes that the political power of the whites and mestizos as well as the notion that they are ethnically and culturally superior, rests on a shaky foundation. The realization that the white's forerunners mistakenly thought they were in India upon arriving in the New World subverts their claim of intellectually superiority and empowers the voice appropriate the term *indio* and embrace it as a cultural identifier. The voice, then, begins to understand that indigenous culture and wisdom are not shameful, but a source of pride:

> Yo soy indio:
> ahora sé que tengo mis propias raíces
> y mi propio pensamiento.
>
> Yo soy indio:
> ahora sé que tengo rostro propio,
> mi propia mirada y sentimiento.

Yo soy indio:
ahora sé que soy verdaderamente mexicano,
porque hablo el idioma mexicano,
la lengua de mis abuelos. (17)

As is the case in "Caminemos solos," "Yo soy indio" emphasizes the central role of language in determining one's self worth. For centuries speakers of indigenous languages were taught overtly and implicitly that their languages had little or no value and that because they did not speak Spanish, indigenes were uneducated, culturally impoverished, and barbaric. Contrastingly, in the 9th stanza the poetic voice affirms that the *indios* have their own complex body of thought and, further, from a linguistic and etymologic point of view, as speakers of Nahua and descendants of the Mexica they are, in fact, the true Mexicans. After giving voice to this realization, the poem develops a hopeful tone, – "Yo soy indio: / ahora se alegra mucho mi corazón / porque viene un nuevo día, un nuevo amanecer." – describing a seemingly near future in which the sadness of the indigenes will end and the voice can, once again, laugh and experience joy.

The concluding stanzas of "Yo soy indio" demonstrate that the moment of realization which occurs in the poem has the effect of drawing the voice closer to its indigenous cultural traditions. The one who speaks, after changing its perception of what it means to be indian, can now hear, perhaps figuratively, indigenous music and song, contemplate the beauty of their culture's dance, hear the words of their elders, and begins to commune once more with Mother Earth (17). While these aspects of Nahua culture were likely available to the voice previously, viewed through the lens of mestizo culture, they were not observable in their true light. While Hernández's translation the term Mother Earth from the Nahua words *tonantzi tlaltipactli*, could be understood exactly as translated, a Nahua speaker will also recognize echoes of the name Tonan or Tonantzin. Also known as "*Ilamatecutli*, 'Noble vieja'" and "*Cozcamiauh*, 'Collar de maíz en flor'" in the Aztec pantheon, Tonantzin is at once the goddess of the earth, goddess of

the harvest, and, sometimes referred to as *Cuiacoatl*, the mother of humankind (Siméon 716-17). Tonantzin is also syncretically associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe, yet Hernández avoids any mention of the Catholic icon, preferring instead to emphasize the indigenous deity.[4]

Despite what at times seems like overt rejection of Mexican national culture in his work, one of the purposes of Hernández's poetry is to demonstrate that "one is capable of accessing modernity and other cultural contexts without renouncing one's roots, one's origins, one's own identity, one's own cultural matrix" (*Memoria y destino* 182). He richly illustrates this principle in "Yo me pregunto," a poem that dialogues with the poetry of and is dedicated to the ancient ruler of Texcoco, Netzahualcóyotl. Hernández's poem plays with the title of former Nahua ruler's well-known poem, "Yo lo pregunto," a reflection upon the fleeting nature of life which dates from the 15th century. The philosopher-king's ancient song asks, "¿Acaso de veras se vive con raíz en la tierra?" before the voice answers, "No siempre en la tierra: / sólo un poco aquí." (León Portilla and Nezahualcóyotl, 31). The King of Texcoco notes that all things will eventually fade into nothingness, even objects constructed of the seemingly durable jade and gold, or the beautiful quetzal feather.

"Yo me pregunto" is a twenty-line lyric poem in free verse and, much like Nezahualcóyotl's poem, is a philosophical search for meaning. However, unlike his predecessor, who depends on his own logic and reasoning to find meaning, Hernández presents the reader with a voice that seeks knowledge from the earth, the elements, and celestial bodies. The opening stanza introduces the entities to whom the voice directs its queries: the stars, the sun, the wind, and Mother Earth. The following stanza, comprised of three lines, presents the questions, which reveal an earnest search for existential meaning: "¿Qué es lo que nos hace tener vida? ¿Qué es lo que no hace caminar? ¿Qué es lo que nos da fuerza y energía?" (129). The subsequent verse is

telling, “Nadie me responde” says the voice, “Camino en la soledad.” (129). The one who speaks then talks of being observed, perceived, and recognized by other people, though the elements have responded to his inquiries with silence, he is not necessarily alone. The fact that people recognize him indicates that he is at least among people who know him, yet, they too are silent. In the fourth stanza, however, the poetic voice receives his answer:

> Instantes después, mi propio corazón
> me responde:
> tú sabes a que has venido
> a la tierra,
> respóndete tú mismo.
>
> ¡Tú tienes la respuesta! (129)

The notion that one may answer life’s most important questions themselves without appealing to tradition or religious authority is a profoundly modern trope. Yet, while embracing the modern, even existential answer that points toward the poetic voice’s individuality, “Yo lo pregunto” simultaneously pays homage to the ancient poet of Tezcoco, Nezahualcóyotl. The title of Hernández’s poem alludes Nezahualcóyotl’s most well-known and oft-anthologized poem, which begins with the lines, “Yo Nezahualcóyotl lo pregunto: / ¿Acaso deveras se vive con raíz en la tierra? (qtd. in León-Portilla *Quince poetas* 89). The ancient Texcocan poem, like Hernández’s, features voice that searches for answers to a profound question, only to discover the answer in its own wisdom. Thus, in “Yo me pregunto,” Hernández embraces his people’s tradition and culture while seamlessly blending them with modern philosophy and thought. Natalio Hernández’s poetry captures the experience of an indigenous subject who dwells in the modern metropolis. Through his verse, Hernández forges an identity that celebrates his language and heritage while being firmly planted in and a participant of the contemporary world.

III. Jun Tiburcio (Totonac)

In addition to being a poet, Jun Tiburcio Pérez González is a sculptor and artisan, who dedicates his work to the representation of the Totonac culture. Tiburcio was born and raised in Chumatlán, Veracruz, in the heart of what Michael D. Coe refers to as "the region of the old Tajín civilization" where Totonac is widely spoken (15-16). Jun Tiburcio writes poetry in his native Totonac and translates it to Spanish, such is the case with both of his collections of poetry published to date: *X'tachuwin chu x'tatlin li tantatanu/Palabra y canto do los totonacos* (1994) and *Sueño en grande/Lanka Tamanixni* (2001). The *raison d'être* of Tiburcio's poetry is to demonstrate the knowledge and wisdom of the Totonac people in contradistinction to what he describes as a modern view of Mexico's indigenous population. As the introduction to his second book*, Sueño en grande*, explains, the poet describes his work as "un reclamo, un anhelo de que las personas se acerquen a los pueblos indígenas con otra visión; nuestra cultura tiene palabras sabias que son vigentes en esta época. Nada está en el pasado: lo antiguo puede incrustarse en la modernidad." (5). Tiburcio hopes that, rather than disregard indigenous culture and wisdom, those who read his poetry will see that the Totonac culture can exist within Mexico's discourse of modernity.

Tiburcio's verses are an act of cultural resistance and, perhaps, even rebellion against Mexico's post-revolutionary discourse of modernity and *mestizaje,* which sought to appropriate those aspects of indigenous culture that were useful for building a national identity, while discarding the rest. "Cuando se habla de integración nacional," says the poet, "solo nos contemplan [a los indígenas] para producir, consumir, y comprar, pero no para mejorar nuestras condiciones de vida" (Vargas). While the commodification of indigenous culture is not a theme of Tiburcio's poetry, he does sharply criticize the appropriation of indigenous lands and culture by those he sees as outsiders. The Veracruzan native is astutely aware of his peripheral position

as a creator of outsider art and he frequently alludes to themes of cultural resistance throughout his poetry. Yet, even before the reader arrives at a poem in Tiburcio's first collection, they are made aware of the notion that his poetry as a distinctly non-western creation. In the presentation to *Palabra y canto de los totonacos*, Tiburcio's first book, he writes the following:

> Lo que escribo en estas páginas, no lo aprendí en la universidad, ni en los libros, me basó poner en práctica mi inteligencia que desciende de mi propia cultura y tomar en cuenta los pensamientos filosóficos de los ancianos que poseen un cúmulo de sabidurías milenarias que otros le atribuyen como una ignorancia o un conocimiento que ya no tiene validez. Pero yo digo lo contrario… (XXIII)

This passage illustrates a common thread in Jun Tiburcio's verses, they are often a revaluation of indigenous culture from an indigenous point of view, and, implicitly, a revaluation of modern values such as education and industrialization. He proudly states that the knowledge and wisdom with which he was able to create his poetic works was not learned in a modern university, nor from reading the western philosophical canon. Additionally, the poet often explores themes of nature, indigenous agricultural practices and family relations, as well as an affirmation of the value of indigenous language, especially Totonac. Indeed, Tiburcio is speaking to the Totonac people, yet, by virtue of the bilingual presentation of his texts, his message is also intended for a wider, Spanish-speaking audience.

One of Tiburcio's more anthologized poems, "Bendiciones," is an example of his penchant for poems about the Totonac language, which, for the poet, is one that blesses, soothes, comforts, and has intrinsic value. "Bendiciones" is composed of six non-rhyming couplets of varying length, in the form of a prayer. In Spanish the poem is simply directed to "Dios," perhaps representing the Catholic god, or, possibly an allusion to un-named god. However, in

Totonac there is a clear use of the word Chichini, a god who represents the sun in the Totonac pantheon. The odd-numbered lines all begin with an imperative or a plea to the receiver of the prayer, imploring that blessings, wisdom, and light be received by the supplicant in the Totonac language, while the contrasting even-numbered lines describe several negative exchanges that the voice has had with those who speak Spanish, presumably people not of indigenous heritage. The poem follows:

> Bendíceme en totonaco, Dios mío,
> porque en español me maldicen.
>
> Ilumíname con el sol totonaco,
> porque me opacan en español.
>
> Dame sabiduría totonaca, Dios mío,
> porque en español me llaman tonto.
>
> Dame letras en totonaco,
> porque las letras españoles mienten.
>
> Cántame en totonaco,
> porque en español me ofenden.
>
> Háblame en totonaco,
> porque en español me gritan. (231)

Ostensibly, Tiburcio's lines present a bilingual indigenous subject who feels more at home communicating in the native language and is treated poorly by Spanish speakers, likely, mestizos. While the speakers of Spanish ridicule the one who speaks, the subject turns to a Totonac speaking god for solace.

In the original poem, in Totonac, Tiburcio uses the word Chichini for god, "Kakuwinin katlawalh chichini xatutunaku" (Montemayor 231). Pablo Valderrama Rouy explains that Chichini represents the sun, and is "the great god of the Totonac" (204).[5] This coincides with the second stanza of Tiburcio's poem in which the voice pleads to be illuminated by the Totonac

sun. Since Chichini is himself the sun, this line allows for multiple readings. It could be that the voice seeks symbolic illumination, that is, wisdom or knowledge from the Totonac god, or that it desires literal illumination from the sun in the form of light and warmth. The following line of the second stanza reveals that the one who speaks desires illumination in Totonac because those who speak Spanish "le opacan". The verb *opacar*, in a general sense, means to make something darker. If Tiburcio uses the verb in this sense, it may be an allusion to an idea, common throughout Latin America, that darker skin is less desirable, the implication being that while the Totonac sun illuminates and enlivens, from a typical mestizo point of view, sun makes one's skin darker, makes them more *indio*, and therefore less desirable and even less human. However, according to the Real Academia Española, in Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay, *opacar* means to "Superar a alguien en alguna cualidad" (RAE). This reading of Tiburcio's usage of *opacar* works in harmony with an interpretation of the second stanza's first line, "Ilumíname con el sol totonaco," as a metaphor for wisdom and knowledge. Thus, the one who speaks likely seeks wisdom and knowledge from Chichini, the Totonac sun god, because he is frowned upon by those who "le opacan en español" for his inability to master the Spanish language.

Such a reading of the second stanza coincides perfectly with the third stanza, in which the voice asks specifically for Totonac wisdom "porque en español me llaman tonto". The implication is obvious, the voice identifies Spanish is a language that is used to curse him and the Totonac people in general, describing their darker skin as a negative characteristic. The voice notes that the Spanish letters seem to lie, that is, they don't make the sounds the voice supposes they should because he views them from a Totonac linguistic point of view. Language, then, is a source of comfort and identity in "Bendiciones." The penultimate and closing stanzas reiterate this point as the one who speaks seeks out the soothing sounds of its mother-tongue, which must

sound inviting compared to the sound of others yelling at the poetic subject in Spanish. The trope of language is one that Tiburcio returns to several times throughout *Palabra y canto de los totonacos*.

Another poem about language, "Colibrí," while just as direct as "Bendiciones" regarding man's use of language as weapon, is somewhat more complex in its use of metaphor. The poem is an apostrophe directed at a hummingbird: "¡Te admiro Colibrí! / Me impresiona tu tamaño, / me asombra tu agilidad / de rayo. / Me haces vibrar / con tu destreza, / para construir el nido / cómodo, digno de un palacio." The one who speaks admires the hummingbird's artistry and agility in constructing a nest out of the finest material: "Tú sacas el algodón / de la flores, tallos, / de los musgos hilos / más finos que la seda." What is more impressive to the voice is that, despite having a long, sharp, beak, like a needle, the hummingbird does not hurt its young. The third stanza reveals that the voice adopts the hummingbird as a model of how to create *artesanías*: "Tú me enseñas cómo tejer. / Me conmueve / tu largo pico de aguja. / Y aun así / nunca hieres a tus hijos / durante su crianza." This is significant also because the Tiburcio's first name, Juan, is the Totonac word for hummingbird. Thus one could surmise that "Colibrí" serves as an *ars poetica* for the Veracruzan poet. In the fourth and final stanza, the voice reveals why it is so enthralled with the hummingbird, who doesn't injure it's young, "No como el hombre, / que sin tener aguja / en la boca hiere / como una espada, / mata sin pensar." (229). "Colibrí" seems to have some autobiographical elements, Tiburcio, who is himself an artisan and poet, uses nest-weaving of the hummingbird as an example of how artisanship should function, but also, the verb *tejer* functions as a metaphor for the crafting a poem.

Just as the hummingbird makes its nest from the best raw materials, the one who speaks is weaving a poem. While the *colibrí* uses its mouth to weave a nest, the poet uses his mouth,

that is, language, to weave a poem. The last two verses reveal just why the voice holds the colibrí in such high regard. Tiburcio writes that, though the animal has a "largo pico de aguja" in its mouth, "nunca [hiere] a [sus] hijos durante su crianza" (lines 15-18). The poetic voice then compares the *colibrí* to mankind, who "sin tener aguja en la boca hiere como una espada, mata sin pensar" (lines 20-23). Notwithstanding the fact that man does not have a sword-like fangs, people still manage to harm and even kill with their mouths. Tiburcio's poem reveals a concept of language and words as objects that can soothe and pacify, but can also do as much harm as a snake bite, words can carry venom and hatred, and, in some cases, can even kill.

Another example of Tiburcio's poetry as an act of cultural resistance is the poem "Tajín," a pictographic poem in the shape of a pyramid –likely an allusion to the pyramid of the niches at the eponymous archeological site– composed of 19 lines, each longer than the previous in order to maintain the shape of the pyramid. The entire poem is an apostrophe directed at El Tajín by the poetic voice, who verbalizes an imagined dialogue between the ruins and the Totonac sun god, Chichini. The first 8 lines represent the voice of the one who speaks, the following 8 lines represent the voice of El Tajín, which is addressing Chichini, and the final three lines represent the voice of the sun god, responding to the ruins. Before moving to the poem itself, it is important to explore why the ruins make a suitable subject for Tiburcio's act of cultural resistance.

The El Tajín archeological site is less than 100 km from where Tiburcio was born, his language is concentrated in the area around El Tajín, and the ruins hold great significance for his people. "The site derives its name from the belief of the modern Totonac that twelve old men called *Tajín* live in the ruins and are lords of the thunderstorm (and therefore the equivalent of the Rain God)" (Coe 141). However, there exists among scholars some debate about the

appropriateness of referring to ruins as a structure of Totonac origin. Coe writes that the "tribal name 'Totonac' has often been inappropriately applied" to many of the carvings at the El Tajín archeological site, explaining that "while it is true that the Totonacs now occupy most of the zone in which the remains are found, it may or may not have been they who made them. Archeologists prefer caution in such matters" (123). He further explains that the decorations in both paint and carved stone are done in the last major manifestation of Classic Veracruz style, as seen in the use of raised outlines and scroll forms throughout the site (143). The argument is that this ruin, so important to contemporary Totonac culture, may not actually be of Totonac origin. While the contemporary Totonac people claim El Tajín as their own, Archeologists do not affirm their claim, but dispute it, in essence invalidating the culture and oral tradition of the Totonac people.

Regarding the debate about the origins of El Tajín, the United Nations is slightly more diplomatic than Coe. El Tajín was consecrated as an UNESCO world heritage site in 1992, the same year that the UN designated as the year of indigenous peoples. Regarding the debate about whether the Totonac culture constructed El Tajín, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre's website explains the following:

> The artistic, architectural, and historical values of El Tajín combine to make this a highly significant site. The reliefs and paintings discovered at the site contain important information on society, ritual and daily life. Although there is still uncertainty concerning the origin of this culture, it has been attributed to the huastecos and totonacos, the latter being the indigenous people that are currently living in the area.

UNESCO is only slightly more cautious, being careful to say that the ruin has been attributed to two cultures. However, while archeologists debate the origin of El Tajín, in the mind of Jun Tiburcio, there is no question that the ruins are part of the Totonac culture.

The first two lines of Tiburcio's poem, which are an apostrophe directed at the ruins, read "Tajín / mi Tajín…" The voice's use of the possessive pronoun demonstrates a sense of ownership that is absent in Efraín Huerta's poem about the same ruin. Tiburcio's point is clear from the outset, "Tajín" is a firm statement of ownership, even reappropriation, which represents a Totonac point of view. This idea is emphasized in the following lines as the voice exclaims, "cuando te miro / veo a mis padres," an indication that Tiburcio's Totonac ancestors were responsible for constructing El Tajín, regardless of what archeologists claim. The following four lines celebrate the beauty of the ruins and reveal that they are a site of confluence between the terrestrial and the divine, "mis ojos se alegran / impresionados de tanta / belleza que levantas al cielo / para platicarle a nuestro padre sol" (55). In the Totonac version of the poem, Tiburcio again uses the name Chichini, the sun god, which is rendered as "nuestro padre sol" in the Spanish translation. At this point the poem changes tone as the one who speaks reveals the subject matter of the dialogue between El Tajín and the god Chichini: "Le estás diciendo que sus hijos están bien / y dices que los han echado fuera de la casa, / y les han quitado sus tierras, ya no les pertenece / andan rodando vendiendo en las afueras del Tajín." (55). These lines describe the appropriation, by mestizos, of indigenous lands and property, as well the archeological site of El Tajín, for their own purposes, leaving the indigenous people to peddle their wares outside of the archeological site. While it is not specifically indicated who commits these actions, in the following verses the poetic voice makes it clear.

In addition to criticizing the acts of appropriation by mestizos, the remaining lines of the poem also disapprove of the poor stewardship that the "extranjeros" have exercised on the land they occupy. The poet explains that the "milpas" of the Totonacs, previously used to grow and cultivate corn, have been transformed into "potreros de extranjeros," or, grazing areas for animals. As in many indigenous Mexican cultures, corn is not only a staple of the diet, but also a central aspect of the Totonac religious practices (Valderrama Rouy 196). Clearing land used for growing corn and instead using it to graze animals not only negatively effects the ability of the indigenous population to provide sustenance for their families, but also requires them to seek wage labor, thus losing their independence.

Lines 14-16 take an ecocritical turn and excoriate "los 'de razón'" for polluting the water, "en sus ríos, ya no corren aguas cristalinas, pura suciedad / que arrojan los 'de razón' que dicen saber de lo moderno" (55). Tiburcio includes a critique of modernity here, noting that the promise of progress has not resulted in prosperity, but dirty waters. The following line reveals that cause of the polluted waters, is oil: "Ni peces hay, todo acabó, solo corre chapopote que ellos arrojan". Chapopote, or asphalt, is a black substance that is a petroleum byproduct. Though there are studies that show elevated levels of oils in the sediment of the Cazones River,[6] one of two major rivers in the area of El Tajín, the description of rivers that only run with asphalt is hyperbolic. However, a 2007 atmospheric study conducted by U.S. and Mexican scientists has found a connection between pollution related to regional petroleum extraction and an increase in the level of rain acidity, which is resulting in a more rapid erosion of carved reliefs at the El Tajín archeological site.[7] Regardless, Tiburcio's point is valid, petroleum operations in the area are doing irreparable damage to ruins as well as the surrounding environment.

The poem ends on a hopeful note, as the sun, Chichini, answers El Tajín, explaining that the status quo will change, that justice will be served, "[S]e solucionará la injusticia cometida. / De nuevo reinarás, donde te pertenece que tus antepasados te heredaron, / son tuyas las tierras de tus hijos no de los ladinos que te las expropiaron" (55). The term *ladino*, as used by Tiburcio (and Gómez Pérez below), refers to a mestizo person in Mexico and parts of Central America that only speaks Spanish. Not to be confused with other definitions of the term –for example, ladino is the name of the language spoken by Sephardic Jews– the intention of Tiburcio here is to distinguish the poetic voice from those who do not speak Totonac. Thus, his use of the term *ladino* should be understood as differentiating his identity from that of a culture other that frowns upon the Totonac culture. Though Tiburcio's "Tajín" condemns the Ladinos for appropriating and damaging indigenous lands, there is a sliver of optimism. The idea that the indigenous population will soon recover lands that they previously occupied, that their language and culture will flourish again is a recurring theme of Tiburcio's poetry, however, "Tajín" is unique in that the promise of a bright future and coming change is spoken by the deity, Chichini, the principal god of the Totonac.

While "Tajín" looks to a bright future for the Totonac people, Tiburcio's "Dónde está el indio" expresses a more melancholic tone, interrogating the results of Mexico's conquest. The poem opens with a child's searching question directed at his father, "Papá: / dónde está el indio / que dejó Cristóbal Colón" (119). The child's question, *ubi sunt*, echoes the Romantic practice of ruin-gazing and reflecting on the past as well as the fleeting nature of the present. However, since the voices of the child and the father or those of indigenous persons, the question and answer that comprise the poem function less as an imperial gaze —similar to what Hernández terms the archeological view of indigenous peoples, discussed above, as artifacts of the past—

and more as a work of ethical remembrance. The father responds to his son by explaining that while the Indians of days past are not physically present in the form of flesh and blood, they live on within the structures erected by their own hands before and after the conquest.

> Hijo mío:
> Está en la catedral
> que con sus manos
> colocó las enormes piedras
> que levanta ¡La iglesia monumental!
> está en el campanario
> que se eleva al cielo
> que con sus fuerzas levantó
> las campanas a la torre
> para repicar "El ave María"
> Ahí, está el Indio
> ahí quedaron sus fuerzas
> su vida, su belleza
> y su eternidad.
> Ahí, ahí…
> Ahí está el indio.
> Está en el maíz
> está en el palacio Teotihuacán.
> Está en el Mayab,
> está en el Tajín.
> Está en Zempoala
> en Youhualichan.
> Está en el suelo Mexicano.
> Ahí está el Indio
> ahí donde quedó un poco
> de lo que destruyeron.
> Ahí está el Indio
> en la ruina de la invasión.
> Ahí está el Indio. (119)

Even in their ruinous state, indigenous structures such as the great Teotihuacán, the ruins of Mayab, and El Tajín serve as a resting place of sorts for the ancestors of the poem's father and son, as do the colonial cathedrals they were obliged to build after the conquest. The father explains to his son the notion that a trace of the indigenous people who once populated Mexico, those who built the pyramids as well as the colonial structures of New Spain, still remain, though

only as a remnant, as part of a ruin. The father's insight opens the poem to a possible historical materialist reading of the ethereal Indians as laborers who somehow overcome estrangement from the structures they built before their deaths. But it is important to remember that well before Marxism existed, many Mesoamerican cultures believed that their ancestors were somehow materially present in the objects they made and possessed during their lifetime. Also of note, the father, presumably Totonac, includes ruins from other indigenous cultures in his explanation, presenting a pan-indigenous view of "el indio" to his son. The message is one of solidarity with other indigene cultures who, like the Totonac, had to abandon their grand structures and erect cathedrals from their stones at the behest of Spanish invaders. But also, "¿Dónde está el indio?" echoes Hernández's theme of an indigenous population that is not quite visible, that still sleeps, but may soon awake. In Tiburcio's poem the ghostly ancestors fulfill the role of the sleeping Indians, who could inspire the living to rise up.

IV. Alberto Gómez Pérez (Tzotzil)

Alberto Gómez Pérez was born in Ejido Santa Catarina Las Palmas, in Huitiupan, Chiapas in 1966. The Chiapanecan poet writes verse in his native tongue, Tzotzil, and is one of the more prolific poets of Mexican indigenous languages. Like his contemporaries Natalio Hernández, and Jun Tiburcio, Gómez Pérez does not live from his creative work alone. He has served as mayor of his home municipality, Huitiupan, Chiapas, supervisor for three zones of the Municipal Public Libraries for the state of Chiapas, and in addition to publishing diverse works in regional and national journals and newspapers, he is also an active member of the Mayan-Zoque Writers Group (*Words of the True Peoples*, 215). Gómez Pérez published his first collection of poetry, *K'evo yu'un kajvaltik xchi'uk yalab snich'nab/Palabras para los dioses y el*

mundo, in 1996, which is, in his own words, contains "las creencias, ideas, costumbres y secretos" of his people (105).

Palabras para los dioses y el mundo is a bilingual Spanish/Tzoztil collection, implicitly directed at a dual audience, which reflects Faudree's notion of seeing double, discussed earlier. Gómez Pérez explains that one of the purposes of his text is for the non-indigenous reader to become a little more familiar with the world of contemporary indigenous people, as well as the struggles they face in a world wherein they are the cultural other (106). This sentiment echoes the statement by Natalio Hernández that contemporary indigenous literature should "llamar la atención de la sociedad mexicana sobre la presencia contemporánea de los pueblos indígenas y la necesidad de superar la visión arqueológica, mítica y folclórica que de ellos se tiene en amplios sectores de la sociedad nacional" (*La palabra*, 139). Yet, while *Palabras…* contains a message for non-indigenous readers, there are also allusions and meanings that only speakers of Tzotzil will understand. Though his book contains "las creencias, ideas, costumbres y secretos" of the Tzotzil, Gómez Pérez makes clear that those secrets are safe being that they are written from the point of view of the indigenous cosmovisión, "empleando elementos y términos no usados en español," and thus, cannot be understood by outsiders (106).

Yet there is another element in *Palabras para los dioses y el mundo* that, for the purposes of this study, is important to note. Gómez Pérez expresses his hope that his poetry "despierte la misericordia para salvar a este pueblo marginado, explotado, humillado y esclavizado de muy diferentes maneras" (105). While much of his verse takes the form of prayers to gods, and examples of Tzoztil culture, many of the poems featured in the Chiapanecan poet's first collection are poems of cultural resistance in that they demonstrate the viability and usefulness of his people's language while aiming to draw attention to the plight of the Tzoztil people and their

struggle for social justice and political recognition. To this end, Alberto Gómez Pérez dedicates his first collection of poetry to the following people: "A los hermanos indígenas caídos el primero de enero 1994. Al gran guerrero tzotzil de los Altos de Chiapas, El Pajarito. Al gran general tzotzil del Norte, general Petz. A la Unidad de Escritores Mayas-Zoques, A.C." (107). The first dedication clearly alludes to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), who under the leadership of Subcomandante Marcos, carried out an armed uprising in open rebellion against the Mexican government on the date indicated in the dedicatory. The second dedication, according to Carlos Montemayor, "refers to the Tzotzil leader Jacinto Pérez Ch'ixtot (or 'Pajarito'), who headed an armed uprising from 1911 to 1914 in the Chiapas highlands" (*Words…* 7). The third dedication likely alludes to Manuel Santiz Petz, an indigenous leader who during the Mexican Revolution helped drive ladinos from indigenous lands. Petz was shrewd and used the unrest as a way to gain more power until some indigenous people eventually saw him as a tyrant (Rus 75-76, n. 31). Last, Gómez Pérez dedicates his work to the *Unidad de Escritores Mayas-Zoques,* one of many writing groups that supports and makes writing and publishing contemporary indigenous literature possible.

Natalio Hernández credits Alberto Gómez Pérez with prefiguring the 1994 Zapatista uprising in his poem "El chicote" which was penned in 1993. Hernández claims that "El chicote" is a "preludio, el anuncio de algo que venía atrás, que estaba por acontecer, por estallar." (140). "El chicote" is composed of several stanzas of varying length, each beginning with the lament, "¡Ay mi pueblo!," after which the poetic voice expresses exasperation with status quo of indigenous/mestizo relations. "¡Ay mi pueblo! Sediento de agua viva, / cansado de escuchar palabrerías, / […]."¡Ay mi pueblo!, mirando está el ocaso, / satura su voz y nadie escucha su clamor, / es mejor la tertulia de sangre, / […]."¡Ay mi pueblo!, despierta del letargo poco a poco,

cuando a un paso está la vida, derrumbes y ríos caudalosos destruyen mi camino" (140). While "El chicote" hints at indigenous uprising, the poem "Despertaron" which was penned after the 1994 Zapatista uprising, more explicitly alludes to the rebellion in Chiapas:

> Se cansaron de la opresión
> se cansaron de la explotación de los ladinos
> por eso ya somos diferentes
> y nos acordamos de los héroes
> que murieron en la represión
>
> Si eres indígena
> es un delito
> y si eres kaxlán no habrá problemas
> ¿A dónde iremos entonces
> si no somos tomados en cuenta?
>
> Dónde escondernos
> si nuestros cerros sagrados están profanados
> nuestros ríos manchados
> nuestras montañas destruidas.
> Hay un motivo
> y hay una razón de este alboroto
> por tanta enfermedad
> en cada territorio
> y en cada pueblo.
> Por eso hay sangre
> y hubo una decisión. (173)

The language of "Despertaron," like that of many early contemporary indigenous poems, does not obfuscate its message, which is readily apparent to the reader and needs little explanation. The poetic voice portrays the experience of living as a disenfranchised minority in a culture that looks down upon and discriminates against its own. The heroes mentioned in the first stanza could be the same heroes to whom the poet dedicates this collection of verse. The idea that opens the second stanza, the supposed criminal nature of being and indigenous person, echoes the American political discourse of immigrants as illegal subjects, but also recalls the colonial Latin American era, during which one's skin color determined the extent of their rights and privileges.

Donald Frischman explains that the word kaxlán, used in the second stanza, comes from the tzotzil word *jkaxlanetike,* which means someone who is not recognized as indigenous but rather as ladino. Further, when kaxlán is preceded by the prefix of agent, *j*, it means "mestizo." But without the prefix, as it appears in the poem, it means "hen". The two words are nearly identical but this is a common way for Tzotzil and Tzeltal speakers to make fun of mestizos. The closing lines of "Despertaron" are a direct allusion to the Zapatista uprising, underlining why it happened while simultaneously justifying the actions of the Subcomandante Marcos and the EZLN. According to Natalio Hernández, the Zapatista uprising serves an important role in the development of contemporary indigenous literature by creating a space wherein the indigenous voices of southern Mexico could and would be heard, in *Memoria y destino de los pueblos indígenas*, he writes the following:

> Mostró…el otro rostro de México. El rostro negado, oculto, producto del proceso colonial y de las políticas indigenistas paternales del [siglo XX]; de la actitud excluyente y racista de la burguesía nacional. De manera que las voces de los pueblos indígenas se hicieron escuchar, primero con las armas en las manos, para construir el espacio social; después con la fuerza de la palabra, para iniciar el dialogo que nunca ha existid y que ahora mismo no acaba de construirse… (143)

After five hundred years of enduring a once-sided conversation, Mexico's indigenous communities, by forging a social space wherein they had a voice, would be included in dialogues about their future and the fates of their cultures and languages.

Within this dialogical space, a common theme that emerges in contemporary indigenous poetry is the preoccupation with preserving language and culture through the written word while also using it as a tool to disseminate knowledge about the injustices suffered by the indigenous

people of Mexico. In the poem, “Escribamos” Gómez Pérez does just that, imploring those of his community to write about their culture, traditions, and experiences with this very purpose in mind:

> Si hemos pensado cantar
> escribámoslo
> y demos a conocer nuestras tradiciones
> para que vean
> y conozcan
> que somos pobres
> y abandonados
> que así sea pues
> para que se entere todo el mundo
>
> Vengan a escribir pequeños
> vengan a escribir mayores
> nosotros tenemos que hablar de la miseria
> y dar a conocer tanta explotación
> ya no carguemos con el miedo
> y que termine de una vez el temor
> en nuestros pueblos
> en este día caminen con sus sueños
> con el canto sagrado de nuestros antepasados
> vengan vengan vengan a escribir. (173, *Palabras para los dioses y el mundo*)

“Escribamos” reveals an interesting tension between western notions of writing and indigenous notions of oral tradition. Historically the indigenous peoples of the Americas largely relied upon the oral tradition as a means of preserving their language, history, myths, and culture. However, the poetic voice here suggests that anyone among his people that has thought of singing (a symbol of oral tradition), should also write what they were going to sing. Further, the voice uses the first person plural verb forms in the first stanza, emphasizing that the singing and writing that is to take place should be a community activity. While the oral tradition may have been sufficient in the past, the voice here notes that his imperative to write is so that they, they cultural others of the Tzotzil can know of their plight, “que somos pobres / y abandonados / … / para que se entere todo el mundo” (173). Gómez Pérez’s poem gets at the heart of an important attribute of

contemporary indigenous poetry, the tendency to publish in bilingual editions of poetry discussed above.

"Escribamos" hints that the imperative to write is not only meant to preserve the Tzoztil language, but recognizing that in the western world, writing is a symbol if intelligence and high culture, the voice recognizes the importance of engaging a modern mestizo audience on their own terms. Just as Columbus and the early conquistadors noted that lack of writing among the indigenous peoples they encountered, reading it as another sign of their supposed barbarism, Gómez Pérez understands that if his language is to be understood as a thing of value, by a western culture, a thing worth preserving, and celebrating, it must be presented in written form. The poet is quite conscious of the fact that in the 1990s part of the reason indigenous languages began to receive recognition is due largely to the fact that they started to publish. Hence his voice invites all to write, young and old alike, and with urgency he closes his poem repeating to those who might come and write, his invitation to join those who have already begun to so, "vengan vengan vengan a escribir" (173)

V. Conclusion

Paja Faudree explains that while the resurgence in indigenous-language literature has been successful in many regards, it has yet to find much of an audience outside of those who read it only in translation.

> Indigenous writers have, indeed, had an enormous impact nationally in Mexico. In addition to hundreds of books written by indigenous authors and numerous anthologies of their work, several national literary and cultural magazines—including regular inserts in national newspapers such as *La Jornada*—publish indigenous-language writing. Almost every state has one or more magazines that

> publish regional indigenous authors. Bilingual textbooks in indigenous languages are available throughout the country, and indigenous intellectuals now occupy powerful positions in the government agencies that oversee indigenous education and language policy. However, they have found it far more difficult to have similar success in creating local, literate publics for indigenous-language works. (220)

Ironically, while many indigenous writers are known on the national level, some have yet to find an audience locally among those who share their language. This could be a sign that the majority of those who read these texts do not, in fact, read the original indigenous works, but only their translations in Spanish. Thus, it is possible that the typical reader of an indigenous-language/Spanish bilingual collection of poetry sees the indigenous language itself merely "as an emblem representing something about the author's identity" while failing to "interact with it beyond reading it as a symbol" (Faudree 198).

Returning to what Natalio Hernández published more than twenty years ago, one of the aims of contemporary indigenous writers in the early and mid-90s was to make their presence known, to help the Spanish-speaking Mexican public come to see indigenous writers and indigenous peoples as contemporaries of the mestizo majority, overcoming the archeological and folkloric image that mainstream Mexico once held of their autochthonous inhabitants. Recently, when asked whether or not he and his fellow indigene writers achieved their lofty goal, Mr. Hernández simply replied that he believes they have, "en gran medida..." (Cluff). Indeed, if one examines the political effect of the resurgence in indigenous literature, and Mexico's greater indigenous rights movement, perhaps the most important achievement of these collective entities was the change in article four of the Mexican constitution, which recognizes the inherent value

of indigenous Mexican languages and cultures, even promoting and supporting their further development. No small accomplishment by any measure. As a result of the change in article four, academic and literary conferences focusing on contemporary indigenous language literature are held annually and an award ceremony sponsored by the *Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* that honors outstanding literature in Mexican languages with the Premio Netzahualcóyotl. Indigenous literature itself continues to develop as a genre, including more women's voices each year but also maturing in its style, as much of the more recent examples are completely contemporary in their thematic content, avoiding allusions to indigenous cultures altogether, while developing a critical posture similar to that of modern Mexican poetry. While the future for indigenous language literature may look bright, if the genre is to continue being successful as a whole, it must find an audience on its home turf, where it can inspire young readers, who already understand the indigenous languages on the pages opposite the Spanish translations, to respond to Alberto Gómez Pérez's invitation, to come and write.

Notes on Chapter 3

[1] Stoler cites the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines the verb *to ruin* thusly "to inflict or bring great and irretrievable disaster upon, to destroy agency, to reduce to a state of poverty, to demoralize completely" (11).

[2] Paja Faudree explains the following: "The vast majority of modern literary works in indigenous languages appear in editions in which the indigenous-language version –the 'original' or 'true' text– is presented on the left, and the Spanish version –the 'translation'– appears on the right.

[3] It is of note that in addition to the term *masehual*, the Nahua in Veracruz also describe themselves as *mexicanos*, alluding to both their Mexican citizenship and their ethnic ancestry as descendants of the Mexica. However, according to Andrés Hasler, among certain Gulf Coast Nahua, when a *masehual* more closely identifies with non-indigenous mestizo culture, they are no longer recognized as such (qtd. in Rodríguez López and Valderrama Rouy, 161).

[4] Unlike Hernández, Jun Tiburcio occasionally translates the names of indigenous deities from Totonac to Spanish names that reflect catholic-indigenous syncretism. See below.

[5] Valderrama Rouy explains further that one of his Totonac cultural informants describes Chichini as a giver of life, who, "as the creator is assimilated to Christ" (204). According to Valderrama Rouy the Totonac religion is very much syncretic.

[6] For more on this topic see: José Angel Galindo et al. "Contaminación del Río Cazones, Veracruz, México durante el periodo octubre 2004 - junio 2005" *Revista Científica UDO Agrícola*, Vol. 5, no .1, 2005, 74-80. Print.

[7] Kahl, J. D. W., et al. "Characterization of atmospheric transport to the El Tajín archaeological zone in Veracruz, México." *Atmósfera*, *20*(4), 359-371. (2007). 07 Aug. 2014.

Conclusion: The Future of Ruins

Hoy estoy vivo sin nostalgia
la noche fluye
la ciudad fluye
yo escribo sobre la página que fluye
transcurro con las palabras que transcurren
Conmigo no empezó el mundo
No ha de acabar conmigo...

-Octavio Paz, "El mismo tiempo"

Estoy
en la mitad de esta frase.
¿Hacia dónde me lleva?

-Octavio Paz, "La mitad de esa frase…"

In 2006 German critic Andreas Huyssen writes that "a strange obsession with ruins has developed in the countries of the northern transatlantic as part of a much broader discourse about memory and trauma, genocide and war" (Nostalgia, 7). Like Simmel before him, Huyssen sees an intrinsic connection between this fascination with ruins and feelings of nostalgia. However, early twentieth-century nostalgia for ruins is problematic since it arises "At a time when the promises of the modern age lie shattered like so many ruins, when we speak with increasing frequency both literally and metaphorically of the ruins of modernity…" (7). Responding to situations of economic downturn, the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York, natural and economic disasters, as well as other cultural crises throughout Europe and the United States, in the last twenty years European and American writers, artists, and intellectuals have turned to ruins with increasing frequency as a symbol or metaphor through which they might interpret and understand the zeitgeist. Huyssen believes that the element of nostalgia present in their intellectual output expresses a longing, necessarily for ruins, but for a time in which other futures, perhaps different from our own present, were still possible (7). While north American and European minds seem to only recently be discovering the interpretive potential and cultural significance of ruins, their Mexican counterparts have long explored the ruins of their pasts, presents, and futures.

As noted in the introduction, this project stems from the observation that twentieth-century Mexican poetry abounds in images of ruins and metaphors of ruination. While many Mexican poets use centuries-old ruin-gazing tropes –such as a poetic self that melancholically looks upon a ruin then asks *ubi sunt* or ponders a *memento mori*– as a way of examining pre-Columbian ruins, others still, use the concept of ruins as a metaphor through which they create meaning about subjects as diverse as technological modernity, modern utopic projects and their

inevitable failures, the modern city, natural and man-made disasters, and even indigenous cultures and languages.

In the introduction to this work, we saw that western modes of thinking about ruins are problematized by the case of Mexico's pre-Columbian ruins, the product of a cultural other. Thus, mestizo Mexican poets who look upon ruins such as *El Tajín* or *Monte Albán* and ask *ubi sunt*, imagine the indigenous past either with nostalgia or horror, usually reflecting the predominate view of indigenous cultures in their own era. Chapter 1 examines how after the modernizing projects of the *porfiriato* give way to the Revolution the city becomes the site of modern development and practices in the post-revolutionary era. Responding to broad enthusiasm for modernization, industrialization, and the trappings of technological modernity, some of Mexico's early twentieth-century poets celebrate the city in their verse, while others are more suspicious of what the changing metropolis brings. Following the latter thread, as the twentieth century progresses, a few of Mexico's writers come to see Mexico City as a metonymic symbol of modernity itself, eventually reading the megalopolis as a ruin of modernity.

Subsequent chapters explore how two Mexican poets, José Emilio Pacheco and Jorge Humberto Chávez (chapter 2), respond to disasters, both natural and man-made, with poetry, using metaphors of ruins to work through their own grief and create some semblance of meaning and significance from the tragedy that surrounds them. Also, in chapter 3, we examined the role of contemporary indigenous poetry in the larger struggle of a people seeking not only recognition, but also legitimization and participation in their country's political dialogue. Defending their cultural knowledge and their languages in verse, poets such as Jun Tiburcio resist the political forces of ruination that have threatened their destruction since the conquest.

Each chapter examines poetry that responds to a specific moment or event, and either directly or indirectly, uses some notion of ruins as an interpretive tool. But what do we go from here, what is the future of ruins in Mexican poetry, and what of this project?

Though he cast a long shadow over the field of Mexican poetry for several decades as both critic and poet, and his ideas greatly influence this project, Octavio Paz's voice is present herein only as a critic. While his essays were quite useful for this project, to write about Paz's ruin poetry would require the writing of a separate book. Other poets, still, could make great contributions to the development of this work in the future, such as Homero Aridjis, who also explores the city as a ghostly ruin in his verses, or Myriam Moscona, who explores personal ruins and individual ruination through intertextual dialogue with her deceased friend and poet, Álvaro Quijano, and the American author Malcolm Lowry. Even the very notion of Mexico City as a ruin is made more complex in the present given Carlos Slim's mass purchase and careful restoration of several buildings in the historical center of the city. The experience of Slim's pristine historical center as a kind of immaculate ruin only adds another layer of experience to an already multivalenced city that so many poets have described using the vocabulary of ruins.

In the twenty-first century, Mexico has already seen more than its fair share of disasters, man-made and natural. Rather than recur to the tropes and symbols of ruins to shape their verses, poetry seems to be confronting the atmosphere of violence head on, as is the case with María Rivera's "Los Muertos," which poignantly captures the anguish and frustration of those that suffered during the Calderón presidency's escalation of violence. The poetic response to the horrible mass kidnapping and subsequent disappearance and murder of 43 Ayoztinapa *normalistas* in Iguala Guerrero, for example, was swift. Many poets responded as part of the *43 poetas por Ayoztinapa* project, memorializing the dead, including David Huerta. While some

direct their ire at those whose political practices and policies make such tragic events possible and even probable, no mention of ruins or ruination is made, the majority, in fact, are simply laments for the dead. Though not a poetic use of ruins as a metaphor for Mexico's turmoil, shortly after the Ayoztinapa tragedy became public knowledge, the *Instituto de Estudios para la Transición Democrática* published a collective essay titled "México: Las ruinas del futuro." The final paragraph echoes Huyssen's *"Nostalgia for Ruins"* in that it reads the present state of affairs as the ruins of a promised future that never arrives: "Hace unos meses, se suponía, estábamos dando pasos de gigante hacia nuestra definitiva modernización. Pero los más viejos problemas no resueltos, los problemas pospuestos siempre -violencia, pobreza y desigualdad- nos precipitaron a las ruinas de un futuro que no llegó." (Mexico: Las ruinas del futuro). While the IETD's essay demonstrates the continued relevance of ruins as a metaphor for understanding Mexico's political situation, it remains to be seen whether or not the county's poets will respond to such events through metaphors of ruination, as Jorge Humberto Chávez and José Emilio Pacheco did, or if they will choose to express the political realities of their country in radically different ways.

Indigenous language poetry deserves a closer look as well. Future studies of this topic would do well to examine whether or not the genre has left behind its earlier tendency toward a poetics of cultural resistance. In at least one case, themes of cultural resistance persist, though with a different focus. Natalia Toledo Paz, who writes in Zapotec, uses the notion of cultural resistance to look inward and interrogate her expected role as an indigenous woman in a patriarchal society, resisting the characteristics and functions her culture would categorize as maternal and have her embrace. Have other common threads developed among the works of Mexico's next generation of indigenous-language poets, has the poetic form itself matured and

developed since the early 1990s, and has it embraced more modern forms and subjects, or if it has remained largely stagnant? For their part, Kelly McDonough and Nahua poet Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño believe that Mexico's indigenous literatures function as "the creation, preservation, and transmission of knowledges" more than as an art form. In their opinion, then, contemporary indigenous literature should not be analyzed and categorized in the same way that we approach western literary production, an interesting paradox for a literature whose readership likely does not read or speak its language of expression. Thus, further studies of indigenous poetry should address the future of an art form intended, in part, for a diminishing public. What, exactly would the indigene language signify for those that don't understand it, and has the genre found a readership among its native speakers?

In an interview with Irma Pineda, McDonough and Sideño asked what she might tell the public about indigenous literary production, she answered, "We are here, we are still alive, and we have much to tell you." (qtd. in McDouough and Sideño 405). According to Pineda then, the *raison d'être* of indigenous literature today echos Natalio Hernández's stated reason that he, and other poets, write verse in their native languages, to "llamar la atención de la sociedad mexicana sobre la presencia contemporánea de los pueblos indígenas y la necesidad de superar la visión arqueológica, mítica y folclórica que de ellos se tiene en amplios sectores de la sociedad nacional" (*La palabra*, 139). While Hernández believes that contemporary indigenous literature has largely overcome these antiquated beliefs, Pineda's statement reveals that much work remains to be done.

What is the future of ruins in Mexican poetry? As 2016 draws to a close, new discoveries at the Teotihuacan and Chichen Itza archeological sites are reshaping our understanding of these ancient citadels. As fresh archeological information emerges, it reshapes the past and creates new

meaning in the present for those who read the ruins and find meaning among them. Surely, the material objects, both pre-Columbian and modern, will continue to haunt those who excavate and gaze upon them, whether literally or metaphorically in verse, and perhaps, inspire them to write new ruin-poetry. What remains to be seen is whether or not they will continue to serve as a relevant and useful interpretive tool long into the twenty-first century, or if ruins will remain a symbol chiefly connected with Mexico's first five hundred years.

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