UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Irony and Politics in the Poetry of Roque Dalton, José Emilio Pacheco, and Nicanor Parra

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Spanish and Portuguese

by

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DEDICATION

To

Mis matriarcas, Altagracia and Julia Elena, me nutro de su fuerza.

Mis padres, Alfredo y Aidée, plantaron las semillas que siguieron dando fruto.

Mi hermanos, Edward y Alizza, son mi corazón.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Irony and Politics in the Poetry of Roque Dalton, José Emilio Pacheco, and Nicanor Parra

by

Samari Yanira Batres

Doctor of Philosophy in Spanish and Portuguese

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While Roque Dalton, José Emilio Pacheco, and Nicanor Parra are among the most well-known poets of their respective countries, their works have rarely been put in conversation with each other due to the fact that they were produced in and responded to specific social and cultural contexts. But a close reading of key texts reveals that they engaged in rigorous and even controversial critique of dominant ideas around politics and art. My dissertation argues that by attending to these poets' use of irony it becomes clear that they utilize it as a tool that allows them to examine and question dominant political ideologies and esthetic precepts without resulting in reductive and formulaic answers. The three main areas discussed in this project are 1) the critical approach to the poet and poetry, 2) the exploration of leftist political ideologies and critique of dogmatism in the left as well as of the United States and its disproportionate influence abroad and, 3) the use of masks and characters as a way to create productive tension within a text.

INTRODUCTION

This project began as an exploration of one of El Salvador's most well-known 20th century authors, Roque Dalton (1935-1975). The deep irony of his execution at the hands of the leftist guerilla organization that he belonged to, the People's Revolutionary Army (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo), turned him into one of the most fascinating martyrs in the history of leftist movements in Latin America. But this idealization of Dalton initially stifled critical readings of his works. In Luis Alvarenga's 2011 book, *Roque Dalton: La radicalización de las vanguardias*, Alvarenga notes that the post-civil war publication of an anthology of Dalton's work, *En la humedad del secreto*, in 1995 marks an important moment in which the approach to his writing shifted. Alvarenga cites Salvadoran critic Rafael Lara Martínez who stated in the prologue to this anthology that "el ícono del poeta guerrillero ha escamoteado la responsabilidad de hacer un análisis literario riguroso y desideologizado" (8-9). While this statement was scandalous at the time, much has changed since then in both literary and political spheres[1]. In academia, critics in and outside of El Salvador have engaged in meaningful critical analysis of his works that looked at it for its literary value outside of the very specific context in which it was produced.

The deeply ironic worldview present in Dalton's poetry is a key factor that reveals not only his development as a poet but the evolution of his relationship to leftist ideologies. Dalton was not alone in his critical approach to art and politics. This same ironic worldview can be seen in other 20th century Latin American poets. In my dissertation, I focus on two

[1] Even though Dalton's works were initially prohibited in El Salvador, in 2007 the Salvadoran government declared him "Poeta Meritísimo de El Salvador" and later in 2013 they declared the "Día Nacional de la Poesía" on May 14th, Dalton's birthday.

others: Nicanor Parra (Chile, 1914-2018) and José Emilio Pacheco (Mexico, 1939-2014). Evidently, there are many marked differences between these three poets, among them their specific geographical and temporal contexts and their varied levels of commitment to specific political causes as well as their definition of commitment. It is also important to note that historically, the weight of Dalton's biography in relation to his works has been significantly heavier than in the cases of Parra and Pacheco. But there are events in Parra's life that are key to the understanding of his poetry and his changing perception of commitment and how it applied (or did not apply) to his poetry. One of these events was his visit to the White House in 1970 which was followed by the backlash from leftist intellectuals who labeled him a traitor. On the other hand, Pacheco vehemently opposed the need to look at the author's biography in order to understand his poetry. He was well known for refusing to give interviews and his poem "Carta a George B. Moore en defensa del anonimato" from *Los trabajos del mar* (1983) is a prime example of this. It is also important to note that Parra belongs to a different generation of authors than Dalton and Pacheco, having been born about two decades before them. But beyond their marked differences, many of their works reflected an ironic worldview that focused its critical eye on political and aesthetic ideologies. But before delving into the different manifestations of this worldview in their poetry, we must first define, as concisely as possible, what an ironic worldview entails.

Critics Ernst Behler, Claire Colebrook and Linda Hutcheon's studies on irony are vital for tracing the way in which it has developed and changed over time. Before delving into their research, it is useful to start from the most basic definition of irony: the act of saying the opposite of what one means. At a fundamental level, irony requires separating

the signifier from the signified. Words are emptied of their original meaning and the opposite meaning takes its place. But even in cases where the ironic phrase simply means the opposite of what it says, there is a risk that the receptor will take the statement at face value. Because of this, Wayne C. Booth declares that irony "risks disaster more aggressively than any other device" (41). It is worth noting that in spite of the risks, Booth argues that it is possible to reconstruct a new stable meaning from the ironic text. This is where literary critic Linda Hutcheon differentiates from Booth. Hutcheon's argument takes the ambiguous aspect of irony a step further, eliminating the possibility of reconstruction. Irony cannot disambiguate, it can only make things more complex. She states: "Ironic meaning is simultaneously double (or multiple), and that therefore you don't actually have to reject a "literal" meaning in order to get at what is usually called the "ironic" or "real" meaning of the utterance" (Hutcheon 60). The sought after meaning(s) occurs in the interaction between the said and the unsaid. Therefore, even when irony is a rhetorical device, it does not disambiguate, it destabilizes, disenchants, and poses questions.

In *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity*, Ernst Behler reflects on the understanding of irony in the ancient and modern world. He explains that in the ancient world, Plato was the first to present Socrates as an ironic interlocutor and that the Platonic Socrates appears as refined, human, and humorous self-deprecating person who embodied the paragon of the teacher (Behler 78). In *Irony*, Claire Colebrook delves further into Socratic irony and what exactly made him the ideal teacher[2]. She explains that Socrates would speak as if he

[2] Colebrook explains that there has been a resistance to the idea that Socrates was the beginning of irony because the awareness of Socrates and Socratic irony was almost absent from medieval and Renaissance works on irony and rhetoric (7). Furthermore, in the Renaissance *ironia* was a trope or figure of speech and not the Socratic irony that Plato

was ignorant or exceedingly respectful in order to reveal his interlocutor's ignorance (Colebrook 2). The type of communication established between Socrates and his interlocutor was founded on questioning the use of a concept (Colebrook 27). In other words, Socrates was ironic because he disguised his knowledge and in doing so, forced his interlocutor to face the emptiness behind the concepts they were using. In short, Socratic irony was not simply saying one thing but meaning something else, it "is an insistence that what we say must have some meaning; that we cannot just offer wisdoms and definitions as rhetorical strategies without commitment to what they mean" (Colebrook 26). It is worth emphasizing that Socratic irony insisted upon questioning established concepts, which is the core of what carries over to the modern era.

The concept of an ironic worldview has its roots in the 18th and 19th century German Romantics. Behler and Colebrook observe that the Romantic movement was marked by the disenchantment before the promises of the Enlightenment and from it, an attitude of "in spite of" is born. This attitude can partially be explained as an acceptance of the impossibility of reaching perfection within the arts while simultaneously straining toward it. This same paradox is found within the Romantic critique of reason, upon which Colebrook elaborates. She explains that the German Romantics responded to this paradox with an ironic attitude, theirs was "a speech which at once made a claim to be heard, but which also signaled or gestured to its own limits and incomprehension" (Colebrook 47). Put differently, their art and critique was self-critical and self-reflective, it viewed itself through an ironic lens. It is key to remember that Socratic irony hinged on the same basic

describes (Colebrook 7). Therefore, Colebrook argues that if Socrates is seen as the beginning of irony and Western consciousness, it is only in a modern sense (8).

principle, that one must question concepts and ideas, like Enlightenment and perfection in the arts, and that this questioning does not necessarily result in clarity.

Ultimately, there are three key takeaways from Behler, Colebrook, and Hutcheon's work. First, at the core of what characterizes an ironic worldview is a self-critical approach to art. There is an awareness of the limitations inherent to creating art coupled with an attitude of "in spite of," which manifests itself clearly in all three poets. This will be the focus of chapter one. Second, an ironic worldview also manifests in the questioning of concepts and ideologies. This is particularly crucial for Dalton and Parra due to their personal relationships to leftist ideologies in their respective contexts and it will be at the center of chapter two. Finally, the third chapter analyzes a more rhetorical use of irony, particularly that one present when the speaker adopts a mask, similar to the one Socrates would adopt in feigning ignorance. But in the case of Dalton and Pacheco, they adopt the voices of figures of authority or those who stand in opposition to their own ideals in order to question opposing ideologies. It is also worth mentioning that Chilean poet Pedro Lastra's prologue to *Catorce poetas hispanoamericanos de hoy* (1984) identifies key characteristics Latin American poetry written in the latter half of the 20th century that line up with those of an ironic worldview. These characteristics will be expounded in chapter one to help clarify the connection between what Lastra proposes about the specificity of Latin American poets and how it connects to the concept of an ironic worldview.

Chapter 1: Demystifying Poetry and the Poet

This chapter focuses on three books, Parra's *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954), Dalton's *El turno del ofendido* (1962), and Pacheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo* (1969)

and it explores how these three poets develop a self-critical *ars poetica* in these specific texts. Drawing from both Latra's proposal and Behler and Colebrook's analysis of the development of an ironic worldview, this chapter expounds the different approaches to self-critical writing. It begins by exploring how they reconceptualized poetry and what themes have historically been accepted as "poetic" and which have not. This results in a rethinking of the genre that does not propose a new set of rules, but instead puts both the more traditional forms of poetry in conversation with "untraditional" poetic forms. This ironic attitude toward poetry inevitably results in an ironic view of the poet, a demystification of his persona. Finally, another important facet of this process of self-reflection through writing is the questioning the concept of originality. This is particularly central in Pacheco's self-reflective poems that grapple with their inherent intertextuality and the impossibility to create something original.

Chapter 2: Political Imaginaries in Dalton and Parra

In this chapter Dalton's *Taberna y otros lugares* (1969) and Parra's *Artefactos* (1972) play a central role. It is important to note that there are key differences between Dalton and Parra politically speaking. Dalton never dissociated from the left during his lifetime even though his poetry contained an ironic tone directed towards his own role as a revolutionary and toward the promises of leftist ideologies. On the other hand, Parra clearly expressed disenchantment with the political left. In Parra's *Artefactos*, a collection of cards that have one phrase and an accompanying image, one of the most revealing artifacts states "La izquierda y la derecha unidas jamás serán vencidas" written on a banner that is held by a large crowd of people that are indecipherable from each other. It is important to

note that this is not a show of support for either side; it is truly offensive to both. It is worth noting that Parra appropriates a phrase that is commonly used in leftist protests, which points to the fact that he was challenging one side more strongly than the other. Nevertheless, in "Ironía y descentramiento en los *Artefactos* de Nicanor Parra y Guillermo Tejeda," Gabriel Villaroel states that "los artefactos lanzan sus esquirlas en las direcciones más diversas, atentan contra la revolución y la contrarrevolución, la poesía y la antipoesía, la virtud y la infamia" (114). Much like in *Poemas y antipoemas*, nothing is sacred in *Artefactos*. What is unique about Dalton's work is that it never becomes as critical as Parra, but even though it never gets to the point of disenchantment that others do, there is still a deeply ironic view of the revolutionary movement and its participants. Scholar Genevieve Fabry explain in her article "La ironía al servicio de la revolución. La poesía de Roque Dalton," that Dalton's work focuses on the interior space of the revolutionary and in doing so; he reveals the complexities of his persona. Fabry's reading prompts us to look further into what effect the exploration of the interior space has on the overall imaginary of the revolution itself. This chapter will explore the way that the ironic worldview of these poets lead them to critique both sides of the political spectrum.

Chapter 3: The Appropriation of Voices of Authority and Public Opinion in Dalton and Pacheco

Speaking in the voice of someone else is not a novel act in poetry. The peculiarity of both Pacheco and Dalton's way of giving voice to another person is in *who* they decide give voice to and *how* they do it. This chapter examines two of Roque Dalton's books, *Taberna y otros lugares* and *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* (1974), and José Emilio Pacheco's

El silencio de la luna (1994) with a focus on the way in which both poets adopt masks. Many times, Dalton and Pacheco adopt the voices of figures of authority and mimic them in their poetry. Returning to Booth's argument, this approach risks disaster more than others might. If it is read in a straightforward manner, without any context, some of these poems can be read as a defense of totalitarianism. But even with this risk, by appropriating these voices in an ironic manner, these authors are able to deconstruct authoritative ideologies through the use of the same exact language that is used to defend them.

Conclusion

Dalton, Pacheco, and Parra stand out not only for their oftentimes dark humor that can create discomfort but for their unifying ironic worldview that leads to a myriad of questions without answers. My dissertation attends to the connections between these writers from various regions, tracing out the continuities that have been missed. Ultimately, by proposing a reading of these three poets with an emphasis on the ironic worldview evident in each of their writings, it becomes evident that they all react and contribute to the process of disenchanting and demystifying the political and esthetic ideologies of their historical contexts.

Chapter 1: Demystifying Poetry and the Poet

Introduction

Chilean poet and essayist Pedro Lastra's prologue to *Catorce poetas hispanoamericanos de hoy* (1984), a special number of academic journal *Inti: Revista de Literatura Hispánica*, proposes that from 1950 to the date of the journal's publication, Latin American poetry had developed four key identifiable characteristics: 1) the prevalence of characters, masks, or doubles in place of the traditional poetic voice, 2) a tendency toward a more narrative style of writing, 3) intertextuality, and 4) a self-reflection or metapoetics. Furthermore, Lastra notes that these poets use literature as a space to reflect *on* literature (xvi). He states that the new poetic subject "Es una conciencia vuelta hacia si misma observándose en el acto de escribir: cuestionamiento de la poesía y el lenguaje, ejercicio de la duda, expresión del *deseo de la palabra*" (Lastra xvii). This *concsience turned inward* is at its core, an expression of an ironic worldview as defined by Behler and Colebrook. It is an art that reflects on itself, on its process of creation, on the conventions it follows and/or breaks, and this in turn forces it to trace out its own limits.

One of the four characteristics that Lastra points to, a narrative style of writing is present in all three poets and even though it is another unifying feature, it is not a crucial characteristic for this project. While I will return to Lastra's argument about the use of masks and characters in chapter three, this chapter will center on two of the chracteristics that Lastra highlighted: the transformation of literature into a space to reflect *on* literature and intertextuality. The texts that this chapter will focus on, Parra's *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954), Dalton's *El turno del ofendido* (1962), and Pacheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo* (1969), were all published during the period that Lastra studies and each of them

demonstrate the characteristics that he proposes to different degrees. I propose that both intertextuality and the tendency toward self-reflective writing are markers of the ironic worldview that prevails in these poets works. Ultimately, this self-reflective writing yields a few results: a reimagining of the thematic elements of poetry that expands the limits of the genre, deprecating and playful depictions of the poet which challenge the idea that the poet possesses a privileged position far from the common man, questions about the long-term relevance of their writings, and an interrogation of the concept of originality. All of these critical approaches ultimately demystify both the writing process and its final result.

It is necessary to place Lastra's proposal about Latin American poetry in conversation with the core esthetic principles of the German Romantics. Romantic irony, the root of the ironic worldview present in Dalton, Pacheco and Parra, "regards irony as something like a human condition or predicament" (Colebrook 48). Human existence is in its essence ironic because humans possess the ability to create and define humanity an infinite number of times, therefore it is impossible to arrive at a static and final definition. This multiplicity of meanings and significations is at the core of an ironic worldview. Conversely, the process of creation represents the pure flow of life, but the final product always falls short of the plenitude of the process. This applies to art as well, "in poetry, for example, we do not just copy nature. Like nature, we create, and the poem is evidence of this creation; the poem is mimetic but it does not copy a thing so much as a process" (Colebrook 49). The emphasis on the process of creation is crucial to my proposals in this chapter, particularly because Parra, Dalton and Pacheco consistently make the creative process visible in their poems and in line with Lastra's proposal, this results in a self-reflective type of literature that refuses to present the final product as ideal. Furthermore,

in light of the previous statements about creation and the final product, Colebrook proposes that for the Romantics, "the poem is a fall from the pure flow of creative life into some determined and limited object" (50). This perceived ironic fall influenced the Romantics approach to poetry, the same way that the ironic worldview of Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco inspires an alternative approach to writing poetry, one that remains skeptical of itself.

The Romantics approach to existence and art resulted in poetry that was often "about the inexpressible, unimaginable or unrepresentable origin of life and consciousness" (Colebrook 61) which inevitably presents a contradiction. How can one write about the inexpressible, unimaginable, or unrepresentable? Instead of trying to resolve this paradox, "Romantic irony embraces this dead end and contradiction, its poems often being about the impossibility of sincere, pure or authentic poetry" (Colebrook 61). This same motif can be found in Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco as they grapple with the impossibility of defining the essence of poetry. Finally, Colebrook proposes that three main traits define ironic texts; they are fragmentary, contradictory, and critical (67). The critical attitude, which Lastra emphasizes, leads Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco to reimagine the thematic elements of poetry and challenge the limitations of such themes, which prompts a reimagining of the poetic subject, the poet himself, while the permanence of poetry and the impossibility of originality present a paradox that the authors refuse to solve. In order to understand the significance of these proposals, the specific contexts of each of the three texts, Parra's *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954), Dalton's *El turno del ofendido* (1962), and Pacheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo* (1969), needs to be established.

Nicanor Parra's *Poemas y antipoemas* consists of three sections which contain poems that vary greatly in theme and tone. The title in itself presents a contradiction, is an antipoem a still a poem? But instead of trying to resolve this contradiction, Parra embraces this paradox and in doing so, he challenged the genre to redefine its esthetic limits. In "Chistes par(r)a reordenar el canon: Roberto Bolaño, Nicanor Parra y la poesía chilena", Benjamin Loy cites Federico Schopf's main characteristics of antipoetry, which include: "la introducción masiva del habla coloquial y otros tipos de discurso no poético y la desublimación [...] de la figura del poeta y de la poesía" (73)[3]. Part of this chapter's focus will be on the incorporation of "non-poetic" discourses into poetry as well as the reimagining of the poet and poetry through an ironic lens. Despite the fact that the antipoetic elements of this book are at the center of my proposals in this chapter, more than a few of the poems contain more traditional themes, like "Hay un día feliz" in which the poetic voice recalls his hometown in a nostalgic reverie. In spite of its colloquial language, this poem and many others do not fit exclusively into the antipoetic esthetic and I propose that in the case of Parra and Dalton, this is a productive tension that actually furthers the deconstruction of the limitations and common literary patterns that are found in the genre. But even though both Dalton and Parra significantly bend and break the rules of verse in their writing, a key difference between them is Dalton's commitment to social and political change through literature. Because of this, he challenges poetry and himself in a constant negotiation between his political alignments and his bourgeois upbringing.

[3] In the article, Loy argues that Parra's influence on Bolaño's works has been largely neglected in research and that ultimately both of their writings contain a critique of Modernity in esthetic and political terms.

El turno del ofendido was written during Dalton's exile in Cuba and Mexico between 1961 and 1962. He dedicates this book to family members and a general, who in an attempt to prove the poet's guilt before a court, ends up making him appear greater than he is. This foreshadows both the ironic tone and thematic elements of the book. Many critics agree that *El turno* is a crucial text in Dalton's literary history. In the prologue to the Ediciones Baile del Sol 2009 edition of *El turno*, Enrique Falcón explains that according to Tirso Canales, a fellow Salvadoran poet of Dalton's generation, the books that preceded this one, *Mía junto a los pájaros* (1957), *La ventana en el rostro* (1961), and *El mar* (1962), belonged to an early stage of writing "marcada por la renovación de los lenguajes y un fuerte tajo existencial" (11). Because of the thematic differences between these three earlier texts and latter ones like *Los testimonios* (1964) and *Taberna y otros lugares* (1969), in which Dalton's commitment becomes the clear motivation behind his writings, *El turno* is sometimes thought of as a moment of transition. Nevertheless, Falcón rejects this proposal and instead suggests that *El turno* "se nos aparece, más que como texto de transición, como *libro de condensación* clave para entender cabalmente esa <<*concreta verdad que*—en palabras del propio Roque—*repartí desde el fuego*>>" (11). In other words, *El turno* is the amalgamation of the poet's existential crisis and renovation of language with historical and social analysis and engagement. He states that in *El turno*, Dalton "hará revisión de su inmediato historial íntimo, se solidarizará con todos los humillados y ofendidos de su tiempo, revolcará tierra abajo los iconos sagrados de un Orden Social humillante y hará causa política por la subversión de las cosas" (Falcón 13). Dalton's personal experience with incarceration and exile prompt introspection which translates into solidarity with those who have also suffered injustice, demonstrated through his political engagement. It is

important to note that Dalton's political commitment did not begin with *El turno*, it simply became more central in that text. The book is divided into two sections, "Las cicatrices" and "Por el ojo de la llave," and I propose that the title of the first section makes evident that incarceration and exile are prevalent markers that shape the text. Along with Falcón's argument, I would like to propose that esthetic concerns and exploration along with a questioning of the role of the poet are central to *El turno*. Furthermore, Dalton's more experimental texts like *Taberna y otros lugares* and *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* have their roots in the type of introspective and self-critical poems that *El turno* contains. Furthermore, Dalton's constant negotiation between his political commitment and bourgeois upbringing enrich his esthetic experimentation and influence his redefinition of the poet. On the other hand, José Emilio Pacheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo* engages in self-reflective writing along with reflections on intertextuality and the concept of eternity, all stemming from an ironic worldview that embraces the contradictions and limitations that art embodies.

No me preguntes was written between 1964 and 1968 and is organized into five sections plus an appendix that contains the supposed biographies and poetry of two unknown writers, which in reality are just Pacheco's alter egos. The epigraph is an excerpt from one of Ernesto Cardenal's poems in which the passage of time that has left the poetic voice without time. As the title and epigraph foreshadow, the passage of time and its effects on humankind and poetry is one of the central themes of the text. Much like Dalton's *El turno*, critics have pointed to *No me preguntes* as a text that documents a crucial change in the poet's esthetic. In "The Postmodern Twist of José Emilio Paheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo*," Ronald J. Friis points to the 1968 massacre of Tlatelolco as a crucial

turning point for Pacheco. Friis argues that after this historic event, Pacheco adopts a new technique in his writing, an "anti-poetic or conversational tone that stands in contrast to Pacheco's earlier, more traditional poetic rhetoric" (28). The shift away from specialized poetic language in poetry precedes Pacheco's adoption of conversational tone, it is already present in both Parra and Dalton's earlier texts. But beyond being a simple linguistic shift in Pacheco's writing, I propose that this technique suggests a renovation of the poetic genre in the Mexican context. Of course, there is also a thematic shift, Friis states that this book contains "overt protest against misguided political power, the use and abuse of *culturalismo*, constant allusions to *modernismo*, strong criticisms of imperialism and capitalism, explorations of the limits of translation and kitsch, and an occasional dose of humor" (28). All of these statements are true, but I would add that the poems that focus on the limits of poetry, like the question of posterity, the tendency to reject past movements in the name of creating something new and innovative, among others, reveals the ironic vision that underlies the text as a whole. Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco in their respective contexts and in the wider context of mid-century Latin America engaged in an interrogation of poetry that ultimately results in an ironic proposition: the in spite of the undeniable shortcomings of the genre, the process of writing is where the true richness and complexity of both existence and art can be found and lost.

Reimagining the Poetic Landscape in Nicanor Parra and Roque Dalton

In *Poemas y antipoemas*, the reader finds a collection of poems that differ greatly in tone and theme. As Lastra noted about mid to late 20th century Latin American poetry in general, poems that reflect on the writing process abound Parra's text. "Advertencia al lector" is one of the most revealing poems of the collection, functioning as an *ars poetica*

that demonstrates the hyper self-awareness of the text. The title proposes that poetry is a product, and like any product, it comes with an owner's manual that inevitably includes a warning. The author's willingness to accept that literary works are products changes the way in which the author perceives his poetry, and instead of presenting it as an elevated art form he proposes that it is no different from any other object. The consumer proceeds at his own risk and the poet refuses to take responsibility for whatever reactions his poems might evoke. The first verses state: "El autor no responde de las molestias que puedan ocasionar sus escritos:/ Aunque le pese/ El lector tendrá que darse siempre por satisfecho" (Parra 71). The author adopts the language of a manufacturer instead of that of an artist. This linguistic shift is an esthetic choice that not only attempts to renovate the genre, but also challenge the limitations previously ascribed to poetry.

As if to avoid a future lawsuit, the warning confronts the critics directly. But the multiple ironic meanings of the words come into play as the poem develops. The poetic voice/author states:

> Sabelius, que además de teólogo fue un humorista consumado,
> Después de haber reducido a polvo el dogma de la Santa Trinidad
> ¿Respondió acaso de su herejía?
> Y si llegó a responder, ¡cómo lo hizo!
> ¡En qué forma descabellada!
> ¡Basándose en qué cúmulo de contradicciones! (Parra 71)

The reference to Sabellius, a third century Roman priest who was excommunicated for his teachings on the Holy Trinity, gestures toward the contradictory nature of poetry and antipoetry. Sabellius proposed that the Godhead was one but was expressed in three

different forms and rejected the idea that God was three distinct persons. The parallel that the poetic voice sets up between himself and Sabellius reveals much about the way that he understands his own *ars poetica*. The poetic voice explains that Sabellius responded to his heresy with contradictions, he critiqued the theology that proposed that God was three separate persons but did not do away with the idea of three different aspects of God. In other words, he did not reject the concept of the Trinity, he just proposed a different understanding of it, which can be read as a contradiction. Parra's proposal, like Sabellius's, took the traditional form of poetry and did not discard it, instead he proposes that the antipoetic is poetic. In the second stanza, the poetic voice delineates the aspects of his work that the critics rejected. He creates a dichotomy between the poetic and antipoetic and then deconstructs it through other poems.

The second stanza replies to the criticism that his works have received. He incorporates their voices into his poem:

> Según los doctores de la ley este libro no debiera publicarse:
> La palabra arco iris no aparece en él en ninguna parte
> Menos aún la palabra dolor,
> La palabra torcuato.
> Sillas y mesas sí que figuran a granel,
> ¡Ataúdes!, ¡útiles de escritorio!
> Lo que me llena de orgullo
> Porque, a mi modo de ver, el cielo se está cayendo a pedazos. (Parra 71-72).

The first four verses outline expectations, the focus on rainbows, which can symbolize beauty and wonder, juxtaposed with pain, covers a range of poetic themes. In contrast, the

second half of the stanza talks about what objects the book contains, most of them belonging to a classroom. This is a reference to Parra's role as a teacher, which suggests that the banal has entered the space of the sublime. The reference to desks and chairs is particularly telling because in other poems, "Solo de piano" and "Recuerdos de juventud", the poetic voice points to the evolution of trees into chairs and desks. In "Solo de piano", the poetic voice breaks down the relationship between the signifier and signified through a list of definitions that confront the limitations of language. The third and fourth verses state "Ya que los árboles no son sino muebles que se agitan:/ no son sino sillas y mesas en movimiento perpetuo", followed by "Ya que nosotros mismos no somos más que seres/ (como el dios mismo no es otra cosa que dios)" (97). The transition between stating that trees are nothing more than furniture followed by a reflection on the fact that humans are beings and god is just god may initially be read as Parra's tendency toward irreverence. But beyond this irreverence, these verses inquire into the nature of objects and beings. The statements, *god is god and beings are beings*, leads in a circle while in contrast, *trees are chairs and tables* suggests something different. In "Recuerdos de juventud" the poetic voice states:

> Lo cierto es que yo iba de un lado a otro,
> A veces chocaba con los árboles,
> Chocaba con los mendigos,
> Me abría paso a través de un bosque de sillas y mesas (Parra 111)

This creates an atmosphere of disorientation, as the title states that the poem is a recollection from the man's youth. If "Solo de piano" proposes answers that lead to more questions, "Recuerdos de juventud" immerses the reader in clouded memories of a time

when the poetic voice was determined to not be fooled (by what exactly it is not clear). Therefore, the tree/chairs and tree/tables therefore acquire a different meaning, they come to symbolize things are they truly are. Therefore, when the poet states that there are no rainbows or pain in his book, but there are plenty of chairs and tables, he is actually proposing an alternative approach to understanding the world. He is, in the words of Jacques Ranciere, participating in the redistribution of the partition of the sensible. The final verse of the stanza states, "Porque, a mi modo de ver, el cielo se está cayendo a pedazos" (Parra 72), providing an explanation for the worldview that is present in his poetry. But even though this appears to be a clear-cut, well-defined esthetic, the ironic aspect comes into play in the fourth stanza.

In "Posmodernidad y premodernidad en la antipoesía de Nicanor Parra," Mercedes Serna Arnaiz states that the antipoet "cambia, corrige, se desdice o rehace continuamente lo dicho" (348). It is ultimately, a poetry that is skeptic of itself and this is evident in the fourth stanza. He states, "Mi poesía puede perfectamente no conducir a ninguna parte" (Parra 72). The possibility that his poetry is poetry (much like god is god) destabilizes the second stanza where the poet states that his poetry is justified by his context. The fact that the poetic voice does not presuppose the significance of his works shifts the conversation art toward a more ironic understanding of its role in society. It confronts the genre with its limits. Yet, as Loy states in his article, this ironic attitude, along with the tendency toward laughter and rejection of established ways of understanding the world, "no desembocan en una actitud cínica o desinteresada hacia el mundo" (71). This can be seen clearly when the poetic voice addresses the possibility of a cynical understanding of his works:

"¿A qué molestar al público entonces?", se preguntarán los amigos lectores:

"Si el propio autor empieza por desprestigiar sus escritos,

¡Qué podrá esperarse de ellos!"

Cuidado, yo no desprestigio nada

O, mejor dicho, yo exalto mi punto de vista,

Me vanaglorio de mis limitaciones

Pongo por las nubes mis creaciones. (Parra 73)

Parra's understanding of his poetry and its relevance can be found in these verses. The poet presents a conflicting and contradictory image of himself, and does so purposefully. He begins by absolving himself of all responsibility for what the book contains, but this is not to say that the author believes that his writing is not worthy of being read. The insistent emphasis on limitations is a deeply ironic way of understanding his works. Like the German Romantics, he points to the way in which the poem is a limited object, it is unable to capture the vastness of the creative process, yet it is the result of that process and as such, the poet derives pride from them. Ultimately, the perceived limitations of his poetry, like his tendency to see that the trees are actually chairs and tables, is the mundane penetrating the previously sacred space of poetry.

"Sinfonía de cuna" and "Oda a unas palomas" exemplify Parra's esthetic through a reimagining of common poetic symbols. "Sinfonía de cuna" is the first poem of the collection, and it does not ease the reader in gently, instead it immediately disrupts the expectations surrounding these symbols. It remains faithful to the title with the first stanza:

Una vez andando

por un parque inglés

con un angelorum

sin querer me hallé. (Parra 9)

It contains four verses, assonant rhyme, and the lines alternate between six and five syllables, creating the musicality associated with nursery rhymes. It is worth noting that instead of using the Spanish word for angel, the poetic voice uses the Latin term, and furthermore incorrectly uses the plural instead of the singular *angelus*. These details become more significant as the poetic voice continues narrating his encounter with an angel. The second stanza narrates their greeting and a sense of miscommunication comes into play because the angel speaks Spanish but the narrator responds in French. The first two stanzas contain Latin and French, one a dead language and the other belonging to a culture that had great influence over Latin American poetry. In other words, the poet adopts the expected esthetic initially in order to subvert it through a metaphorical encounter with an angel.

In the fourth stanza, the initially cultured narrator destabilizes the image he fabricated of himself. He states: "El me dió la mano,/ yo le tomé el pie" (Parra 10), creating a comical image of chaos. It is important to note that through these descriptions, the poet mocks both the angel and himself. His initial attempt to appear cultured soon falls apart, as he explains that he grabbed the angel's foot because "¡Hay que ver, señores,/ como un ángel es!" (Parra 10). The poet grabs hold of the angel, literally and metaphorically, in order to discover its true nature. In the fifth stanza he describes it:

Fatuo como el cisne,

frío como un riel,

gordo como un pavo,

feo como usted. (Parra 10)

The angel is both a religious figure and part of the poetic imaginary, therefore calling it conceited, cold, fat, and ugly disrupts both esthetic rules and religious narratives. The poet disrupts commonly held beliefs through the appropriation of a figure that holds religious significance. He explains that his actions angered the angel and that he attacks him with his golden sword but misses, turning the narration into a slapstick comedy. Finally, he states:

> Muerto de la risa
> dije good bye sir,
> siga su camino,
> que le vaya bien,
> que la pise el auto,
> que la mate el tren. (Parra 11)

The final blasphemy, wishing death upon the angel, completes the poet and the angel's transformation. The poet no longer possesses a unique eye for beauty, but instead he sees the underlying nature of things. Trees are chairs and tables; angels are unattractive and conceited. In "Oda a unas palomas" the poet does something similar, but in that case, he focuses on doves and how they have fooled people into admiring them. While it is esthetically subversive to desecrate poetic symbols, but it is not necessarily ironic. In fact, the irony of these esthetic disruptions becomes evident only when they understood as a part of the larger project that is *Poemas y antipoemas*.

If Parra's proposition was to simply subvert all poetic norms, then his book would only contain antipoems. Yet, as the title foreshadows, both traditional and subversive verses exist side by side. Among the poems that follow the genre's conventions are "Se canta al mar", a poem that narrates the origin of the author's poetic conscience. What

stands out about it is the lack of antipoetic elements. The poetic voice narrates his first encounter with the sea, at a time when "yo no comprendía/ francamente ni cómo me llamaba" (Parra 41). These verses indicate that at the time of this encounter, the poet did not possess self-awareness. This is significant because the desire for poetry then precedes the self. He continues to narrate the experience and says that his father took him by the arm and told him "Como quien reza una oración me dijo, con voz que tengo en el oído intacta: "Este es, muchacho, el mar" (Parra 42). The momentous nature of the occasion is revealed in the eyes of the young boy, who runs toward the sea:

> Eché a correr, sin orden ni concierto,
> como un desesperado hacia la playa
> y en un instante memorable estuve
> frente a ese gran señor de las batallas.
> ……..
> Cuánto tiempo duró nuestro saludo
> no podrían decirlo las palabras.
> Sólo debo agregar que en aquel día
> nació en mi mente la inquietud y el ansia
> de hacer en verso lo que en ola y ola
> Dios a mi vista sin cesar creaba. (Parra 43)

The poem appears to follow the concepts of *creacionismo*, imagining the poet as Huidobro's "pequeño Dios." In this case, poetry imitates nature, and the poet's objective is to recreate as nature as faithfully as possible. This is both an elevated depiction of the poet and of the genre. The contrast between this poem and "Advertencia al lector" is so acute that they do

not appear to come from the same book and herein lies the ironic nature of *Poemas y antipoemas*. The esthetic propositions of "Se canta al mar", which can also be understood as an *ars poetica*, appears to contradict "Advertencia al lector", which neither imitates nature nor elevates the poet above the average person. But, like the German Romantics, Parra is not interested in resolving the contradictions that arise out of his work, instead he embraces them. This approach creates a nuanced imaginary of what the genre encompasses. In his attempt to imitate the waves, the poet embraces the limitation of such an endeavor. In other poems, the poet includes quotidian objects in unexpected places, emphasizing the permeability of the poetic space.

In the aforementioned poem, "Recuerdos de juventud" and in "Notas de viaje", the poetic voice gestures toward the banal while narrating existential reflections. In "Recuerdos de juventud," the poets divagations end with "Yo pensaba en un trozo de cebolla visto durante la cena/ y en el abismo que nos separa de los otros abismos" (Parra 113). The entire poem centers around memories of disorientation and confusion where the poetic voice seeks clarity but fails to find it. The final two verses present a disorienting line of thought in which an onion appears alongside a reflection on the abyss. The juxtaposition of these two verses intensifies the crisis that the poetic voice is facing. Loy cites Niall Binns who studies the postmodern aspects of Parra's works: "el antipoeta no crea ningún gran relato literario que sirva como compensación por la tierra baldía del mundo en que le tocó nacer" (70-71). Even though he incites questions, he does not propose answers. Instead, he confronts the reader with the abyss and furthers the skeptical ironic vision he presents through the insertion of a common object. In "Notas de viaje," the poetic voice is a traveler who initially appear archetypal. The poem begins as follows: "Yo me mantuve alejado de mi

puesto durante años./ Me dediqué a viajar, a cambiar impresiones con mi interlocutores" (Parra 89). The traveler leaves his job for the uncertainty of adventure, but what he finds is far from what one would expect. In this case, his memories betray him: "Pero las escenas vividas en épocas anteriores se hacían presentes en mi memoria./ Durante el baile yo pensaba en cosas absurdas:/ pensaba en unas lechugas vistas el día anterior" (Parra 89). Much like the onion in "Recuerdos de juventud," lettuce appears out of place. In this case, the poetic voice himself recognizes the absurdity of his thoughts. Both of these poems put into play Parra's esthetic proposition because they both allow seemingly banal moments to permeate the sacred space of poetry. Lettuces and onions along with tables and chairs are not necessarily poetic material, yet they appear alongside of existential crisis and memories. Ultimately, what Parra proposes is that the poetic space is permeable even though it had previously been understood as exclusive and out of reach and yet, it is still a sacred space. Through this contradiction, he is suggesting a redefining of the genre, an expansion of the space created by literature that allows the inclusion of the absurdly common objects and thoughts. In fact, it is the existence of the absurd within the sublime that gives us a sense of the limits that the fixed nature of the poem creates. A skeptical, ironic worldview allows for these contradictions to not only come to light but to also resist resolution and clarity. In the case of Roque Dalton, his ironic worldview of the poetic space is rooted in the perceived conflict between his bourgeois upbringing and his revolutionary commitment.

One of the key texts to understanding the tensions that Dalton engaged with in his writing is *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America*, originally published in 1963. There, he ascertains that his understanding of poetry comes from two places: "my long and deep

bourgeois formative period, and that of the communist militancy I've held to for some years now" (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 10). It is interesting to note that Dalton does not reject his bourgeois upbringing, instead he attributes his current understanding of what it means to write poetry to that upbringing in conjunction with his militant commitment. These two conflicting sources form the basis for Dalton's approach to esthetics and his role as a poet. He declares that his poetry is not simply an ethical instrument and furthermore, that the ends that he pursues in poetry are not the same ones he pursues through the Communist Party (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 15-16). Initially, it may appear that poetry and militancy are separate for the poet, but this is not the case. Dalton explains that poetry is not an ethical instrument because of its imaginative aspect. He states that imagination facilitates access to the transcendent and eternal aspects of reality, but this does not mean that poetry is an exclusive, transcendental object. For him, poetry and art pursue worldly political goals by "artistically picking up on the reality that needs to be expressed" (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 16). Herein lies the contradiction: he proposes that art is not an ethical instrument because of its imaginative aspect, but it is through this imaginative eye that art is able to pursue political ends, ethical ends we might say. Dalton theorizes that art is political because it is imaginative, it is not concerned with reproducing reality as it is, but on connecting the receptor with the transcendentality of reality. He also proposes an alternative understanding of beauty that makes space for the unpoetic, or antipoetic.

Dalton outlines the two characteristics that he believes poets should possess. First, they must have a profound understanding of life and second, they must have imaginative freedom (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 17). He continues to say that a poet is a poet because he creates beautiful works, yet he rejects the idea of art for art's sake (Dalton, *Poetry and*

Militancy 18, 20). He justifies this seeming contradiction by redefining what beauty consists of, "We consider the concept of beauty and the beautiful as cultural realities, endowed with historic scope and social roots" (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 20). Furthermore, in cases where forms of art appear to cultivate "the ugly" are simply cases where beauty is more hidden or it is used to create contrast. Ultimately, Dalton's argument is that "All that fits into life fits into poetry" (*Poetry and Militancy* 19). He reworks the limits of poetry to include everything through a series of propositions, beginning with the idea that it is more than ethical instrument and that it pursues political ends through its ability to see the transcendent and that fundamentally, art is beauty, but beauty is found in everything when seen through the eyes of imagination. In "Utopian thinking in verse: Temporality and poetic imaginary in the poetry of Nicanor Parra, Mario Benedetti, and Roque Dalton," Juan G. Ramos argues that these poets use satirical humor that gestures toward all that is wrong with society to give rise to utopian desire. In this article, he states that in *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America*, Dalton concludes that the role of the revolutionary poet is to turn toward "the seemingly mundane, the quotidian, the pressing political questions, which may be deemed unpoetic or even antipoetic material into the very source of a renewed politically committed *poiesis*" (Ramos 197-198). Ramos's reading is accurate, but I would like to build upon it and argue that incorporating unpoetic/antipoetic material into poetry is not only political in purpose but it is also an attempt to generate esthetically defiant art.

The momentous quality of *El turno del ofendido* in Dalton's development as a writer cannot be overstated. Falcón argues in its prologue that it is a condensation of the different aspects of the poet's esthetic experimentation. *El turno* was published one year before

Poetry and militancy, but their temporal proximity is not the sole reason for which they should be read in conversation with each other. In many ways, *Poetry and militancy* addresses in essay form what *El turno* does in verse. The poem "Arte poética" breaks with what an *ars poetica* traditionally did and proposes questions instead of answers. It begins with a single verse stanza, "La angustia existe" (Dalton, *El turno* 74), a preamble that lies at the core of the poet's crisis. The second and third stanza narrate a man's existence, one that is full of misery: "el hombre recoge los hirientes residuos de su día/ acongojadamente los pone cerca del corazón/ y se hunde con un sudor de tísico aun no resignado" (Dalton, *El turno* 74). The narrative style of the poem disrupts expectations because instead of listing metaphors and prescriptions that describe the esthetic theory of the poet, the poet turns outward in order to begin theorizing what poetry should be. In the third stanza he continues to narrate and explores the man's alienated state of being: "se exilia de su misma piel asfixiante" (Dalton, *El turno* 74). The descriptions of anguish become asphyxiating like the man's skin, therefore the change in tone of the fourth stanza stands out more harshly.

The fourth stanza narrates a different type of life, beginning with juxtaposing imagery: "Pero los hombres los demás hombres/ abren su pecho alegremente al sol/ o a los asesinatos callejeros" (Dalton, *El turno* 74-75). The contrasts between the second and third verse creates purposeful confusion, when it appears that the darkness is left behind, the third verse brings a harsh return to the anguish of the previous stanzas. But what stands out is that that verse is not the only reference to violence, even though the most of it speaks of joy, "se ríen hasta que duele el aire con los niños", "bromean con el mar" and then it ends with a return to violence, but in a different form:

establecen sus puños contra la desesperanza

sus fuegos vengadores contra el crimen

su amor de interminables raíces

contra la atroz guadaña del odio. (Dalton, *El turno* 75)

In these verses, violence has purpose, it is a revolutionary power that stands against the evils of society. Much like Parra, Dalton utilizes juxtaposing imagery to create productive tensions in his works. The tension created between hope and hopelessness leads the poetic voice to ask in the final verse of the poem: "¿Para quién deberá ser la voz del poeta?" (Dalton, *El turno* 75), a question that he does not intend to answer. If an *ars poetica* is meant to give the prescriptions of what a poem should be, Dalton's "Arte poética" confronts the impossibility of this task. If in *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America* Dalton appears to have a clear sense of what poetry should be, in the poetic space it is much more ambiguous. The title of the book suggests that the purpose of the text is to denounce the injustices of society, but instead of advocating for a single, prescriptive way of writing, the poet advocates for an ambiguous form of writing. "Las feas palabras," "Los escandalizados" and "Yo quería" engage with the same questions that "Arte poética" sets forth.

It is important to put "Las feas palabras" in conversation with *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America*, particularly because Dalton refers to a poetry of the "ugly" in both and makes a case for their use. The poem begins with death, "En la garganta de un beodo muerto/ se quedan las palabras que despreció la poesía" (Dalton, *El turno* 78). Many of Dalton's poems make references to inebriated people, insane people, criminals, and other unwanted members of society. The unwanted contained the words that poetry rejected, therefore the loss of the drunk is twofold, as his words are lost with him. But the poem presents an uncommon, and maybe even uncomfortable proposition, both the man who

died and the words that died with him are valuable. In the second stanza, the poetic voice says "Yo las rescato con manos de fantasma/ con manos piadosas es decir" (Dalton, *El turno* 78), and he explains that all of the dead are inevitably pious because of their experiences. Here, the role of the poet is clear, he must rescue the unwanted words that have been ignored by others. In the penultimate stanza the poetic voice abandons them to the readers, and in the final stanza, he gives instructions as to what must be done with them. He commands:

> Amadlas también os digo. Reñid a la poesía
> la limpieza de su regazo.
> Dotadlas de biografía ilustre.
> Limpiadles la fiebre de la frente
> y rodeadlas de serenas frescuras
> para que participen también de nuestra fiesta.

The fact that he uses the imperative in this section signals that this poem also functions as an *ars poetica*, but in this case the prescriptions are clear. Therefore, when it is put in conversation with "Arte poética," the irony of Dalton's proposition comes into play. "Arte poética" refuses to create a formulaic list to define the genre's esthetic, but "Las feas palabras" demands the inclusion of the rejected through the use of ugly words. Both Dalton and Parra advocate for an expansion of the poetic space through an esthetic that makes room for antipoetic themes and words. When he asks that they be allowed to participate in the celebration, it is clear that joy is part of the esthetic that he presents. In "Los escandalizados", this joyful proposition is expanded upon.

"Los escandalizados" resembles Parra's "Advertencia al lector" in its unapologetic approach to the reader. The first stanza states "sí/ sí/ yo sé que odiáis la risa" (Dalton, *El turno* 139). Like "Advertencia al lector," it serves as a preemptive response to those who might question or chastise the text's humorous tone. In the second and third stanza he quotes the critics who compare laughter to "un clarín sucio" and "una huera navaja" and furthermore they suggest that it is harmful: "haciendo daño por ejemplo a Dios?" (Dalton, *El turno* 139) This verse makes evident that poetry is considered a sacred space, one that should not be tarnished by the profanity of laughter. In the subtext of this poem, the validity of using humor as a revolutionary tool is evident when placed in conversation with *Poetry and Militancy* as well as "Arte poética" meanwhile its esthetic implications are also in question. These texts consistently ask "who should the poet's voice belong to?" and conclude that the dichotomy between joy and laughter versus anguish and pain proves to be a limiting one. Laughter, similarly to ugly words, has been rejected by poetry and in the third stanza, its critics explain why:

> Oh que es repugnante
> la risa
> —exclamáis con amplios gestos de asco—
> indigna es del hombre y de sus espinas
> indigna de sus cirios helados
> cuya mínima luz hiela las sombras. (Dalton, *El turno* 139)

It has been deemed unworthy because of the painful aspects of existence, but the poet does not respond to this claim with a well-formulated rebuttal. He states "Yo me río/ Bajo las sábanas me río/…/ Yo me río" (Dalton, *El turno* 141). Laughter rebels against esthetic

rigidity because it is only possible through the expansion of the poetic space. Ultimately, the idea that all of life belongs in the space of poetry is manifested wordlessly through laughter. The final poem of *El turno*, "Yo quería" further faces the limitations of a poetry that intends to speak of everything.

"Yo quería" is the closing statement of *El turno*, an ambitious attempt to create a text that captures all of the complexities of esthetic renovation and political commitment. The use of the past tense, "quería," does not point to the past, but to a failed attempt to fulfill a desire. The poem consists of two stanzas, the first is 41 verses long and the second consists of only three. The first stanza states what the poetic voice intended to do, what he intended to speak of, always using the past tense. It relies on heavy contrasts, much like "Arte poética," and by doing so, the disparate voices that the poet intended to let speak become one. The two four verses state: "Yo quería hablar de la vida de todos sus rincones/ melodiosos yo quería juntar en un río de palabras (Dalton, *El turno* 171). The poem reads as a stream of consciousness, all of the ideas are interconnected and the divisions between the verses do not signal the end of a phrase or even a thought, instead it continues to flow, like the river of words that the poet attempted to weave together. The first two verses point to the poet as creator, pulling together everything that surrounds him to make something new. These verses resemble Parra's "Se canta al mar," where the poetic voice reveals that his verses attempt to do what God does with the waves. The concept of the poet as creator, seen prominently in Huidobro's early 20th century *creacionismo*, conforms to a more traditional understanding of the poet, which then leads us to ask how Dalton and Parra contend with this apparent contradiction. In response, "Yo quería" suggests that poems document the limitations of the author's ambitious endeavor to create and yet, as

with the German Romantics, the poet continues to strive toward creating a poetic space where all that fits into life can be expressed.

The starting from the third verse, the poem takes on a more political tone, "los sueños y los nombres lo que no se dice/ en los periódicos los dolores del solitario/ sorprendido en los recovecos de la lluvia" (Dalton, *El turno* 171). The motif of the poet speaking for those who cannot speak or saying what the newspapers, or other official statements omit, is a common thread among politically committed poets. As aforementioned, the poetic voice sets up this poem through contrasts that flow together until they are inseparable from each other. The first two verses where the poetic voice speaks of the creative process flows into the committed nature of the poet's works. The fact that there are no commas or periods until the end of the poem is also thematically important because it represents the unity of thought across the different esthetic propositions that the poem names. The first two verses begin with an abstract representation of the essence of poetry while the following three provide concrete manifestations of the role of poetry in society. The poet continues to utilize juxtapositions, creating another *ars poetica*.

As Falcón stated in the prologue to this book, this poem is one of condensation as it contains aspects of existential crisis and linguistic renovation as well as the development of his social consciousness. This is exemplified further beginning with the ninth verse the poetic voice declares:

yo quería pronunciar las sílabas del pueblo

los sonidos de su congoja

……..

hablaros de los trenes

de mi amigo que se mató con un puñal ajeno (Dalton, *El turno* 171).

Here, the poetic voice fluctuates between speaking for those who cannot, speaking about quotidian objects, and ends with a return to the personal. This movement between serious topics and trivial ones was also present in Parra, demonstrating a continuity between their esthetic propositions. But something that sets their proposals apart is Dalton's continuous grappling with his social commitment and how it relates to his role as a poet. It is key to note that this portion begins with a repetition of the phrase "yo quería," serving as a reminder that this is a failed *ars poetica*. The breadth and depth that the poet strives toward are an ideal, which suggests two conclusions: first, that in its ideal state, poetry would be able to express macro and micro narratives, the sacred and the profane, and the sublime and the ordinary. Second, as with the poets of German Romanticism, the poet faces the limited and defined object that he created with the acceptance that it will never be able to fully contain and express the creative process that birthed it into existence. In Dalton's works, it is clear that he strives toward a poetry that contains everything that life does and that when all of this is put into the poem, it creates tension. This consistent oscillation between the personal and the social manifests which manifests itself steadily throughout *El turno* shapes the poetic voice's stream of consciousness. It says in the twenty-fifth verse: "y quería hablaros de la Revolución/ y de Cuba y la Unión Soviética" and follows it with "y de la muchacha a quien amo por sus ojos/ de mínima tormenta" (Dalton, *El turno* 172). As in the verses cited earlier, this appears to be a juxtaposition, but it slowly becomes evident that the division is imposed from the *outside*. In the poetic text, the social and personal penetrate each other. The continues use of "y" points suggests a total unity between all that

the poet wanted to talk about. The tension, juxtaposition, and contrasts come from imposed categories that have slowly been deconstructed throughout the text. But even though the text appears to dissolve all dichotomies successfully, this poem is ultimately one of failure.

The second stanza is only three lines long and its somber tone and violent imagery draws a parallel between the failure of the *ars poetica* and death. After the 41 verses in which the poetic voice outlines everything he intended and wanted, he concludes "Y no he podido daros más—puerta cerrada/ de la poesía—/ que mi propio cadáver decapitado en la arena" (Dalton, *El turno* 172). There are a few important elements in this conclusion, the first is the fact that the poet declares that he was unable to give anything but his dead body lines up with the image of the martyr that is common to revolutionary narratives. Here, instead of a dead militant, the reader is offered a dead poet. At the end of his revolutionary attempt to write poetry that contains the fullness of life, the poet loses himself. Interestingly, he speaks to the closed door of poetry, which establishes that poetry is an exclusionary space. Herein is the complexity of "Yo quería." When there is an attempt to expand the reach of the poetic space, it ultimately ends in failure. We can also ask whether this closed door represents rigid estheticism, or if it symbolizes the impossibility of reaching the ideal. When I say the ideal, I am referring to the one set forth by Dalton's esthetic proposition, visible not only in this poem but in his essay *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America*. I argue that the closed door contains a multiplicity of meanings, in line with Kierkegaard and other 20th century literary critics like Linda Hutcheon, who propose that irony does not demonstrate the fundamental coherence of language, instead it signals a

multiplicity of viewpoints and infinite meanings[4]. "Yo quería" is the conclusion to a text that captures an attempt to open up the poetic space and its tragic ending symbolizes a failure. Even though the somber tone of the ending suggests a nihilistic view of poetry, I believe that this conclusion can be refuted through other poems in this same collection, particularly "Los escandalizados." Dalton reflects on the creative process, and part of that reflection leads to a pessimistic understanding of poetry, while other reflections lead to laughter. The multiplicity of *El turno* as a whole does not support a single, static interpretation of poetry.

Dalton and Parra both intend to capture a breadth of topics that the genre had previously ignored while simultaneously continuing to write in a way that follows more traditional themes. In other words, the move toward a broader number of themes builds off of traditional conceptions, it does not require their destruction in order to usher in a new literary movement. Along with the thematic changes that they propose comes a rethinking of the role of the poet. Dalton and Parra approach this through self-mockery that results in the demystification of writers.

Self-portraits and Heteronyms: The Demystification of the Poet in Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco

For Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco, self-reflective verses lead to a turn inward, they transform their poems into mirrors that reveal a less than ideal image of the writer. Lastra notes in his prologue that the apparition of the mask or character is intimately tied to the

[4] Claire Colebrook points out that literary critics Searle, Booth and Muecke's argue that ultimately irony actually affirms that literary and language are coherent. For them, irony is stable.

"despersonalización del hablante" (xi), something that Enrique Lihn called the "transformación del sujeto poético" (xi). More than focusing on the use of masks, I want to focus on the process of transformation that the poetic subject experiences, thinking of it in relation to these poets' insistence on expanding themes and approaches to poetry. Lastra continues to say that "En efecto, el lugar desde donde habla este nuevo sujeto no es ya más el lugar que ocupaba el hablante inspirado de la poesía tradicional, quien se reconoce a sí mismo, de un modo u otro, poseedor de un privilegio" (xii). In other words, previously the image of the poet in his ivory tower had resulted from the use of a specialized language that could only be understood be a select few, it was written by the privileged for the privileged. Therefore, the shift toward colloquial/conversational poetry logically progressed into a change in the imaginary of the poet. Parra, Dalton, and Pacheco all participate in this demystification, challenging the privilege associated with their position through self-mockery and in the case of Pacheco, dissociating his work from his persona.

In *Poemas y antipoemas*, Parra presents an unimpressive and common image of himself. The poetic voice and Parra are one in the same in "Autorretrato," and he opts to speak as a professor (which was Parra's occupation) and his students are his audience. The fact that he imagines himself in the role of a teacher in order to create his self-portrait is revelatory in two ways: first, it destroys the myth that authors dedicate their entire lives to writing, and second, it signals that the roles of teacher and poet coexist and feed off of each other during the creative process. The self-portrait focuses on the physical decay that comes as a result of age and eternal work weeks. The first four verses begin with a description of the organ that we use to speak, the tongue:

Considerad, muchachos,

esta lengua roída por el cáncer:

soy profesor de un liceo obscuro,

he perdido la voz haciendo clases. (Parra, *Poemas* 55)

The tongue which has been destroyed by disease and voice loss gesture toward the failure of speech. He gestures toward his limitations in "Advertencia al lector," and furthermore he rejoices in them. In that poem, he admits that some might find his verses to be artificial and unintelligible and then declares "como los fenicios pretendo formarme mi propio alfabeto" (Parra, *Poemas* 72). Before the inability to communicate with his audience with clarity, the poet resorts to creating a new language. The poet's contentious relationship with speech and meaning is expressed not only through his resolve to develop a new form of communication, but also through his self-portrait, where the deterioration of the tongue and voice serves as a reminder of the impossibility of communicating using signifiers that lead to other signifiers[5], leaving a void of meaning. These initial verses introduce us to a professor/poet who is unable to produce clear speech, beginning the deconstruction and reconstruction of the imaginary associated with poets.

Pity creates a vertical relationship between the one who receives and the one who gives it; thus, it is notable that the poetic voice seems to encourage this reaction from his audience. He states starting on the seventh verse: "¿Qué os parece mi cara abofeteada? ¡Verdad que inspira lástima mirarme!" (Parra, *Poemas* 55) Far from the ones who dwell in an ivory tower, this new poetic subject is painfully human. His declining health and

[5] Behler argues in *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* that the postmodern epoch can be described through semiotics because the relationship between signifiers and signified is no longer understood as straightforward. Instead, signifiers lead interpretations, and after that, more interpretations of those interpretations arise. Most importantly, he argues that true meaning is unattainable (6).

unappealing appearance make it impossible to idealize him and furthermore it serves to destroy the myth of the sublime nature of the writer. The poetic voice continues to use his senses to evoke the limitations of poetry. He states that his eyes are failing: "Me los he arruinado hacienda clases:/ la mala luz, el sol,/ la venenosa luna miserable" (Parra, *Poemas* 56). It has commonly been thought that poets possess a special ability to see the world differently, but this poetic subject's eyes are failing. But, even though I have focused on the esthetic implications of this self-portrait, it is important to note that this poem is not only a challenge to the perception of poets, but it also contains social commentary about the accepted norm of working until exhaustion: "¡Para qué hemos nacido como hombres/ si nos dan una muerte de animales!" (Parra, *Poemas* 56) "Autorretrato," reinserts the poet into the world by focusing on his occupation and the way it has destroyed his body, rendering him unable to speak nor see with clarity. His self-portrayal in this poem is mostly unidimensional, but when it is put in conversation with others and specifically with other self-depictions, like "Epitafio," create a more nuanced imaginary of the image he intends to project to the audience.

In "Epitafio," the poetic subject imagines how he will be described when he passes. All of the descriptions consist of juxtaposing qualities, which is a manifestation of the ironic approach that Parra takes toward his identity as a poet. He begins by saying "De estatura mediana,/ con una voz ni delgada ni gruesa" and later states "Ni muy listo ni tonto de remate/ fui lo que fui: una mezcla/ de vinagre y de aceite de comer" (Parra, *Poemas* 67-68). In other words, the poet is average, unimpressive, and contradictory. The metaphor of two liquids that do not mix is specially revealing because it emphasizes the duality of the poet, he is an enigma, undefinable. As aforementioned, Colebrook explained that human

existence is ironic because of its ability to continually redefine itself and this is what Parra demonstrates in "Epitafio." As uncomfortable as all of his contradictory claims might be to his readers, he declares triumphantly at the end that he is "¡Un embutido de ángel y bestia!" (Parra, *Poemas* 68). The divine aspects, if we may call them that, are rooted in the creative process. In "Se canta al mar" the poet reveals his desire to create what God does with the waves, movement. But all that he creates is permeated by mundane common objects like onions and chairs. This conflicting duality is contained within the poet as well, but like the German Romantics before him, Parra refuses to resolve this tension. Instead, he revels in it, as it is a manifestation of the human condition. Dalton also participates in the redefinition of the poet, by manifesting the desire to be known, rooted in pride, along with a need to be forgotten. His other proposition puts poets among the outcast of society, prompting a reconceptualization of their position which was previously one of privilege.

In "Megalomanía" and "El vanidoso," Dalton puts on display the egotistical aspects of being a writer. The first of the two poems consists of four stanzas that list men who were excommunicated by the Catholic Church:

> Federico II con todo y ser emperador de los altivos alemanes
> fue excomulgado por el Papa de entonces:
> es que hizo obligatorio el estudio de la medicina a los médicos
> antes de que cobrasen por recetar infusiones
> o extirpar carne de la carne del hombre. (Dalton, *El turno* 116)

There are a few noteworthy details in this stanza. First, the subject is a powerful man who could not avoid excommunication in spite of his position. Second, the reasons that the poetic voice details appear nonsensical. Put differently, the emperor was punished for

establishing a logical decree, one that would have benefited society as a whole. This indicates that those who are excommunicated by the Church have the best interest of humanity in mind, making them heroic. The following stanzas mention Miguel Servet, who was sentenced to death for heresy, Martin Luther, who was also excommunicated and it ends with a return to the poetic subject. He asks:

> Acciones tan maravillosas tendría yo que hacer
> —flaco, débil, el ojo taciturno, el aspecto abolido—
> para que también me excomulgasen
> dejando a salvo mi honrada vanidad para siempre. (Dalton, *El turno* 117)

The poetic voice reveals that he desires excommunication because it would allow him to salvage his vanity. It would place him among the company of well know historical figures that participated in some of the most controversial and monumental events of their time. What makes this revelation humorous is that the poetic subject is interested in creating social change that could outrage the established religious organizations of his time not for the sake of doing good, but to sustain his ego. This selfish man is far from the archetype of the martyr, religious or political. The desire for recognition shatters poetic conventions because it reveals his ulterior motives, showing a much more humanized image of the poet. In "El vanidoso" the speaker reflects on the public's perception of his persona, but in this case he also explores the intimate aspects of identity.

In "El vanidoso" the poetic subject imagines his death, which forms part of a common trope within committed literature. In his essay "Ideologías de la muerte en la poesía de Otto René Castillo" James Iffland explains that among those who were fighting for liberation, death was understood as the ultimate self-sacrifice for the sake of a better

world[6] (172), but this poem reveals a vain martyr. Because Dalton is consistently negotiating politics and esthetics in his writing, this poem's proposal is twofold: it flips the expectations of a self-sacrificial revolutionary on its head and it reveals the vanity of the poetic subject. The poem begins with a resounding declaration: "Yo sería un gran muerto./ Mis vicios entonces lucirían como joyas antiguas/ con esos deliciosos colores del veneno" (Dalton, *El turno* 135). The poetic subject reflects on the fact that after his death, a cult would form around his persona, his vices would be appropriated and transformed to make him appear great. These verses focus on the superficiality of death, which counters a more common approach which focuses on the existential questions that mortality represents. In the third stanza he says "imitarían los adolescentes mis gestos de júbilo,/ mis ocultas palabras de congoja" (Dalton, *El turno* 133). This reflection on posterity emphasizes how the external aspects of the poetic subject would become a unidimensional symbol, losing the complexities of his humanity. The final stanza destroys the fantasy: "Tal vez alguien diría que fui leal y fui bueno./ Pero solamente tú recordarías mi manera de mirar a los ojos" (Dalton, *El turno* 135). The illusion of greatness is broken by a return to the personal. As Falcón noted in the prologue to *El turno*, this text is one of condensation where the poet considers existential inquiries alongside political and social commentary. This poem does just that, it critiques the poetic subject's vanity and society's tendency to glorify its dead and it ends with a deeply personal declaration of love. The public will appropriate his

[6] This essay belongs to a book named *Ensayos sobre la poesía revolucionaria de Centroamérica* in which Iffland studies both Dalton and Castillo. Even though the essay I cite is not focuses on Castillo and not Dalton, it provides a general overview of the concept of martyrdom that the Committed Generation developed. Furthermore, in *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions* John Beverly and Marc Zimmerman argue that Castillo was key in showing the Committed Generation how to combine conversational/colloquial poetry with Marxist themes.

image and utilize it as inspiration, but he will only remain human to those who knew him intimately[7]. Both "Megalomanía" and "El vanidoso" put the poetic subject's ego on display, but in the latter one he presents a more complex representation of himself which is only possible through a return to a more sentimental form of writing. Meanwhile, in "Alta hora de la noche" the speaker asks for the opposite of glory: oblivion.

It is interesting to note that "Alta hora de la noche" became a sort of epitaph that many have invoked after Dalton's death. For example, in *Mágica tribu*, Nicaraguan-Salvadoran author Claribel Alegría, Dalton's friend and member of the Committed Generation, recalls the day she received the news of his death, prompting her to read this poem. The reasoning behind this tendency is clear, since the poetic voices provides instructions for what should be done after his death: "Cuando sepas que he muerto no pronuncies mi nombre/ porque se detendría la muerte y el resposo" (158). In contrast with "El vanidoso" and "Megalomanía," this poetic subject has little interest in being remembered, instead he asks for anonymity. Through the apparent contradictions, these poems work together in the process of transforming the poetic subject. Each poem presents a different facet of the poet: in "Megalomanía" he is egotistical and focused on being controversial enough to receive recognition, while in "El vanidoso" he is more complex because he foresees that after his death his humanity would be lost to an idealized version, while in "Alta hora de la noche" remembrance and recognition are of little interest to him. In fact, when the poetic subject imagines his death this time, he speaks to one person. He tells his beloved: "Tu voz, que es la campana de los cinco sentidos,/ sería el tenue faro

[7] It is important to note that much like Dalton imagined, his figure was coopted by the Salvadoran government after his death.

buscado por mi niebla" and in the fifth stanza he repeats the same sentiment "No pronuncies mi nombre, cuando sepas que he muerto:/ desde la oscura tierra vendría por tu voz" (Dalton, *El turno* 158). These verses contain common tropes of love poems in which the desire to be together would be so strong that it would defy death. It is also void the vanity present in other poems, ending with the repetition: "No pronuncies mi nombre, no pronuncies mi nombre. Cuando sepas que he muerto no pronuncies mi nombre" (Dalton, *El turno* 156). In conjunction with each other, these three poems present a contradictory poetic subject, on one hand he is self-absorbed and concerned with his reputation while on the other he longs to be forgotten in order to assure his rest in the afterlife. It is important to note that both Parra and Dalton create multifaceted representations of the poetic subject. The key differences between the two are that while Parra's "Advertencia al lector" frees the author from responsibility for the reaction his poetry might elicit, Dalton's poetic subject concerns himself with the way that he is perceived by the public. Pacheco also participates in the reconceptualization of the poetic subject in his works, particularly in *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo.*

When thinking about how Pacheco reimagines the poetic subject, it is important to note that he was known for his resistance to being interviewed. His poem, "Carta a George B. Moore en defense del anonimato" published in the book *Los trabajos del mar* in 1983 summarizes Pacheco's stance on poets and the public's perception of them. In this letter/poem he says, among other things, that he has nothing to add to what he has already said in verse and furthermore, he places the responsibility of creation on his readers. This approach completely decentralizes the author and it parallels Parra's "Advertencia al lector" where the poet also hands the responsibility of the text over to the reader. In the

introduction to his book, *José Emilio Pacheco and the Poets of the Shadows*, literary critic Ronald J. Friis states that "Pacheco rejects the arrogance of the romantic or avant-garde poet who privileges a unique personal imagination and creative vision" (18). This reconceptualization of the poetic subject can be seen in texts that came many years before his defense of anonymity, like *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo*. In this section, I will focus on the final section of that book, titled "Apéndice: Cancionero Apócrifo." In this appendix, Pacheco claims to rescue the works of two poets: Julián Hernández and Fernando Tejada. He writes a short biography for each of them, describes their personalities and follows it excerpts written by each poet. But just like Dalton and Parra, Pacheco is also playing with his readers. Julián Hernández and Fernando Tejada are simply heteronyms that he utilizes in order to create a space to reflect on poetry and critique the way that the role of the poet has been understood.

The biographies that precede each "excerpt" give the reader insight into the vices of Hernández and Tejada. He states that Hernández was fired from his job at the London consul because of his drinking problem and that his bad temper did not allow him to form part of any of the literary movements of his time. He notes that Hernández did not receive any attention when he was alive and proposes that his works "Intentan y a veces logran expresar poéticamente la visión de un *outcast*, la amargura sarcástica de un perpetuo excluido que contempla la vida literaria—y la vida *tout court*—con quebrantada y a la postre estéril ironía" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 113). In this description there are characteristics of the ironic worldview of German Romanticism, starting with the statement about the limitations of his poetry. If we think of the different archetypes of the poet, Hernández possess many of the characteristics, among them he was an alcoholic and an

outcast, in other words, he embodies the artist whose genius is misunderstood by society. I will explore the "excerpt" that follows, titled "Legítima defensa" in the following section of this chapter, where I will explore intertextuality and posterity. But before transitioning into those topics, it is important to also look at Tejada's biography as well. Tejada, the second pseudonym that the poet adopts, never published any of his works, but he was featured in the journal *La Torre de Marfil*. The fictional journal bears a playful name, since poets have consistently been accused of being far removed from the realities of society, of living in ivory towers. The biography explains that the founders of *La Torre de Marfil* were "afines a una tradición de la antitradición pictórica, parodian, distorsionan un tema clásico para insertarlo en el contexto de nuestra época; oponen—no siempre con acierto—una de las posibles realidades actuales del amor-pasión al concepto aún trovadoresco que se halla en la extraordinaria poesía de Pierre Ronsard" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 119). Like Hernández, who attempts but only succeeds sometimes, Tejada forms part of a group that tries to put the modern conception of love and passion in conversation with Ronsard's poetry, but fails at times. Each poet/pseudonym endeavors to create an authentic expression of their own experience and vision of the world, but their poetry falls short of the ideal. In this way, Pacheco, Dalton, and Parra all reimagine the figure of the poet through an analysis of the limitations and contradictions inherent to the process of creation. Pacheco explores this reconceptualization through his engagement of two central themes in his works: intertextuality and posterity.

Intertextuality and Posterity in Pacheco's Poetry

In the aforementioned introduction to his book, Friis argues that the temporal and intertextual are two prominent themes of Pacheco's work (Friis, *Poets* 16). This well-founded observation guides this section in which I will study the reconceptualization of poetry and the role of the poet through Pacheco's thoughts on intertextuality and posterity. Lastra proposes that the poets of the second half of the 20th century participate in a form of writing that critiques itself, something that is evident in all three of the poets I have analyzed. What differs Pacheco from Dalton and Parra's self-reflective form of writing is his tendency to think of art through the lens of intertextuality and the deterioration that results from the passage of time. The poem "Crítica de la poesía" exemplifies the practice of combining art and critique. It consists of two stanzas, the first one alternates between verses written in italics and ones that are not, demarcating the line between critique (not italicized) and poetry (italicized). The first verses say:

He aquí la lluvia idéntica y su airada maleza

La sal, el mar desecho…

Se borra lo anterior, se escribe luego:

Este convexo mar, sus migratorias

Y arraigadas costumbres

Ya sirvió alguna vez para hacer mil poemas. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 36)

The significance of this narration is twofold: first, it demystifies the writing process because it provides insight into the difficulties that writers face when composing a poem. This is significant because it makes the labor of writing evident instead of attributing it to supernatural inspiration or ability. Second, it demonstrates the inevitability of repeating what others have said before and questions whether originality is possible. The poetic

subject uses the sea, a common motif of poetic inspiration, but is forced to erase when he comes to the realization that everything he writes already exists. The following verses, inserted through a parenthesis, present a more violent response to this frustration.

Pacheco, like Dalton and Parra, is a poet of contradictions. Dalton consistently negotiates between his role as a poet and his revolutionary commitments, while Parra alternates between presenting the poetic subject as a small god, a creator and a common, unimpressive man. In "Crítica de la poesía" Pacheco presents a contradictory understanding of the genre. Following the verses where he erases what he wrote when he realizes that it has already been written, he states:

> (La perra infecta, la sarnosa poesía,
> risible variedad de la neurosis,
> precio que algunos hombres pagan
> por no saber vivir.
> La dulce, eterna, luminosa poesía.) (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 36)

Here, the poet expresses his frustration and he also describes his own persona. The rage directed toward poetry comes from the idea that those who write it (and read it) are simply neurotics who do not know how to confront their existence if it is not through writing. The final verse of the stanza includes an abrupt change in tone, from rage to tenderness. This juxtaposition reveals the poet's complicated relationship with his writing, which may be a crutch for the neurotic, but nevertheless, it is still a recipient of beauty. This love and hatred are summarized by the last stanza, which only contains three verses. He concludes "Quizá no es tiempo ahora:/ nuestra época/ nos dejó hablando solos" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 36). He suggests that context is to blame for the inability to write poetry,

which could refer to the specificity of the Mexican context, considering that the massacre of Tlatelolco took place one year before the publication of this book, or it could be alluding to the more general postmodern epoch. But it is clear that the "why" behind poetry is being addressed through the question of originality. Ultimately, the book contains an ironic proposal because the author insisted on writing poetry at a time where he cannot justify its existence. Finally, the use of italics and parenthesis within the poem proves to have been a superficial indicator that only appeared to separate critique from art but at the conclusion of the poem, the lines that separate the two become blurred and irrelevant. Pacheco redefines the poetic space through a critique of the tendency to claim that innovation is both possible and necessary. Furthermore, in other poems Pacheco addresses his predecessors directly in an attempt to establish a literary genealogy and this conversation between texts leads to further redefinition of the poet's understanding of originality and textuality.

In his article "The Postmodern Twist of José Emilio Pacheco's *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo,*" Friis argues that Pacheco's works attempt to reconcile two visions of poetic influence, the agonistic and the intertextual. The agonistic exploits the tension between old and new poets while the intertextual accepts that all texts are permeated by other texts. The poem "Declaración de Varadero (en el Centenario de Rubén Darío)" encapsulates this attempt to reconcile with his predecessors. The fact that it begins with an excerpt from one of Darío's poems anticipates the poetic subject's approach. The epigraph is the poem "Armonía" where the poetic voice talks about the mysteries that he cannot comprehend or express: "cuando a veces lo pienso,/ el misterio no abarco" (qtd. in Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 32). In these verses, Darío explores the limitations of the genre, just as Pacheco

does in his own context. Ultimately, "Declaración de Varadero (en el Centenario de Rubén Darío)" proposes that it is time to reconcile with the old poets through a reflection on the criticism that Darío and *Modernismo* received in posterity.

The first stanza serves as a homage to Darío, in line with the theme of the 100th anniversary of his birth:

> En su principio está su fin. Y vuelve a Nicaragua
> para encontrar la fuerza de la muerte.
> Relámpago entre dos oscuridades, leve piedra
> que regresa a la honda. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 32)

Here, the poetic subject appears to refer to Darío's burial in Nicaragua, while the metaphors that he uses to describe his life are charged with power. By comparing Darío to lightning and a rock thrown from a sling he highlights the significance of the literary movement that Darío initiated. The poetic subject is not at odds with his predecessor in the initial stanza, but quite the opposite, he recognizes his monumental contribution to Latin America's literary tradition. This tone changes in the second stanza where he states:

> Cierra los ojos para verse muerto.
> Comienza entonces la otra muere, el agrio
> batir las selvas de papel, torcer el cuello
> al cisne viejo como la elocuencia;
> incendiar los castillos de hojarasca,
> la tramoya retórica, el vestuario:
> aquel desván llamado "modernismo".
> Fue la hora / de escupir en las tumbas. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 32)

The first verse suggests that Darío's physical death is only superficial and the following verses solidify this interpretation because they state that the second death consists of the "murder" of the modernist esthetic. The verses about twisting the symbolic swan's neck is most likely a direct reference to Mexican poet Enrique González Martínez's sonnet "Tuércele el cuello al cisne de engañoso plumage[8]" in which the poet responds to what he perceived as the excesses of *modernismo*. It is important to note that the poetic subject provides his own interpretation of the swan and concludes that it represents eloquence. He continues to say that it is time to burn down castles made up of dead leaves, another metaphor that symbolizes the superfluity of *modernismo*. The stanza ends with a declaring that the second death of Darío was symptomatic of a moment in which the new poets performed the rejection of their predecessors. It is important to note that all but the third verse of this stanza is made up of eleven syllable verses. The hendecasyllabic verse, along with the alexandrine, were characteristic of modernist poetry, so the fact that this stanza is made up of mostly hendecasyllabic verses is not coincidental. Even when the poetic subject narrates the violent separation between *modernismo* and the generation that rejected it, he repeats its structural characteristics. This is a reflection on intertextuality, one of the key aspects of Pacheco's critique of poetry. Furthermore, these verses preempt the third and fourth stanza where he addresses the cyclical nature of literary movements and the need to break with the past.

As Friis notes, Pacheco's poetry revolves around the themes of temporality and intertextuality, and this poem reflects on both. In the third stanza he states "Removida la tierra/ pueden medrar en ella otros cultivos" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 32-33), using a

[8] This poem was published in the 1911 book *Los senderos ocultos*.

metaphor to demonstrate the need for change in order to secure future literary movements. He continues to explain that "Las palabras / son imanes del polvo" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 33), refering to the way that time inevitably erodes all texts. In the fouth stanza he declares:

> Los hombres somos los efímeros,
> lo que se unió se unió para escindirse
> —sólo el árbol tocado por el rayo
> guarda el poder del fuego en su madera,
> y la fricción libera esa energía. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 33)

This stanza reflects on impermanence, starting with the short duration of human life and then makes a reference to the Christian biblical statement that states that man cannot separate what god has joined[9], but he inverts it by declaring that we come together just to separate in the future. The final three verses use metaphorical language that requires a look at the poem as a whole in order to derive meaning. They state that the tree that is touched by lightning acquires the power of fire, therefore it is interesting to note that earlier in the poem, Rubén Darío is compared to lightning, "Relámpago entre dos oscuridades," so the return of this symbol is not coincidental. When the poetic subject states that the tree that has been hit by lightning contains power and concludes that this energy is released through friction it can be interpreted to mean that what the poet touches contains a special power that is manifested through tension. This solidifies the theory that in order for a new literary movement to begin, there needs to be a rejection of the previous

[9] This biblical reference can be found in Matthew 19:6.

authors and their esthetic. The fact that this poetic subject recognizes that friction allows for the release of new creative energy explains the conclusion.

In terms of how Pacheco defines and redefines the poetic space and where the ironic worldview becomes evident, "Declaración de varadero" reinforces the need that new poets feel to reject predecessors in the name of innovation. It ends by absolving Darío: "Pasaron, pues, cien años:/ ya podemos/ perdonar a Darío" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 33). While the poem demonstrates that the pattern of rejecting the work of predecessors is key to the forward movement of literary creation, the final stanza reveals the superficiality of this pattern. Furthermore, it becomes evident that one day, the poet writing this will also become the target of criticism by newer generations who will feel the need to mark the difference between his esthetic and their own in order to prove their innovation. Pacheco's complex relationship with his predecessors and what it means to him as a poet who will one day be another's predecessor is deeply connected with the problem of intertextuality as evident in "Crítica de la poesía" and "Homenaje a la cursilería."

Similar to "Declaración de varadero," "Homenaje a la cursilería" is in direct conversation with another text, in this case, Gustavo Adolfo Becquer's well-known Rima LIII:

> Volverán las oscuras golondrinas
> en tu balcón sus nidos a colgar,
> y otra vez con el ala a sus cristales
> jugando llamarán.
>
> Pero aquellas que el vuelo refrenaban

tu hermosura y mi dicha a contemplar,

aquellas que aprendieron nuestros nombres,

ésas… ¡no volverán!

Volverán las tupidas madreselvas

de tu jardín las tapias a escalar

y otra vez a la tarde aún más hermosas

sus flores se abrirán.

Pero aquellas cuajadas de rocío

cuyas gotas mirábamos temblar

y caer como lágrimas del día….

ésas… ¡no volverán!

Volverán del amor en tus oídos

las palabras ardientes a sonar,

tu corazón de su profundo sueño

tal vez despertará.

Pero mudo y absorto y de rodillas,

como se adora a Dios ante su altar,

como yo te he querido…, desengáñate,

¡así no te querrán! (Becquer)

Rima LIII's poetic subject speaks to his beloved whom he has lost and through the poem, he reminisces on the moments that they shared and warns that she will never find the same love and devotion from future lovers. The title of Pacheco's poem is a play on the word *homenaje*, which initially signals that the poem will pay homage to Becquer's poetry. A homage communicates respect and honor, but by stating that this is a homage to tackiness, it subverts expectations. Ultimately, the meaning of the word *homenaje* does not change, yet by stating that tackiness is worthy of honor, the poet places cultural production that is considered of bad taste on the same level as high art. It is also interesting to note that even though "Declaración de varadero" focuses on the way that literary movements have rejected Darío and the esthetic associated with *modernismo*, this poem shifts its focus to the thematic and stylistic elements of Becquer's poetry. Both poems center around the poetic subject's loss of their beloved, suggesting that love poems can be considered *cursi*. Furthermore, the epigraph is an excerpt from Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde[10]'s poem "Si soltera agonizas": "Amiga que te vas:/ quizá no te vea más" (qtd. in Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 27). In line with both Pacheco and Becquer, Velarde's poem also talks about two lovers who are unable to be together. Ultimately, Pacheco's poem follows the conventions of love poems while simultaneously playing with the inevitability of intertextuality.

The poem begins speaking directly to his beloved in the first stanza in a combination of a reflection on intertextuality and the passage of time:

> Dóciles formas de entretenerte / olvido:
>
> recoger piedrecillas de un río sagrado

[10] Ramón López Velarde (1888-1921) has been recognized as one of the greatest Mexican poets and formed part of the postmodern movement.

estampar becquerianas violetas en los libros

para que amarilleen ilegibles (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 27)

The poetic subject begins with a personal tone and admits that he has forgotten the different tokens of affection that he would gift his beloved while also suggesting that that was a time of innocence. The third and fourth verses function as a metaphor for poetry, the violets represent poems that due to the passage of time, have faded. The fact that he calls them "becquerianas violetas" is significant because it establishes an explicit connection between Becquer's poems and the text which was already foreshadowed by the title. It demonstrates that Becquer's works have been relegated to the past, and as the title suggests, may be considered *cursi* in the eyes of new readers. In other words, "Homenaje a la cursilería" is not only about the loss of a beloved, but it is also engaging with the loss of former texts. The conflict between past and present literary movements does not always take the form of rejection like it did with Darío, but in other cases it is a dismissal of thematic elements that are relegated to a naïve time. The fact that the poetic subject establishes a connection between the initial stages of love and Becquer creates a parallel between the naiveté of young love and the sensitivity of Becquer's poetry. But the poem does not provide a neat conclusion, instead it complicates the relationship between Pacheco and Bequer's works.

While the first stanza implies that the poetic subject has moved past the *cursilería* of Becquer's esthetic, the poem is a result of intertextuality. The attempts to differentiate between his work and that of his predecessors fail and writing something innovative and new proves to be impossible. In the second and final stanza, Becquer's Rima LIII becomes central to the development of the poem:

besarla lentamente y en secreto

cualquier último día

antes de la execrada separación

al filo mismo

del adiós tan romántico

y sabiendo

aunque nadie

se atreva

a confesarlo

que nunca volverán las golondrinas (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 27)

The second stanza does not speak *to* his beloved, instead he talks *about* her, marking her absence. He narrates their final encounter and describes it as "tan romántico." This verse is a deconstruction of the theme of love. It recreates the cliché of the final kiss, but the emphasis on the romantic nature of the moment breaks the illusion. In other words, the poetic subject breaks protocol, as Huidobro's famous poem "Arte poética" states, "Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh Poetas!/ Hacedla florecer en el poema". If we follow this metaphor, the poetic subject fails to make romance flourish in the poem and instead he speaks about it, revealing his inability to create the effect he desired through verse. Therefore, not only does the poem demonstrate the intertextual nature of all texts, but it also reveals the limitations of writing. Like in "Crítica de la poesía" the poetic subject breaks down the creative process and makes it visible to the reader and by doing so, he expands the poetic space to include the labor that goes into writing and sometimes leads to a dead end. The

final verse of the poem "que nunca volverán las golondrinas," returns the reader to Becquer's poem as it repeats the same concept of Rima LIII:

> Pero aquellas que el vuelo refrenaban
>
> tu hermosura y mi dicha a contemplar,
>
> aquellas que aprendieron nuestros nombres,
>
> ésas… ¡no volverán! (Becquer)

The swallows of Becquer's poem are special because they were the witnesses to the lovers in their time of joy. This stanza reflects on the impermanence of time while simultaneously pointing to the cyclical nature of time. The swallows return to set up their nests every year in the same space, yet even though they appear the same, time deteriorates everything, in this case, the love of the poetic subject and his lover. The fact that the final verse of Pacheco's poem restates the second stanza of Becquer's emphasizes the ephemeral nature of poetry while simultaneously highlighting the intertextual nature of all texts. Just as Becquer's text is broken down and absorbed into Pacheco's, so will Pacheco's poem be incorporated into another text.

The final section of *No me preguntes*, "Apéndice: Cancionero apócrifo" continues to explore the intertextual nature of texts and the effects of time while simultaneously engaging directly with the decentralization of the poet. "Legítima defensa" belongs to this final section in which Pacheco writes under two different heteronyms, the first of which is Julián Hernández. As aforementioned, Pacheco includes a short biography for each of his pseudonyms and he describes Hernández as an alcoholic who is unable to fit into any literary movement due to his antagonistic personality. What stands out about "Legítima defensa" is that this alternate persona that Pacheco develops holds a very critical view of

poetry and poets in general even though he is a poet himself. The poem is made up of twelve sections and each of them is dated somewhere between 1937 and 1952. Each one centers around poetry and attempts to define its place in society and the poet's relationship to it. The epigraph is a poem written by an 8th century dramatist and poet Bhavabhuti translated by John Brough:

> If learned critics publicly deride
> My verse, well, let them.
> Nor form them I wrought.
> One day a man shall live to share my thought
> For time is endless and world is wide. (qtd. in Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 114)

The epigraph introduces a hopeful tone to the poem, but it is immediately contrasted with the harsh reality of the first section in which the poetic subject reveals that after the death of a famous literary critic, he found out that the critic had never read any of his books even though he had written harsh critiques of them. The poet then declares "Abro la puerta, adiós, y me despido:/ ¡Descansa en paz, *Lector infatigable*!" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 114) The final verse reveals deep disenchantment with the practice of literary criticism as it reveals a highly hierarchical structure that is almost impossible to overcome. The contrast between the epigraph and the first section of the poem sets the ironic tone. The previously analyzed poems set up a tension between originality and intertextuality and ultimately accept that both contradicting concepts can exists in his works. Meanwhile, "Legítima defensa" critiques the concept of posterity. The fact that it begins with two contradicting ideas about the author's ability to write whatever he desires because someone somewhere will read it, followed by the anecdote about the way that a critic unjustly ruined a poet's

career sets up "Legítima defensa" as a text of tension in which the poet will continue to engage with contradicting ideas surrounding poetry and writing.

Pacheco continues to grapple with intertextuality but this time in conjunction with the idea of posterity which he ties to a redefinition of the poet. The second section of "Legítima defensa" states:

> Vivieron a la moda.
>
> Fueron toda su vida *de vanguardia*.
>
> Atacaron lo viejo.
>
> Y recordé sus nombres
>
> al leer esta tarde en el periódico
>
> que la Academia celebró en pasados días
>
> a sus Miembros de Número difuntos. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 114)

This section, like most of "Legítima defensa" takes on a narrative style and it is set up like a joke. The first three verses describe an unknown "them," one assumes poets, who play out the tradition of attacking their predecessors and boasting of their cutting-edge esthetic. The third verse sets up the punch line through the usage of the word "recordé," relegating these Avant-garde authors to the past. The last three verses of this section reveal the twist, as all of these authors are now dead. Even though he does not name any specific person, the use of the word Avant-garde is not incidental because of the significance that the *vanguardias* had in Mexico. Even the most revolutionary movement came to an end, even though its impact on Latin American literature was monumental. Ironically, the spirit of the Avant-garde continues on, as Pacheco explored in other poems like "Declaración de Varadero," where the poetic subject admitted that rejecting predecessors is an inevitable

part of the progression of literature. In other words, there is a cyclical nature to literary movements and the poet simultaneously participates in that cycles while critiquing it. The third section of the poem returns its focus to the poetic subject as it continues with the narrative tone of the first two parts.

The poetic subject begins the third section by narrating a chance encounter with someone whom he appears to have a tense relationship with, he feels that he cannot call him his enemy or his antagonist and decides to call him his contemporary. The fact that he debates with himself over how to describe their relationship is an important detail because it establishes that at one point, their writing was in conflict, even though the conflict seems to have lost its significance over time. The poetic subject reveals his thoughts and states:

> Cada uno en el otro ve a distancia
> cómo y con qué vértigo envejece
> nuestra generación;
> cómo el estilo
> que creímos eterno,
> ya es historia,
> pasado impopular,
> freno y obstáculo
> ante los jóvenes que
> —si reparan en nosotros—
> nos dedican
> una risita
> o un sarcasmo. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 115)

This section gestures toward "Declaración de Varadero" and "Homenaje a la cursilería," poems that dialogue with previous authors and literary movements. In both cases, the poetic subject oscillates between a tense relationship with his predecessors while also recognizing their influence over his own writing. In the previously cited verses, the poetic subject gives the reader the perspective of literary predecessors, like Darío and Becquer, as they come to realize that the passage of time has rendered their works and their esthetic antiquated. It is important to note that the poetic subject notes that if new poets cite them, it will be in a mocking tone. This once again prompts a re-reading of the poems in which Pacheco reflects on the relationship between his poems and those of canonical authors. "Legítima defensa" suggests that any intertextual elements are include in a parodical manner, but this understanding of intertextuality is in direct tension with what Pacheco suggested in other poems. In fact, many of the ideas that are presented in this "Cancionero Apócrifo" focus on the destructive nature of time in relation to literature, therefore this pessimistic understanding of intertextuality and posterity forms part of a larger proposition that defines poetry through its relationship to time.

In the fourth section, the poetic subject talks about another poet's desire for recognition in the future:

Dijo Samuel (quizá sin darse cuenta
de que estaba citando):
"Escribo para ser admirado
en el admirado
en el año 2000 y mis palabras
quedarán para siempre en la memoria

de las generaciones. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 115).

One assumes that Samuel is a writer who imagines his works will maintain their relevance in the future, but considering the fact that the previous section had established the ephemeral nature of texts, one can anticipate that his desire to produce timeless poems will prove to be unattainable. The poetic subject immediately interjects with a parenthetical comment that gestures toward intertextuality. Samuel's desire had already been previously expressed by another; therefore, the poem quotes a quote, creating a sense of the infinite nature of the literary cannon and the resulting intertextual nature of writing. Samuel's naiveté is evident from the quote, but the poetic subject provides a further observation that places judgment on Samuel's desire.

The poetic voice of "Legítima defensa" echoes the tone of "Crítica de la poesía," where the poetic voice oscillates between describing poetry using derogatory phrases like "perra infecta" and using endearing phrases, "dulce, eterna, luminosa poesía." In this case, the poetic voice's scorn seems to be directed toward the subject of the poem, Samuel. After citing Samuel's desire to be remembered, he states:

Sed de inmortalidad.
Miré hacia afuera:
en el jardín luchaba alguna mosca
por sacar de la flor néctares, polen.

Vana tarea,
intentar convertirse en abeja
a estas alturas. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 115-116)

The fourth section of *No me preguntes*, "Los animales saben" utilizes the lives of animals as a way to reflect on human existence and also challenges the assumed separation between animals and humans[11]. Therefore, the comparison between Samuel the poet and a fly is congruent with Pacheco's interest in exploring the parallels between humans and other living beings. In this case, the poetic voice uses the differences between a fly and a honeybee to explore the relationship between poets and posterity. First, the flies can be characterized as a nuisance and they are known for their unsanitary nature. On the other hand, honeybees are productive, humans consume the honey they produce. The poetic voice observes a fly that appears intent on becoming a honeybee, and it is clear that he is drawing a parallel between Samuel's desire for immortality with the fly's inability to turn itself into a productive honeybee. It is clear that this comparison is meant to be pejorative, as one is inclined to ask, how dare Samuel try to be something that he is not? But, more interestingly, the implicit implications of this metaphor suggest that some authors are like flies, while others are like honeybees. These categories suggest that some produce works that do stand the test of time while others simply do not. It becomes clear that the poetic voice takes on a superior and maybe even arrogant attitude, maybe imagining that his works can accomplish what Samuel only dreams of accomplishing. In the context of "Legítima defensa," this particular section stands out because it proposes an understanding of poetry that contradicts section two and three in which the poet recognized that his

[11] An example of this is the poem titled "El espejo de los enigmas: los monos" in which Pacheco presents the possibility that humans might be the source of entertainment for the monkeys as much as we are entertained by them. This reflection on the human-animal relationship hinges on challenging the supposed separation between the two categories of living beings and is something that Pacheco explores in other texts like the book *El silencio de la luna*.

poetry is not exempt from the destructive effects of time. This section sets up a tension within this specific poem that is characteristic of the ironic perspective that shapes Pacheco's works. This tension is further explored in the tenth section.

The tenth section is the first of three monologues in which the poetic voice reflects on self-criticism and the poetic genre. The first of these monologues states the following:

(*Monólogo del poeta I*)
Quisiera ser un pésimo poeta
Para sentirme satisfecho con lo que escribo
y vivir lejos
de tu dedito admonitorio,
autocrítica. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 117)

As in "Crítica de la poesía," he reveals the writing process in poetic form, but in this case, he focuses on his relationship to self-criticism. Interestingly enough, similarly to the fourth section, the poetic subject creates categories of poets. There are terrible poets, those who lack the ability to critique their own writing and there are what we can assume are true poets who do engage in self-reflective writing. Again, the interesting aspect that is worth noting in this poem is the way in which it exists in tension with the key propositions that Pacheco exposes in "Legítima defensa." The poetic subject demonstrates that there is an inherent tension to self-critical writing because the poet expresses that he wishes he did not have to confront his own critical voice. But, as in the previously analyzed section, the implicit meaning reveals that the poet perceives himself as a kind of martyr, and self-criticism is the price he has to pay to avoid becoming a "pésimo poeta." Once again, the poet expresses his superiority by identifying what makes others inferior, in this case, lack of

self-awareness. “Legítima defensa” constructs a contradicting image of the poetic subject, on one hand he appears to be capable of admitting that time will render his works irrelevant, yet he continues to compare himself to others in order to demonstrate the way in which he is producing important works. In many ways, this parallels the ideas presented in Parra’s poem “Advertencia al lector,” where the poet declares that his limitations are a source of pride for him. Pacheco’s poems line up directly with what Colebrook identified as the key traits of ironic texts, they are fragmentary, contradictory, and critical. This poetic subject is fragmented because every section of “Legítima defensa” reveals a different aspect of his personality, contradictory because his proposals about poetry appear are full of tension, and finally, he consistently participates in the critique of his own work (and the works of others, in this case). But the twelfth and final section is a monologue that takes on an extremely aggressive and pejorative tone and addresses poets directly.

In many ways, “Crítica de la poesía” foreshadows the ending of “Legítima defensa.” But where the former poem presents a multifaceted and contradictory understanding of what poetry is and explores the poet’s role in society, the latter ends with a denunciation against the genre and its practitioners. The final section begins as follows:

(Monólogo del poeta III)
¿A quién pretendes halagar con tan vistas
piruetitas verbales
o suspirillos dolorosos, retruécanos,
ironías invisibles? (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118)

The poetic subject (who we can assume is a poet due to the title) confronts a nameless poet and accuses him of writing in order to please someone. He uses the diminutive in a

pejorative manner, referring to both the creative use of language and the expression of emotions as a performance for a demanding audience. It is important to note that the final verse of this stanza refers back to irony and it is due to this final verse that one can conclude that the poetic voice is speaking to himself. He calls this "ironías invisibles," predicting that some might not understand that this poem is a practice of irony, it is purposefully fragmentary and contradictory, which creates a space for it to be critical of the genre. With the realization that the poetic subject is speaking to himself, it becomes clear that more than an aggressive rejection of someone else's writing, the poem is the result of an extremely self-critical approach to writing.

The second stanza repeats the sentiment of the first, as the poetic voice asks "¿Quisieras que alguien te palmease/ por lo bien que resuenan/ tus cascabeles?" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118), returning to the need for recognition that he referenced in the first stanza. Furthermore, this stanza brings the poem full-circle, since the epigraph and the first section of "Legítima defensa" address the relationship between writers and literary critics. There is a tense, sometimes antagonistic relationship between critics and poets. The need to impress is not only a result of the need for recognition, but it is also the result of external pressure imposed by a system that has endowed critics with the power to bring success or ruin to an author. It is worth noting that even as the poetic subject berates the poet, he himself participates in the same type of criticism that prompts a type of writing that is focused on pleasing the readers instead of the creative process. In the third stanza he states:

> Es mejor que te ocultes en huraños rincones.
>
> Los seres como tú no reciben halagos,

lomos de latigazo o de pedrada.

Y ya nadie sonríe

Con tus jueguitos malabares: (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118).

In this stanza, the poetic voice begins to give instructions and there is a clear indication that the poet does not have any place in society. The poet here is constructed as an outsider who is so insignificant that he deserves neither praise nor punishment. The fourth and fifth verses further this claim by stating that the poet does not serve any purpose (like the fly he was compared to earlier in the poem), his work is so insignificant that it cannot even be categorized as entertainment. After these verses, he utilizes the names of nymphs that were commonly used in European Renaissance and Baroque verse from the 15th to the 17th centuries:

Filis, la gran madrota, pastorea

un rebaño de putas por las aldeas de Flandes.

Amarilis con sífilis, borracha

y juguete de todos los soldados.

La dulce Cloris gime emputecida

de placer en la cama de un sacristán leproso. (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118)

The poetic subject uses figures that were common in a previous literary tradition, and he inserts them into a present context in which Filis now owns a brothel, Amarilis suffers from a sexually transmitted disease, probably the result of prostitution, and Cloris is a sacristan's lover. These verses symbolize the decay of the genre as a whole, now the figures that used to serve as inspiration have experienced the destructive effects of time. Here, it is worth noting that in the eight section of "Legítima defensa," composed of two verses and a telling

title, “Arte poética I,” declared “Tenemos una sola cosa que describir:/ este mundo” (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 117). As time has passed, the nymphs continue to be muses, but now their nature has changed, as the world now requires that they work as prostitutes in order to survive. The conundrum that faces the poet now is that if their art is meant to describe the world as it is, they are left to describe a corrupted version of the old poet’s muses.

It is important to note that this section’s usage of the nymphs is also a continuation of the theme of intertextuality. There is an aspect of nostalgia in this section that stands out, particularly because the pejorative descriptions of the corrupted nymphs suggest that in the past, they existed in a purer form that was worthier of verse. This leads us back to “Homenaje a la cursilería” where Becquer’s poetry fails to stand the test of time and is dubbed “cursi” by new poets. It becomes clear that this nostalgia for the past is a common theme in Pacheco’s work. The poet is confronted with a world that continues to provide inspiration, but the result of this inspiration reminds us of the past while simultaneously appearing so different that it becomes unrecognizable. Finally, when the poetic voice then asks “Y a estas ninfas/ ¿quisieras perpetuarlas?” (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118), it reveals the reasoning behind the monologue. Can we continue to justify poetry in such a time? This question is particularly relevant because as Friis noted, *No me preguntes* was published after the massacre of Tlatelolco[12]. Without naming that specific horrific event in this poem, Pacheco confronts himself with a question that did not find a concrete answer in this book,

[12] It is important to note that *No me preguntes* contains a poem titled “Lectura de los “Cantares Mexicanos”: Manuscrito de Tlatelolco,” a poem that adapts a collection of Nahuatl songs and utilizes them to narrate the events that happened in Tlatelolco in 1968. This poem is an intertextual exercise as well as an approach to addressing the way in which we write history and the way events repeat across time.

why continue writing poetry? This poetic subject concludes that it is best to simply disappear into oblivion: "Será mejor, bufón,/ que ganes los rincones/ y allí guardes un púdico silencio" (Pacheco, *No me preguntes* 118). This conclusion to a poem that is titled "Legítima defensa" is incongruent with what the poem initially set out to do, provide a defense for something, or someone. At the end, neither poets nor poetry receive vindication, in fact, the final section does the opposite, it presents a well-supported argument for why poetry and poets no longer have a place in our society. But this conclusion only stands if we ignore the other eleven sections of the poem. As a whole, "Legítima defensa" is critical poetry, and it addresses intertextuality, the effects of time on poetry, and the role of the poet and poetry in society. If any conclusion can be drawn from this poem, and I would argue that coming to a static conclusion is actually counter to what Pacheco intends to do through this poem, it is that when tasked with the defense of poetry, one cannot help but admitting that writing poetry is an ironic process. There is a constant tension between trying to present new works as avantgarde and the realization that everything has already been written, a tension between the contributions of poetry and poets to society and an understanding of its triviality, and a tension between posterity and oblivion.

Conclusion

Dalton, Pacheco, and Parra expand the poetic space to include what had previously been deemed unpoetic, they demystify poets and reveal their flaws, and reflect on intertextuality and posterity. These self-critical approaches to writing are an expression of the ironic worldview that results in contradictory, critical, and fragmentary texts. What all of these poets point to, in their own respective socio-cultural and historical contexts, is a

need to approach writing differently. In Dalton, the negotiation between the political and the aesthetic stands out, in Pacheco, the negotiations between his social and literary context lead to a nuanced approach to writing, while Parra addresses a changing society through a self-reflective form of writing that consistently points to its limitations. This continuation and evolution of the ironic attitude that cultural theorist Colebrook and philosopher Behler identified from the time of the German Romantics asks that we approach their writing with the same critical eye that they do, while simultaneously demystifying a genre that has so often been accused of being too esoteric and out of reach. In chapter two, I study the way in which the critical approach that Dalton and Parra took toward poetry also applies to political ideologies. Both of them found themselves in a highly volatile political climate and while their responses to this context varied in key ways, they both confronted the complexity and contradictions of what it meant to be a Latin American writer with varied levels of social commitment.

Chapter 2: Political Imaginaries in Dalton and Parra

Introduction

As mentioned in chapter one, Colebrook identifies three key characteristics that define an ironic text, they are fragmentary, contradictory and critical. While it is clear in the previous chapter that the critical and contradictory nature of Dalton, Pacheco, and Parra's works can be seen in their approach poetry, these characteristics also apply to the way in which Dalton and Parra approach political ideologies. Roque Dalton's *Taberna y otros lugares* (1969) and Nicanor Parra's *Artefactos* (1972), were product of a combination of specific lived experiences and a broader, polarized political landscape that characterized Latin America at that time. The success of the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) had shaken the whole continent, and intellectuals across Latin America, including Parra and Dalton, had direct ties with the intellectual movement taking place in Cuba. But the enchantment before the promises of the Revolution was slowly fading. It is important to note that the arrest of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla in 1971 marked the beginning of further division among intellectuals who initially had fully supported Castro's regime. While *Artefactos* was published after the Padilla case, Dalton's *Taberna* was published before, so these specific events are most relevant in relation to Parra's text. But even with this key difference, it becomes evident that both of these texts engage with the political climate of their time through the same ironic attitude with which they approached poetry. In order to begin to understand the diverse forms of political critique that both Parra and Dalton participate in through their works, it is important to establish the differences between each poet's commitment and relationship to leftist militant activity during the mid-20th century.

Nicanor Parra had maintained an amicable relationship with Cuban intellectuals up until the events of 1970. That year Parra, along with other leftist poets, were invited to visit the White House while they were in Washington DC for the National Poetry Festival. During that visit, the first lady Pat Nixon greeted them with a cup of tea and pictures were taken to commemorate the occasion. This moment would forever change Parra's relationship to leftist intellectuals as well as leftist ideology, as he was accused of fraternizing with the imperialists. Even though he attempted to defend himself initially, Parra eventually embraced his new status as a traitor that could not be easily categorized into either end of the political spectrum. *Artefactos* is the first text that Parra publishes after this event, therefore his complete dissatisfaction with political ideology shapes the text and it is that disenchantment that makes it a thought-provoking and deeply ironic collection. On the other hand, Dalton, a leftist militant until the day of his death, presents a different situation that nonetheless, presents an ironic vision of the left.

After *Taberna y otros lugares* wins the Premio Casa de las Américas in 1969, Uruguayan author Mario Benedetti interviews Roque Dalton about his book. This interview was transcribed in Benedetti's *Cuaderno cubano*, which includes a variety of genres, including poetry and essay, all of which document Benedetti's time in Cuba. Prompted by Benedetti, Dalton explains that one of the most ambitious poems in the collection, "Taberna" was the result of his stay in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He describes it as follows: "una crónica de los esquemas mentales de un sector importante de la juventud checa, en los años 1966 y 1967" ("Una hora" 115). Dalton emphasizes the fact that everything that is written in "Taberna" is a survey of sorts that simply collects the voices of the Czech youth

during their leisure time at the Ufleku tavern in Prague[13]. What is even more important for understanding the poem, and the book as a whole, is Dalton's observations of the Praguian state of mind. He states that the Revolution had triumphed in Czechoslovakia twenty years ago, therefore the frame of mind there differed greatly from the one in Cuba. He explains:

> el sentido de lo heroico, el fervor de la revolución, el orgullo de ser comunista y revolucionario, eran desde luego el pan de cada día para la juventud; en cambio, la problemática planteada por los jóvenes praguenses, era una mescolanza de misticismo, religiosidad, anticomunismo, snobismo, nihilismo; o sea una cantidad de formas ideológicas que el imperialismo exporta para el consumo de los pueblos que él mismo se encarga de oprimir. (Dalton, "Una hora" 116-117)

In other words, after living in the fervor of the recent Cuban Revolution, Dalton is faced with the contrasting reality of socialist Czechoslovakia, one in which the youth no longer contains the vitality and commitment that would be needed for moving the Revolution forward. It is important to note that even as Dalton claims to be a reliable, objective interlocutor for their voices, it is clear in his interview that he held a critical view of the statements that he reproduced in the poem. But even in light of this statement, Dalton emphasizes his commitment to reflecting the complex political landscape that he encountered during his time in exile.

Benedetti's interview of Dalton is crucial to understanding the specific moment in which *Taberna y otros lugares* is conceived. When Benedetti asks Dalton to describe the

[13] This poem forms part of the "exteriorismo" esthetic which was popularized by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal. Exteriorismo can be defined as an esthetic that allowed for everything that exists on the outside to exist within the poem. Cardenal specifically explained that it was not to be confused as another "ismo" of the many that arose during the avant-garde period.

trajectory of his poetic work, he reveals a few key aspects that help illuminate the ironic perspective that he adopts. First, he declares that before the pressing political situation in his country, he found that "no era suficiente la expresión admirativa o condenatoria, sino que precisaba un análisis más profundo" (Dalton, "Una hora" 114). This comment is in line with his essay, "Poesía y militancia en América Latina" (1963), where Dalton declared that the poet should reject "mechanical, schematic thinking" (*Poetry and militancy* 23). In this interview, he declares that in order to engage in the deeper analysis, he started writing a poetry that revolved around characters, and when even this was insufficient, he began writing a poetry that focused on ideas. Ultimately, he explains that *Taberna* is full of characters, and that some of these characters hold opinions that do not reflect his own ideology and that he forms these types of characters "establecer una contradicción dialéctica, en el seno de la expresión poética" (114) and this dialectical contradiction can only be resolved by the reader. In doing this, Dalton avoids falling into a schematic approach to writing, as he opens up a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities through his creation of various characters that contain conflicting ideologies. Ultimately, *Taberna y otros lugares* complexifies the imaginary of the revolutionary and commitment to social change.

Even though Roque Dalton and Nicanor Parra's positions before the leftist movements that defined the landscape of Latin American politics during the 20th century differ greatly, Parra completely separated himself from any alliance while Dalton was a member of the leftist Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) until they executed him in 1975, both of them created texts that presented their respective political landscape through an ironic worldview. Parra's extreme disenchantment results in the production of

Artefactos, a series of postcards with images and short phrases that cause discomfort and are meant to allow for a myriad of interpretations, some of which purposefully contradict each other. Dalton's *Taberna y otros lugares* consists of a variety of characters that hold opposing political ideologies and everything in between, which requires that the readers interpret and come to their own conclusions, which also may end up challenging the ideology that the author himself held. In the case of Dalton's text, he complicated the imaginary of the perfect revolutionary and martyr and he blurs the lines between groups that hold opposing perspectives. Meanwhile, Parra's postcards engage in the critique of both Cuba and the United States, sometimes separately and other times in conjunction, while also questioning the meaning of the Revolution and consequently, what it means to be a revolutionary. This chapter will explore both *Artefactos* and *Taberna y otros lugares*, and it argues that ultimately, both texts hinge on an ironic worldview that complicate the concept of political commitment.

Reimagining the Revolutionary through his Relationship with Death and Incarceration

Dalton is one of the most well-known committed poets of Latin America, and with good reason. His deep and unwavering commitment to leftist revolutionary movements of his time is evident both in his life's trajectory, including the many arrests and his time in exile, and his many writings on the topic. Committed literature, also known as political literature, has been praised, vilified, and even ignored by literary critics. The varying level of interest and/or dismissal of this type of literature is rooted in the functional element that has always been associated with explicitly political literature since in worst-case scenarios,

it can fall into becoming propaganda. Dalton defined what he understood to be the social function of all literature in his essay "Poesía y militancia en América Latina," and it is worth noting that there are different interpretations of what that social function consists of, particularly in the context of mid-20th century Central America. In his introduction to *Ensayos sobre la poesía revolucionaria de Centroamérica*, James Iffland analyzes the role of committed poetry in Central America with a focus on the way in which it contributes to the creation of subjects that are aware of their ability to exert change over an unjust reality. Iffland cites Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire's philosophy which emphasizes that those that participate in the process of raising consciousness (the committed poets in this case) first analyze reality, denounce it, and also announce the coming change. Much of Dalton's work, including the biography *Miguel Mármol* (1971), serve that function, as he consistently denounces the terror that the Salvadoran state had unleashed on its people time and time again with the hope of creating a socially conscious reader. But even though we must keep this in mind when approaching Dalton's works, it is important to also note that his work was far from homogeneous. Dalton's keen observations, expressed in his poetry, are particularly unique because of their narrative tendency as well as their contradictory nature. One of the key pieces of evidence that prompts readers to reevaluate the way that we understand political commitment is the way in which Dalton reimagines and reinvents the revolutionary through the way that he imagines his relationship with death and incarceration.

This section will focus on the poems contained in the third section of Taberna, titled "El país (III): Poemas de la última cárcel." But, before analyzing these poems, it is important to describe what the imaginary of the revolutionary consisted of and then explore how the

revolutionaries Dalton creates in his poetry digress from the norm. The poems of Guatemalan writer and member of the Committed Generation, Otto René Castillo (1936-1967), describe what we can call the archetype for the revolutionary. In the second essay from *Ensayos sobre la poesía revolucionaria de Centroamérica*, "Ideologías de la muerte en la poesía de Otto René Castillo," Iffland explores the way in which Castillo confronts the possibility of death as a result of his actions as a revolutionary. Iffland emphasizes that individual death is seen through a collective lens, since ultimately the martyr sacrifices himself for the sake of a better world. He states that "La ideología revolucionaria basada en el materialismo histórico ofrece una trascendencia que se realiza en las vidas de los demás" (172). The emphasis on collectivity is key here, particularly because it becomes a defining characteristic for the imaginary of the revolutionary in life and death. Even though there are specificities to the way Castillo constructs the revolutionary in his poetry[14], what is important to highlight here is the fact that the revolutionary imagines his death as the highest sacrifice for the sake of others. In the poems collected in the section "El país (III): Poemas de la última cárcel," the poet and the poetic voice conflate into one, and Dalton narrates his experience while incarcerated during the time when he had been sentenced to death. This highly personal section reveals the psyche of the revolutionary who is one step away from becoming a martyr, but instead of focusing on the common good that is to come, the poet discloses his innermost thoughts and doubts.

[14] James Iffland emphasizes the way in which Castillo mobilizes key autochthonous elements in his poetry to foment a liberation movement with a focus on his incorporation on indigenous worldviews. For more on this topic, see Iffland's essay, "Ideologías de la muerte en la poesía de Otto René Castillo."

The section is made up of sixteen poems, all numbered signaling the section's cohesiveness. The first one stands out because it does not have a title, it is simply numbered to signal the beginning of the series. Poem number one is written in prose, and it is worth noting that only one other poem in this section is written in prose as well (poem number twelve, titled "El 357"), the others follow the more traditional poetic construct of verses and stanzas. The poem begins by reminding the reader of the writer's location and he reflects on what the common man might be thinking:

> De nuevo la cárcel, fruta negra. En las calles y las habitaciones de los hombres, alguien se quejará en estos momentos del amor, hará música o leerá las noticias de una batalla transcurrida bajo la noche del Asia. (Dalton, *Taberna* 59).

Dalton's multiple incarcerations, including the time he escaped from jail after being sentenced to death, are a key part of the revolutionary imaginary that surrounds the poet's figure. It is important to note that the conflation between the poetic voice and the poet into one subject allows, and maybe even demands, that the reader pull from biographic information to analyze the varying meanings can be derived from the poem. What is interesting is that through these lines, the poetic voice exposes his internal monologue. The first words, remind us that he has experienced being incarcerated before, and following that he begins a narration of the outside world. The contrast between the first part of the sentence and the last is evidence of the poet's commitment to making space for all that fits into life. The narrative focused on those outside of jail starts talking about love, music, and ends with the reminder of the incessant wars that plague the world. The mention of Asia was most likely a reference to the controversial Vietnam War, a war that Latin American intellectuals condemned the United States for, and interestingly, a war that Parra was

accused of supporting when he went to the White House. As noted in the previous chapter, Dalton's poetry can be characterized by the heavy contrasts between the internal space which is many times conflicted with emotions and the many historical and present events that afflict society. As a committed poet, the reprehensible state of society is constantly present, but even as he denounces, the poetic voice always returns to other more traditional themes of poetry, in this case love and music. It is also worth noting that there is another contrast between the first sentence, where the poetic voice declares that he is once again in jail, and the second where he imagines life outside of his cell. If we return to the archetype of the revolutionary martyr, it is clear that the poetic voice is not focused on the collective for which he is being sacrificed, but his thoughts go from reflecting on his confinement to imagining what others are doing with their freedom. This theory is confirmed with in the following sentences, where he states "Y, en cualquier lugar, la última de las cosas hundidas o clavadas será menos prisionera que yo" (Dalton, "Taberna" 59). The desire to be elsewhere is highlighted, as the poetic subject desires the freedom that a nail finds hammered into a wall. But what is ever more important in this first poem is the poet's reflection on the possibility of purpose.

Suffering can become more bearable if it is understood as part of a process that can lead to something good or valuable. As such, the revolutionary martyr would understand his suffering as a sacrifice on the road to a better world. The poetic subject of this poem also tries to make sense of his incarceration, and he states in a parenthesis:

(Claro, que tener un pedazo de lápiz y un papel – y la poesía – prueba que algún orondo

concepto universal, nacido para ser escrito con mayúscula – la Verdad, Dios, lo Ignorado – me inundó desde un día feliz, y que no he caído – al hacerlo en este pozo oscuro – sino en manos de la oportunidad para darle debida constancia ante los hombres. Preferiría, sin embargo, un buen paseo por el campo.

Aun sin perro.) (Dalton, *Taberna* 59)

This is how the poem number one ends, and it necessitates further attention. The first sentence of this fragment is a meta reflection on the process of writing poetry within poetry, and it seems to present poetry as the ultimate purpose, and the motivation, behind the poetic subject. His poetry, made to write some unknown "concepto universal" and finally, it will be given to humankind. This enormous, yet mysterious, task which the poetic subject believes is what he is meant to do while in jail, could potentially function as motivation, as strength in times of adversity. But the last two sentences shift the tone of the poem, as he declares that even though he believes he is destined for a great purpose, he would much rather be able to take a walk in the fields alone. The apparent banality of this declaration is almost comical. Even as the poetic subject had moved toward presenting himself as a martyr who has a crucial role to play in the revolutionary process, and maybe in humanity's destiny, if given the choice, he would choose freedom. What is interesting is that this is not presented as selfishness, but simply as a logical progression. Poem number two, titled "Preparar la próxima hora," and it establishes a clear connection with the first through a continuation of the reflection on purpose and destiny.

"Preparar la próxima hora" is written in verse and it begins with the same theme that the previous poem ended with. It begins with the following verses:

No querría pensar en el destino. Por alguna razón

lo asocio a olvidados tapices de vergüenza y

majestad donde un rostro impasible

(como el de Selassie)

luchase imponerme una marca eterna. (Dalton, *Taberna* 61)

In the first poem, the poetic subject declares that he is convinced that being in jail is part of a greater purpose in which he will reveal some great secret through his written work. Without naming it explicitly, it is clear that he is imagining that incarceration was part of his destiny. Then in the second poem, he begins by talking about how he wishes he could avoid thinking about destiny. He extrapolates on the why, and draws a comparison between Haile Selassie I, the last Ethiopian emperor who has been regarded as a messianic figure by many Rastas, and destiny. Selassie is well known for his determination to modernize Ethiopia as well as for granting himself more power through a new constitution in 1955. Therefore, using Selassie as a metaphor for destiny reveals the relationship between the poetic subject and destiny. The poetic subject views destiny through a conflictive lens and in fact, these initial verses set up the same conflict that the poetic subject faced in the first poem. In the first poem, he declares that even though he is suffering for a greater purpose, he would much rather have his freedom. This is a more passive conflict with destiny, while in the second poem, the conflict has escalated, as he perceives destiny as a powerful emperor that he resists. As the poem continues, he provides commentary on his daily life in jail, which serves as a return to the material reality that he faces.

The poetic subject oscillates between his internal monologue and conflict and observations of his surroundings. In the second stanza he states “Esta mañana el vigilante

trajo tan sólo sobras/ para mí – no ha sufrido, el pobre – / que con la niebla han dado nombre al día" (Dalton, *Taberna* 60). The aside where he states that the guard has not experienced suffering, and then pities him for that privilege is noteworthy. It is contradictory to suggest that someone who has not suffered should be pitied, and this paradox can be easily solved if we think of the archetype of the martyr. Suffering is a crucial part of being a revolutionary (something that I will explore more in a later section of this chapter), and by being exempt from suffering, the guard is far removed from the revolution. In the third stanza he describes the food in detail, "Son trozos muertos de sal de algún marisco muerto,/ tortillas de maíz atacadas con esa vieja furia/…. Restos de un arroz bronco como de tres abanderados soberbios" (Dalton, *Taberna* 60). The multiple references to death while talking about food remind the reader that the poetic subject has been condemned to death and that he is simply waiting for his execution. As death surrounds him, even through his food, he reveals extreme anguish:

> La pared está llena de fechas que cargo zozobrante,
> piezas de la fatiga final, desnuda, que gritan y que
> son peores testigo de algo que ni mis lágrimas
> borrarían
> (el miedo?). (Dalton, Taberna 61)

This shift in tone furthers the contradictions and insecurities that the poetic subject is facing. He does not explain what the dates that he has written on the wall refer to, but he makes evident that they are the root of his restlessness. He declares that they form part of some final fatigue, signaling once again the proximity of death. These dates are personified, they become the sole witnesses in solitude. What they are witness to becomes question at

the end of the stanza, as the poetic subject wonders if it might be fear. The question is asked in a parenthesis, signaling that the poetic subject is unsure of how to define his current state. He remains confused, unsure, and he vacillates between believing that there is a purpose for his suffering (in poem one) and completely rejecting the idea of destiny and wallowing in his current situation.

The fifth stanza of the poem makes a reference to Faust, the main character of a tragic play written by German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The play centers on Faust's deal with Mephistopheles, the Devil, in exchange for the world's pleasures. Faust first loses the woman he loves and then throws all of his energy into chasing worldly accomplishments but it does not satisfy him. In the end, he does earn his place in heaven. The poetic subject imagines himself as Faust and states:

> He orado (soy Fausto), me he dado besos en las
> manos, me he dicho ancianamente
> haciendo rebotar el aliento en un rincón helado de la celda:
> "pobrecito olvidado, pobrecito,
> con la mayor parte de la muerte a tu cargo,
> mientras en algún lugar del mundo alguien desnuda bellas armas
> o canta himnos de rebelión que sus mujeres prefieren a las joyas
> tú escuchas marimbas de miel
> después de ser escupido por un déspota de
> provincia,
> sientes el rumor de tus uñas
> creciendo contra la piel del zapato,

hueles mal (esto lo ampliaré en otra parte),

tratas de hallar una señal que diga "vivirás"

aun en una mariposa o un hato de tempestades… (Dalton, *Taberna* 61)

The poetic subject imagines himself as Faust, a character that dedicates his life to pursuing all his wants, ends up dissatisfied, but still receives heaven as a reward at the end. In doing so, he returns to a focus on himself. His prayer is one of self-pity. He repeats the word "pobrecito", something that reappears in his semi-autobiographical novel *Pobrecito poeta que era yo* (1976). It is important to note that wallowing in his pain is nowhere near fitting into the narrative of the revolutionary martyr, there is nothing heroic or inspiring in the poetic subject's repetition of the word "pobrecito." When he imagines the outside world, he imagines the revolutionaries, preparing their arms and singing songs, but this is not a triumphant imaginary. This can be deduced by the verses that immediately follow the narration of the outside world, where the poetic subject contrasts his current state in the same self-pitying tone of the entire prayer. The constant humiliation that he suffers in jail, which he constantly refers back to, starting from his complaint about the food in the second stanza, is the center of his prayer. The conflict that the poetic subject faces is twofold, in part he wants to be free in order to participate in the revolution the way others are able to, and at the same time, he is simply tired of the way he continues to be mistreated in jail. This is the ironic imaginary that this self-centered revolutionary presents the reader with. Furthermore, he clearly wants to live, his unwillingness to die creates a tension between the ideal revolutionary martyr and this complex, revolutionary who experiences fear before the possibility of death. The following verses present a new emotion: rage.

The fifth stanza continues with the poet's internal monologue, and after revealing his self-pitying prayer, there is a shift in tone and he begins call on a new god:

Aleluya estricta, bien gritada ante las estrellas imposibles,
qué bella viene de pronto la cólera:
filo inmenso, cuánto vales a mi alma,
homenaje a los sacrificados sin bellos puntos finales,
cólera, cólera, o madre preciosa, justa raíz de sed,
has llegado… (Dalton, *Taberna* 61-62)

The arrival of rage is treated as the response to the poet's prayer. Rage provides strength and it serves as homage to the lost. It is important to note that this shift in the poem is the first indication of the poetic subject's deep connection to other revolutionaries who have died for the sake of a better world. It is worth noting that his melancholy self-pitying attitude is lifted through the memory of those that have been lost which stirs up anger. Negative emotions, which have been the center of the poem, continue even in the most hopeful part of the poem. The revolutionary is both reprehensible for his "poor me" attitude and then admirable for finding the strength and rage in remembering other revolutionary martyrs. Far from fitting into a uniform, archetypal imaginary, the revolutionary that he presents is multifaceted, contradictory, and he is constantly at odds with the idea of destiny. In the sixth and final stanza, he returns his attention to the current situation:

En el patio lejano la luz del sol
será como una gata blanca. Estoy acaso listo
para dejarme ver la cara en la próxima hora del agua?

Sí. Pediré un cigarrillo. (Dalton, *Taberna* 62)

The final stanza returns to the poem's title, "Preparar la próxima hora." Through the final stanza, it becomes clear that the entire poem is a reflection on whether he is able to continue facing himself. As the morning arrives, he wonders if he is ready to face himself again, and he concludes that yes, he is. The final words are ambiguous, after facing an intense crisis that made him question whether he believes in destiny and ended with a revitalization that was only possible through a connection to the great cause of the revolution. But in his immediate surroundings, the banal pleasures occupy his mind as well, as his thoughts end with the desire for a cigarette. The poetic subject's painful humanity is displayed through his crisis but also through the common things that take up his attention. But his questioning of the possibility of destiny and its relationship to his current situation continues to be the center of his reflection in the third poem of the section.

While in "Preparar la próxima hora," there are constant references to the poetic subject's immediate context, the third poem, titled "Límites," is a lot more philosophical and it focuses on the mysteries that the poetic subject has pondered throughout the first two poems. "Límites" consists of five stanzas, and the final one foreshadows the title of the book. The poetic subject begins by talking about language: "Lengua tejida que matará cada trampa/ iluminando vasos terrenales,/ pero jamás la leve audacia, los fervores del íngrimo" (Dalton, *Taberna* 63). In the first poem of the section written from jail, the poetic subject has been writing about writing. In the first poem, he ponders on the possibility that he could reveal some great, mysterious concept through his poetry. In "Límites," as the title foreshadows, the poetic subject once again reflects on language. The tongue stands for speech, written and verbal, and he both recognizes it as a powerful force while

simultaneously recognizing its limitation in the first stanza. The tongue, is both violent (matará) and soft (iluminando). In the second stanza, he returns to the mystery, he declares:

> Porque primero fue la danza borradora
> de cautelas claras como redes
> y ahora será sólo el enigma
> la simple maravilla que juega y juega. (Dalton, *Taberna* 63)

In the first poem of the jail collection, he spoke of a "orondo concepto universal," in the second poem he meditated on "el destino," and in this poem he speaks of "el enigma." The first half of the stanza talks about deception and the second half refers to an enigma that taunts the poetic subject. The clear continuity between the first three poems centers around a mysterious concept that not even the speaker understands. The second stanza explains that initially, the poetic subject had been deceived, but now there is an enigma that has taken the place of deception. In the third stanza, he returns to Faust, through the second reference to this play.

The poet's constant negotiation with destiny returns in the third stanza of the poem, with a reference to Faust:

> Oír a Gounod sentado entre las ratas
> no puede ser una señal. Todo
> lo que es, es vértigo sonable,
> verdad abierta del incrédulo, margen. (Dalton, Taberna 63)

French composer, Charles Gounod composed an opera titled Faust, based on Goethe's play. This is the second reference in this section to Faust (he declared that he was Faust in the

second poem). But again, he rejects the possibility of destiny. To hear the opera playing could be a sign of destiny, but he refuses to believe it and instead, attributes it to chance. Everything, he declares is simply vertigo, dizzying confusion. The poet's constant negotiation with destiny, yet his inability to distance himself from it, sets up a tension in the revolutionary almost martyr. But what stands out is the final stanza, which is only made up of one verse: "Taberna y otros…" (Dalton, *Taberna* 63), suggesting that the book's title came to the poem while he was in jail, as a sign that he so rejected. It is important to note the extensive cohesiveness and unity that the poet sets up for the book as a whole. At the micro level, the section that he declares was written from jail centers around the way he grapples with the concept of destiny, and with the final verse of "Límites," the poet solidifies the idea that there was some force (maybe that of destiny) that allowed him to escape death. It is important to note that within the first three poems of "El país (III)", the poetic subject mostly focuses on himself, and the only time he contemplates the outside world, it is to compare his confinement with their freedom. He wrestles with contradicting thoughts regarding the power of destiny or chance in his life, and whether his incarceration and death sentence hold any meaning beyond himself. But, in "Preparar la próxima hora," he declares that it is the rage birthed from the death of his comrades that saves him from his wallowing. This theme returns in the ninth poem of the section.

If we recall Iffland's explanation of the revolutionary's imaginary of death, the importance of the collective cannot be understated. The ninth poem in the section written from prison is titled "Mala noticia en un pedazo de periódico" and it describes the experience of finding out about the death of comrades while incarcerated. The poem is broken up into four stanzas, and the first says "Hoy cuando se me mueren los amigos/ sólo

mueren sus nombres" (Dalton, *Taberna* 70). The space outside of the jail is reduced to the words that inform the incarcerated of the events that continue to unfold. Because of this, the poetic subject's dead friends are no more than dead names. The dehumanization of the dead is central to this poem. In the second stanza, he expands on the disintegration of his relationship with his dead friends and writing:

> ¿Cómo aspirar, desde el violento pozo,
> abarcar más que las tipografías,
> resplandor de negruras delicadas,
> flechas hasta las íntimas memorias? (Dalton, *Taberna* 70)

The poet's relationship with writing and the events that he can no longer experience directly works within the dichotomy of outside/inside. First, writing is the only way that the author can express his experience inside to the outside, meanwhile writing is the only way that the outside world can penetrate the space of the prison. In other words, writing is both his connection to freedom and a reminder of his confinement. In the third stanza, he once again focuses on the divide between himself and those that are outside.

In the first and second poem, the poetic voice imagines what others do with their freedom, and there's a clear desire for that same freedom. In the third stanza he declares:

> Sólo quien vive fuera de las cárceles
> puede honrar los cadáveres, lavarse
> del dolor de sus muertos con abrazos,
> rascar con uña y lágrima las lápidas. (Dalton, *Taberna* 70)

Once again, there is a clear desire to be like the ones who live outside, but in this case, it is for less self-centered reasons. The poet wishes he could properly mourn and honor his

dead comrades. This stanza reveals the most vulnerability, and the poem as a whole is written in mourning for the lost and for the poet's inability to properly mourn. The poem ends with a two verse stanza that states "Los presos no: solamente silbamos/ para que, el eco acalle la noticia" (Dalton, *Taberna* 70). The mourning process is reduced to a whistle with the purpose of silencing the sorrowful news. This poem reveals the collectivity found in the prison and it extends to the comrades outside of the prison. In contrast with previous poems, where the poet's focus on his own existential crisis made the outside world seem desirable, while "Mala noticia en un pedazo de periódico" focuses on collective loss. But what is key for the revolutionary imaginary that the poet builds throughout this section, is that every version of the revolutionary is present. The doubtful revolutionary, the revolutionary who wants freedom, the revolutionary who believes in his calling, the revolutionary that is focused on the collective, all of these versions, are one in the same. "País (III): Poemas de la última cárcel" reinvents the revolutionary martyr, but the challenge to the archetypal revolutionary happens throughout all of the book. In other poems, the poet focuses on imagining the free revolutionary and his unheroic characteristics.

The Multifaceted Revolutionary in *Taberna y otros lugares*

In *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions* John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman argue that Dalton's poetry "is also concerned with redefining the sense of Marxism-Leninism and revolutionary militancy in order to bring them closer to the sensibility of the new generation emerging in El Salvador on the heels of the Cuban Revolution" (129). I argue that in order to redefine these major ideologies, Dalton begins by

reimagining the individual revolutionary. Furthermore, Beverley and Zimmerman explore the way that Dalton builds his own persona, which they believe is encapsulated in the "self-ironic, nonheroic hero" (129). This construct also applies to the revolutionaries that he imagines in his poetry. While in the third section of *Taberna* it is very clear that the poetic subject and Dalton are one in the same, the rest of the book is populated by a variety of characters that hold varying opinions. But even those characters that seem to be in line with the left are many times complex, multifaceted characters.

"Buscándome líos" is the final poem of the first section of the book. This section, titled "El país (I)" contains many poems that extrapolate on the poet's tense relationship with his home country. What stands out is the way that he explores the ways in which exile have transformed his relationship with El Salvador. "Buscándome líos" is also an exploration of the relationship between the country and an individual, but it is explored through the lens of the birth of a revolutionary conscience. The poem is a sort of genesis, as it narrates the poetic subject's first meeting. He begins by describing his observations of the people at this meeting in the first stanza:

> La noche de mi primera reunión de célula llovía
> mi manera de chorrear fue muy aplaudida por cuatro
> o cinco personajes del dominio de Goya
> todo el mundo ahí parecía levemente aburrido
> tal vez de la persecución y hasta de la tortura diariamente soñada. (Dalton, *Taberna* 24)

There are a lot of key details in this scene that a crucial to understanding why this reimagining of the leftist revolutionary was subversive. The poetic subject sets up the scene

as to create a foreboding mood. The rain sets the mood and the second verse provides further details that tell the reader why the rain was important: the poetic subject was soaked. He playfully explains that his "manera de chorrear" was cause for celebration, but it can be deduced that they were applauding him for other reasons. The poetic subject provides us with enough detail to build a comprehensive picture of what was happening, not only is it possible that they were celebrating the entrance of a new member of the unnamed guerilla group that he was joining, but it is also possible that they were impressed that the rain had not stopped him from attending. But the fact that the poetic subject says that they applauded him for the way he was dripping is important because it focuses on the performativity of the role he took on. Arriving dripping wet is performative in that it makes the "sacrifice" of attending a meeting appear so much greater, since he had to give up comfort in order to attend. Furthermore, the description of the other meeting attendees also deserves our attention. The first of the comrades he describes look like characters from Francisco de Goya's paintings. Since the poetic subject is painting a dark scene with the rain, we can imagine that he is referring to the paintings from Goya's dark period, *Las pinturas negras*. The poetic subject continues to elaborate on the dark setting, and then the tone shifts, he declares that everyone looks bored, which is contradictory to what one would imagine of a meeting full of revolutionaries. But the fifth verse reveals the source of boredom, completely subverting expectations. Instead of having suffered persecution and torture, the "characters" at these meetings dream of it, and it is implied that they have dreamed of it for so long that their fantasies have become tedious. This is key to the reimagining of the revolutionary, because it reveals the perverse, dark side of the idea of martyrdom. The dreams of torture are deeply tied to a desire for recognition, a desire to be

remembered in death. It is clear that the rain that the poetic subject "endured" to arrive at the meeting is a minor example of the suffering that is attached to the revolutionary. It begs the question, if a revolutionary doesn't die as a martyr, is he still a revolutionary? The characters at this meeting think not. Torture and persecution are a medal of honor, but when they become the object of desire, it destabilizes all of the narratives and ideologies surrounding the revolution.

The second stanza of the poem advances the narration of the meeting, and the poetic subject adds more descriptions and explains the instructions he was given:

> Fundadores de confederaciones y de huelgas
> mostraban
> cierta ronquera y me dijeron que debía
> escoger un seudónimo
> que me iba a tocar pagar cinco pesos al mes
> que quedábamos en que todos los miércoles
> y que como iban mis estudios
> y que por hoy íbamos a leer un folleto de Lenin
> y que no era necesario decir a cada momento camarada. (Dalton, *Taberna* 24)

The poetic subject continues to provide key details, for example, the fact that the speakers had hoarse voices. This observation is most likely an observation of the passionate nature of the speeches. This description focuses on the performative nature of the revolutionary, which is a continuation of the same performativity that the poetic subject presented when he arrived soaking wet. The logistics of the meeting seem like unimportant information, but it is very much in line with Dalton's esthetic, everything that fits into life fits into poetry.

The mention of the monthly fees and the other logistic details also contribute to the narrative style of the poem. The seventh verse reveals additional information about the poetic subject, he is a student, while the ninth verse of the stanza conveys his excitement. The final stanza is made up of two verses, and it provides a final important detail about the poetic subject: "Cuando salimos no llovía más/ mi madre me riñó por llegar tarde a casa" (Dalton, *Taberna* 24). It can be deduced that the poem's speaker is a young overeager student. The title, "Bucándome líos," contributes to the characterization of the poetic subject. It provides a sort of reasoning behind the young student's actions; he is looking for trouble. What is interesting about the phrase, "buscándome líos" is that is has a lighthearted tone, it also implies that joining the revolution was unnecessary. The poetic subject's young age suggests that he might have not understood the magnitude of the movement he was joining. This genesis of the revolutionary is crucial in challenging the archetypal ideology of the revolutionary in both the way in represents the newly-committed subject as well as in the way that it represents the already established revolutionaries. But it is important to note that even if the poetic subject's naiveté is evident, his dedication to the cause is never denied. The fact that he is scolded for saying the word "camarada" too much signals excitement, which the other characters in the room seem to be missing. This poem is a critique of the archetypal imaginary of the revolutionary that glorifies and converts him into a homogeneous character that is meant to be imitated and performed, but lacks substance. The boredom of the other's in the room is rooted in the fact that they are not fulfilling their goal of becoming a martyr for the revolution. While "Buscándome líos" stands out for its critical nature, there are other poems in the collection

that have a more hopeful tone, while still maintaining the ironic perspective present throughout the text.

"Sobre dolores de cabeza" is the first poem of the section titled "La historia: Escrito en Praga." This section contains the extensive "Taberna," which will be discussed in detail in the third chapter. For this book, time and space are key indicators that the poet purposefully includes in order to orient the reader. Therefore, the fact that "Sobre dolores de cabeza" was written in Prague, which was a crucial time period for the poet as he was exposed to the realities of a post-revolution society. The poem is divided into five stanzas and it explores the pains of being a communist. It begins with a statement that reflects on the poetic subject's commitments: "Es bello ser comunista,/ aunque cause muchos dolores de cabeza" (Dalton, *Taberna* 105). The contrast between the first and second verse are the perfect example of the type of ironic perspective that the book presents, of the tension that Dalton discussed in his interview with Benedetti. In the second stanza, he goes on to explaining the root of the headache:

> Y es que el dolor de cabeza de los comunistas
> se supone histórico, es decir
> que no cede ante las tabletas analgésicas
> sino sólo ante la realización del Paraíso en la tierra.
> Así es la cosa. (Dalton, *Taberna* 105).

Here, the poetic subject presents the disease and the cure, which will only be acquired through the triumph of the revolution. At this juncture, the poem follows the conventions of committed poetry, it talks about the struggles faced by the revolutionaries, but justifies them through the promise of a future, better world. This is in line with what Iffland

described as the focus on collectivity over individuality. The third stanza continues this argument as it continues to revolve around the metaphor of the headache, it states that under capitalism "nos duele la cabeza/ y nos arrancan la cabeza" (Dalton, *Taberna* 105), and he highlights the dichotomy between the types of headaches suffered with the following verses, "en la lucha por la Revolución la cabeza es una/ bomba de retardo" (Dalton, *Taberna* 105). Even though in both scenarios, one would end up without a head, either because it was ripped off or because it will blow up, it is clear that under capitalism, the headaches and eventual death are involuntary. In the fourth stanza, he declares "En la construcción socialista/ planificamos el dolor de cabeza/ lo cual no lo hace escasear, sino todo lo contrario" (Dalton, *Taberna* 105). The poetic subject suggests that the discomfort experienced due to the revolution is thought-out, which is what makes it different from life under capitalism. The final stanza contains only two verses, "El comunismo será, entre otras cosas,/ una aspirina del tamaño del sol" (Dalton, *Taberna* 105). In part, the poem is a clear celebration of the world that is to come, while simultaneously the idea of the constant headache, even though it is planned, adds complexity to the imaginary that it presents. It is important this poetic voice is a collective, it speaks from the perspective of an "us," which is different from other poems in this collection. In *Poetry and Militancy in Latin America*, Dalton insisted that poets could not simply spend all their time praising how great the revolution was and how the bourgeoisie is terrible. While in part, this poem does what Dalton himself rejected, while simultaneously, the focus on the "headache" is a focus on the negative aspects (though justified) of the revolutionary's life. When this poem is put in conversation with others, it is clear that the contradictions that are built are purposeful. If "Buscándome líos" presents a far from ideal imaginary, "Sobre dolores de cabeza" primarily

presents a utopian future, though there are pesky headaches to deal with in the process. The section written in prison presents the conflicts that the militant poet faced, while other poems continue the discussion and complication of the revolutionary. But it is not only the leftist militant reimagined, but the opposition is also reimagined through a focus on individual experiences.

Us versus Them Deconstructed

"El país (III): Poemas de la última cárcel" explores the internal conflicts of the poet, but the twelfth poem, titled, "El 357," focuses on his interaction with a prison guard. The poem is written in prose, like the first one of the collection, and it narrates the relationship that the poet built with guard 357. The poem begins by describing the guards and categorizing them into groups, "Los vigilantes se dividen en varios grupos. El de los que apedrean a los conejos mientras corren desde el jardín con las margaritas en la boca…El de los que caminan a saltitos frente a mi celda, gritando palabras del país…Y el de los que en la madrugada orinan al tiempo que me despiertan (con la luz de sus lámparas lamiéndome la cara) y me dicen, mohínos que hoy hace más frío aún" (Dalton, *Taberna* 73). The description of the different categories focuses on what the guards do. The description of the relationship between the poet and guards is clearly marked by the power dynamic, which is emphasized with the description of the way that they wake him up in the morning while urinating and shining a light in his face. There is a marked lack of demonization, the guards are peculiar and a bit rude, but not evil. Then, he begins his description of guard 357: "A ninguno de estos grupos pertenece el 357, que fuera pastor y músico y que ahora es policía por culpa de una venganza nada clara y a quien (es decir, al 357) darán de baja este fin de

mes" (Dalton, *Taberna* 73). The first thing that stands out in his initial description is that the poetic subject marks a clear difference between him and the other guards. Second, his name is not revealed, which can be interpreted in many ways. The lack of name is dehumanizing, but it could also be protection from retribution against him. The poetic subject further creates an intimate portrayal of guard 357, who was originally going to be a musician and a pastor, which suggests that this guard is an unwilling participant. He ends the sentence by declaring that he's being fired, which again signals that the guard is not very committed to his job. He explains the cause, "Todo por haberse escapado una noche e ido a dormir con su mujer hasta las nueve de la mañana, befa de los reglamentos" (73). The description furthers the romantic imaginary that the poetic subject builds. Furthermore, the fact that he knows all of this intimate information about guard 357 communicates that they had a relationship beyond the norms of guard-prisoner. The second half of the poem describes their interaction and their farewell.

In the section written from prison, cigarettes have a special significance. In "Prepara la próxima hora" the poetic subject ends his reflection on destiny, rage, and purpose with "Pediré un cigarrillo" (Dalton, *Taberna* 62). There is pleasure, normalcy, and habit attached to smoking. As the poetic subject continues to explores his relationship with guard 357, he recalls "Hace días, el 357 me regaló un cigarillo." This simple act of kindness further cements the relationship between the two, while simultaneously highlighting the horizontal power dynamic between the two. The narration of their relationship continues and he describes a more recent development, "Ayer, mientras me miraba mascar una larga hoja de hierba-anís (que había logrado atraer hasta cerca de la reja con la vara de gancho que me fabriqué), me ha preguntado por Cuba" (Dalton, *Taberna* 73). The first interaction

he describes highlighted an action, while this second interaction is a conversation about Cuba, the center of the revolution. The parenthesis highlights the lack of freedom of the poetic subject, it's interesting because in contrast with the previous sentence, where the poet was gifted a cigarette, this time he entertains himself with something that he had to acquire on his own. Finally, the poem ends with a return to death and poetry: "Y hoy ha sugerido que tal vez yo podría escribir un pequeño poema para él—hablando de las montañas de Chalatenango—para guardarlo como recuerdo después de que me maten" (Dalton, *Taberna* 73). The final sentence is deeply ironic on many levels. First, a tender moment is immediately marred by the reality of the power relationship between the two men, as well as the imminent death of the poetic subject. Second, the moment can be seen as another moment where the powerful (the guard) can make demands something from the powerless (the poet). The request for a poem can be seen as a perverse joke, a way to further humiliate the poet. What puts this interpretation in question is the fact that the guard states that he planned to keep the poem as a memory of the poet. "El 357" challenges the dichotomy between the guards and the prisoners, but within certain limits and that is the root of the irony of this poem. This poem expands the reimagining of archetypal figures, in this case, the other is the guard. His small gestures of kindness, even though in constant tension with his position of power, plays a central role in pointing to his humanity, which could be lost amidst the separations between "them vs us." This poem also presents a slightly hopeful scenario, whereby through a sort of friendship, the guard becomes curious about Cuba and poetry. But what Dalton does at the micro level with specific characters that challenge the archetype that they could easily fall into, he also asks political questions

at the macro level through humor and reflections on the terms and ideas that shape leftist ideologies.

Questions of Ideology

In his book, *Roque Dalton: La radicalización de las vanguardias*, Luis Alvarenga points out that in the time after Dalton's death, the majority of the literary criticism of his works came from a very leftist perspective that focused on its contributions to the fight for a revolution. Alvarenga notes that this approach started to shift later, and many of the debates that center around the poet's life, his militancy, and his poetry have a long history and can be traced back to the 1980 *Recopilación de textos sobre Roque Dalton*. He cites Dominican author Pedro Conde Sturla's observations in his essay from that compilation:

> advierte con gran agudeza que el encontronazo de Dalton con las contradicciones del socialismo real durante su estancia en Checoslovaquia como miembro salvadoreño de la *Revista internacional*, provocan "el rechazo de la ortodoxia rampante", aunque ello no trae consigo el rechazo al socialismo, sino que plantea, para el autor salvadoreño, el reto de revolucionar incluso al mismo socialismo (7)

The poet's stay in socialist Czechoslovakia, which both the poet and critics have identified as a crucial turning point in his life, serves as a catalyst that makes the poet rethink concepts that shaped leftist ideology. Two poems in the section written from Prague, "Revisionismo" and "Decires" demonstrate a playful yet critical approach to Marxism. What stands out is the way that the poet asks questions instead of providing answers. These poems, as Alvarenga stated, are now tasked with imagining a revolution within socialism itself.

"Revisionismo" is a short poem, it consists of two stanzas, and it takes a single declaration by Marx and in a playful tone:

No siempre.

Porque,

por ejemplo,

en Macao,

el opio

es el opio del pueblo. (Dalton, *Taberna* 111).

By titling this poem "Revisionismo," the poet foreshadows a controversy that does not play out the way that the reader may have anticipated. Revisionism, which originated in the late 19th century with German theorist and politician Eduard Bernstein, was an attempt to revise Marxist doctrine to adapt it to a new and changing context. Of course, this was met with much resistance. The reader is warned via the title that what comes next might be polemical, and the first verse, "No siempre," is a direct challenge to dogmatism. There are exceptions that may apply depending on the context. In the second stanza, the poetic subject provides an example of one of these said exceptions, and refers back to one of Marx's most well-known statements: "Religion is the opium of the people." The poem does not quote it directly, but it is clearly referenced in the text. What is interesting about the revision that this poem proposes is that it is a quite literal interpretation of the Marxist adage it challenges. The comical nature of this particular poem lies in the fact that it is set up to be a serious revision, but instead it mocks the dogmatic nature of fundamentalist Marxism. The poem also opens up a variety of interpretations, as its comical nature could be understood as mocking the idea of revisionism as well, which would then further

support dogmatism in the left. The poem could be interpreted in this way because it could also suggest that any revisions proposed to Marxism are just as superficial and laughable as the one proposed in the poem. This is where Hutcheon's observation about the risky aspects of irony become central. This poem, as a part of a larger project, makes the topic more ambiguous, specially when it is thought of in relationship to more traditional political poetry and the poet's militant commitment. The tension between Dalton's role as a poet and role as a revolutionary manifest itself in this short yet potentially controversial poem. "Decires" belongs to the same section as "Revisionismo," and it continues the same line of questioning and controversy that has been key to *Taberna y otros lugares*.

The title of "Decires" evokes a communal conversation, and the poem is presented as a collection of quotes that the poetic subject has collected. It is made up of six stanzas, and the first five are all in quotations. The final one provides the poetic subject's verdict, but much like "Revisionismo" the irony happens between the said and unsaid. The first stanza declares ""El marxismo-leninismo es una piedra/ para romperle la cabeza al imperialismo/ y a la burguesía"" (Dalton, *Taberna* 112). This extended metaphor is characteristic of each one of the stanzas in this poem. The first one suggests that Marxism-Leninism is tool which will directly destroy the bourgeoisie. What stands out immediately is the lack of rhythm and flow in the poem. The phrase Marxism-Leninism lack musicality and the rest of the stanza also continues to use specialized language with little attention to rhythm and flow. The second stanza is a contestation to the first, ""No. El marxismo-leninismo es la goma elástica/ con que se arroja esa piedra"" (Dalton, *Taberna* 112). The second stanza suggests that Marxism-Leninism is a catalyst that launches movement, but it

stays within the same metaphor of the rock that will be thrown to destroy the bourgeoisie. The third stanza then responds to both of the previous ones:

> No, no. El marxismo-leninismo es la idea
>
> que mueve el brazo
>
> que a su vez acciona la goma elástica
>
> de la honda que arroja esa piedra. (Dalton, *Taberna* 112)

The definitions become more and more elaborate as the poem progresses. What began as a simple comparison between a rock and an idea expands and turns into an extended metaphor about how the idea is what propels the arms to use the elastic band that eventually throws the rock. What's interesting about the third stanza is that Marxism-Leninism is compared to something that is just as abstract as the ideology. The fourth stanza moves away from the rock metaphor and suggests ""El marxismo-leninismo es la espada/ para cortar las manos del imperialismo"" (Dalton, *Taberna* 112). The new metaphor compares it to a weapon once again, but now instead of the head being the target, imperialism needs to be rendered unable to act. Of course, that is not the final verdict, the fifth stanza declares:

> Qué va! El marxismo-leninismo es la teoría
>
> de hacerle la manicure al imperialismo
>
> mientras se busca la oportunidad de amarrarle las
>
> manos. (Dalton, *Taberna* 112)

The first three stanzas that focused on the sling and rock metaphor became more complex as they progressed, and the same applies to stanzas four and five, in which it begins with a straightforward idea and then becomes more complex. At the end, both major extended

metaphors become more abstract as they progress, which is representative of the way in which an ideology can be interpreted and reinterpreted in order to make it more accessible, but as soon as it is boiled down to a straightforward metaphor, it immediately is complicated and abstracted once again. The final stanza provides the poetic subject's response to all of the previous ideas and metaphors, adding to the never-ending list of interpretations of Marxism-Leninism.

There are many parallels between "Revisionismo" and "Decires." Among them, is the question of how Marxism-Leninism applies across different contexts and time, and they also both combine abstract ideas with concrete examples. The final stanza of "Decires" states:

> ¿Qué voy a hacer si me he pasado la vida
> leyendo el marxismo-leninismo
> y al crecer olvidé
> que tengo los bolsillos llenos de piedras
> y una honda en el bolsillo de atrás
> y que muy bien me podría conseguir una espada
> y que no soportaría estar cinco minutos
> en un Salón de Belleza? (Dalton, Taberna 112-113)

This poetic subject ends with a question, and through the first few verses, he reveals characteristics about his identity. He declares that he is a well-versed revolutionary, then in the third verse he makes a strange declaration. The phrase "al crecer" implies that the poetic subject matured in his studies, but what is contradictory is that through all of his readings, he began to forget. Instead of gaining more knowledge, there is a reverse process

that leaves the poetic subject with less understanding. He then lists all of the things that he has forgotten, they are references to the previous "decires," The first few are things that he already possesses, the sixth stanza focuses on something that he does not posses but could get if necessary, and finally, he declares that beauty salons are insufferable. The poetic subject addresses each one of the metaphors quoted earlier, but what is interesting to note is that he does not come a conclusion nor does he propose a new metaphor. At the end of a long list of ideas and metaphors that try to make sense of Marxism-Leninism, the poetic subject is unable to make sense of anything beyond the actual metaphors. Instead of focusing on the meaning behind the metaphors, the poetic subject interprets them literally. This can be understood in a myriad of ways. First, it can suggest that revolutionaries waste time focusing on theories and ideas and that immobilizes them and makes them forget that there are real, concrete things that they could be doing. In other words, it be read as a call to action. Another possible approach is to interpret the poem as an unfinished conversation. There are many indicators that *Taberna y otros lugares* as a whole includes many perspectives, which are sometimes contradictory, and there is a clear pattern of unresolved conflicts. It is only through reading the poem through the lens of the collective of the book that the irony becomes evident in this individual poem. Much like Hutcheon argues about irony, this poem creates more ambiguity, the final stanza which could have potentially been an answer to the question it posed, is just another question. This ambiguity, rooted in an ironic approach to political ideologies, opens up a myriad of interpretations, questions, and it creates a complex discussion about what defines commitment in literature. Parra's *Artefactos*, published three years after *Taberna y otros*

lugares, through its combination of images and short phrases, creates a politically contradictory and dynamic analysis of the ideological context of the time.

The Revolution and the Revolutionary in *Artefactos*

Artefactos, committed to providing an alternative mode of circulation for poetry, is a box of 242 postcards plus one booklet that contains a prologue written by the collection's editor Cristián Santa María. The prologue preempts the conflictive nature of the artefacts as well as the controversies that could arise from them. Santa María proposes a list of questions about the artefacts: "¿Blasfemias o ansias de Fe y Redención? ¿Vulgaridad pornográfica o testimonio documental? ¿Guerra política o grito de libertad frente a "compromisos"?" He sets up dichotomies through a line of questioning that asserts the artefacts' resistance to categorization, in line with the postcards themselves which also resist resolution when they are read in relation to each other. Much like Dalton, who hands the responsibility of resolving the conflicts that arise in his poetry to the reader, Santa María ends the prologue with the following declaration: "Quedan, ahora, con la palabra, los críticos, y los lectores." And much like *Taberna y otros lugares*, the rich contradictory statements made across the collection of postcards create a deeply ironic space. It is important to highlight that *Artefactos* was published after Parra's break with leftist academics after the fateful Washington trip of 1970. In "The Postcard Poetics of Nicanor Parra's *Artefactos*", scholar, poet, and translator Rebecca Kosick argues that *Artefactos* "is ultimately a material realization of Parra's poetics" (129). She proposes that even though *Poemas and antipoemas* is seen as the birth of antipoetry, it was still poetry. It could not free itself completely from the conventions of the genre partly *because* it was still a book,

and ultimately, that "limits this poetry's potential to circulate in the way nonpoetic speech or text does" (Kosick 136). The artefacts, in not being bound (literally and metaphorically) and having the capacity to move independently from the collection completely break with the expectation of cohesiveness and linearity. Furthermore, because it is a collection of postcards, this facilitates, or better yet, it calls for, an ironic reading. Any attempt "order" the artefacts to create a sort of narrative or linear reading is up to the individual. The text categorically resists a single reading or outcome, and therein lies its ironic nature. Therefore, this analysis will put specific postcards in conversation with each other according to common thematic elements, all of which engage in discussions about the politics of the time.

There are many overlaps among Dalton and Parra, one of them is the way that they reimagine the revolutionary and by default, the revolution, adding complexity to the glory of the promised utopia and avoiding archetypal characterizations of the revolutionary. A quintessential example of the type of questions that the artefacts ask its readers is in Figure 1, the poetic subject personifies the revolution and speaks to it directly. The repetition of "revolución" follows conventional poetic form, and it also creates a woeful tone in the poem, then, the second half of the poem calls the revolution to accountability. In this artefact, the word revolution comes to represent not only the concept of the revolution, but the myriad of definitions and actions that have been attributed to it. In repeating the word

twice, its meaning does not become more concrete, but less clear. By pairing it with its opposite, “contrarrevoluciones,” the definition becomes further muddled.

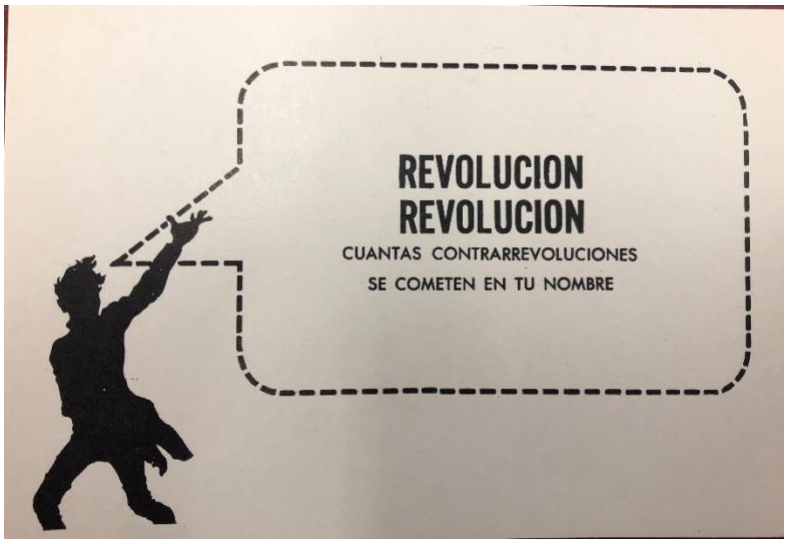


Figure 1: Nicanor Parra, "Revolución revolución cuantas contrarrevoluciones se cometen en tu nombre," *Artefactos*, 1972.

The font of the text communicates just as much as the image and the words themselves. The word “revolución” is in bold and all capital letters, while the rest of the text is significantly smaller and not in bold. In this way, it reads like the fine print for the revolution. The text is within a bubble of speech, being proclaimed by an anonymous figure with no distinguishable features. All of this points to a few key ideas: first, the lack of specificity communicated through the dark figure releases the text from all specificity. The poetic voice is not calling out a specific revolutionary leader (even though in other artifacts, the text demands accountability from specific revolutionary leaders), but in this artefact the complaint is directed toward the Revolution.

The artefact communicates at least two ideas. It confronts the damage done in the name of the Revolution. In doing so, it conflates revolution with its direct opposite: counterrevolution. It points to the possibility that the revolution cannot be fulfilled because

it has historically become coopted by the opposite forces. In other words, one of the views presented in this artefact is that the revolution will never truly manifest and in fact, the counterrevolution will take its place. This is a disenchanted vision of revolution. Simultaneously, the artefact also communicates another seemingly contradictory idea, it presents the *possibility* of revolution, and even yearns for it. In "Utopian Thinking in Verse: Temporality and Poetic Imaginary in the Poetry of Nicanor Parra, Mario Benedetti, and Roque Dalton," Juan G. Ramos arguments that these poets exhibit what he calls an "utopian impulse" (185) which is manifested through the satirical viewpoint expressed in their works. Ramos is careful to clarify that he is not claiming that these poets write utopian literature, but "what we find in Parra, Benedetti, or Dalton, instead, is… a utopian intention or utopian desire as critique, which suggests the possibility of change in the now" (Ramos 188). This artefact is a clear example of what Ramos argues. The poetic voice, through its critique of Revolution, manifests a utopian desire for the same Revolution that it critiques. It is important to note that the artefact does not define what exactly constitutes Revolution, nor counterrevolution. This is relevant because the refusal to provide answers, as with Dalton's poetry, is a key characteristic of the ironic worldview evident in Parra's writing. In another artefact, the poetic voice further describes the process of the Revolution in a critical and comical manner.

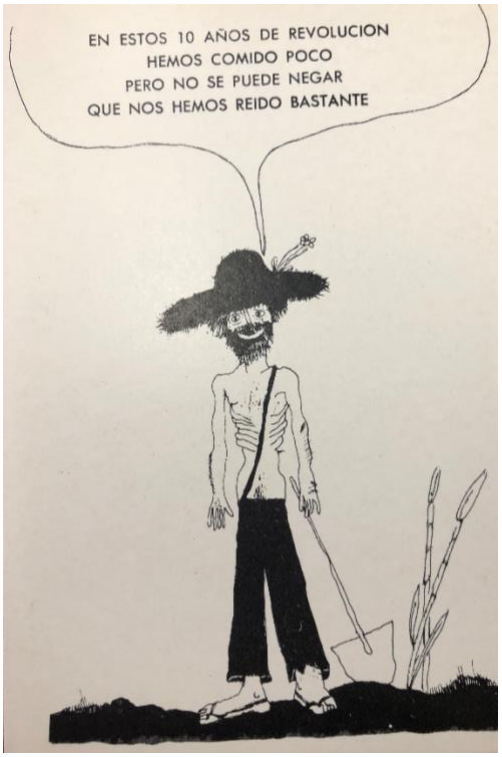


Figure 2: Nicanor Parra, “En estos 10 años de revolución/ hemos comido poco/ pero no se puede negar/ que nos hemos reído bastante" *Artefactos*, 1972.

If this artefact is placed in conversation with the previous, one can follow a clear line of critique directed toward Revolution as both an ideology and a process. The image depicts an emaciated man, maybe a peasant. He appears disheveled and is clearly malnourished, but one can see a slight smile. What this smile could mean, of course, depends on the readers interpretation. It is crucial to note marked differences between the previous artefact, where the speaker was an anonymous shadow, and this artefact. Our speaker not only communicates through written language, but also through his facial expression and physical appearance. His smile/smirk can communicate joy, pain, acceptance, or maybe

hope. As always, it can also communicate a combination of all of the previously mentioned attitudes and emotions simultaneously, even if they might contradict each other. It is important to note that the Revolution's manifestation once again yield results that are worthy of critique.

In Figure 1, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is broken, its meaning is no longer static and set, but varies according to its context. But what is important to note is that the artefacts still depend on a presupposed definition in order to function. In other words, the artefacts begin from a place of certainty and he utilizes this certainty in order to reveal the ambiguity of language, signifiers, and ideologies. If there were no accepted meaning for the word "Revolution," and if there were no ideology inherently attached to the word, the artefacts would lose their impact. The only reason the artefacts present anything of worth is because they come into an already established discourse and challenge it through close observations and succinct commentary. The artefact with the peasant and his commentary is significant in that it creates a narrative in which the failings of the ideology of Revolution are implicit. Those who it was supposed to serve never see an improvement in their quality of life and their situation may even worsen. The final line, "hemos reído bastante," holds as much ambiguity as the peasant's facial expression. One is left to interpret the meaning of laughter, whether it communicates hope, resignation, pain, or something else. In contrast with the single voice of the artefacts in Figure 1 and Figure 2, other artefacts present a conversation where the definition of "revolutionary" is the central question.

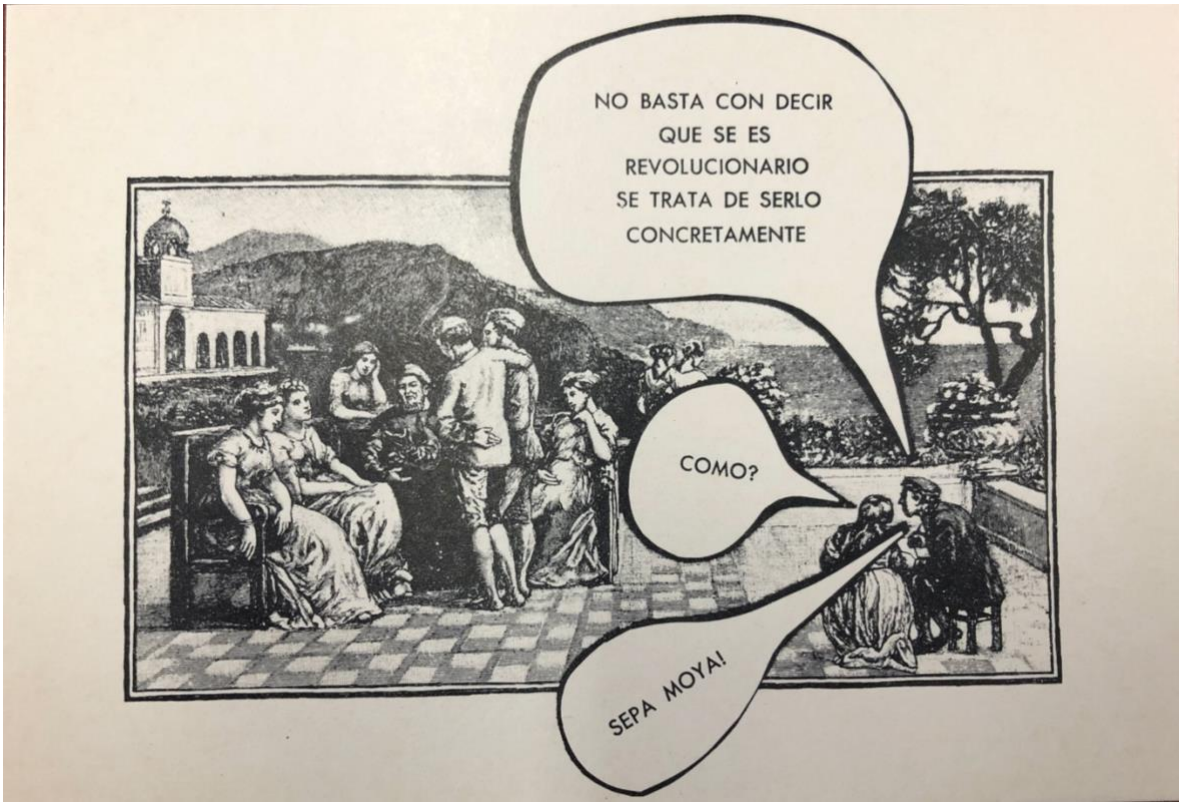


Figure 3: Nicanor Parra, "No basta con decir/ que se es/ revolucionario/ se trata de serlo/ concretamente/ como?/ sepa moya!" *Artefactos*, 1972.

In Figure 3[15] the speaker asks for specific instructions about how one participates in the revolution. The artefact is a dialogue between two people, the first speaker makes a declaration that appears to be profound, but upon closer inspection, one realizes that the statement is circular. The first half states "No basta con decir/ que se es/ revolucionario" which would logically be followed by a statement about actually participating concretely in the revolutionary process. Instead, the second part of the statement is "se trata de serlo/ concretamente". Both the first and second half of the statement center around the verb "ser", saying that one *is* a revolutionary and *being* a revolutionary. The difference between the two is the embodiment of the revolution "serlo concretamente". The second speaker

[15] It is important to note that this is an aristocratic scene and the people having a dialogue are the servants.

asks how this can be achieved, and the response adds to the circularity of the first statement. The introductory statement says that one must not say one *is*, one must *be*, but the response regarding the methodology is unknown to both speakers. This returns us to Figure 2 where the speaker who has been living in the revolution also lacks the ability to describe what should be happening during that process. Figure 1 inverts the definition of revolution and its inversion reveals a search for meaning. Figure 3 then confronts the reality that the demand to be a "true revolutionary" functions as a discourse that ends at the moment that one asks "how." All of these artefacts stand in tension within themselves and when placed in conversation with each other. In other artefacts, Parra also participates in critique of capitalist nations as well as communist countries, furthering the ironic worldview present in *Artefactos*.



Figure 4: Nicanor Parra, USA/ No te aflijas/ todo gran país/ tiene sus pequeños problemas" *Artefactos*, 1972.

Against all Ideology

Figure 4 could on its own potentially be read as a piece of traditional leftist propaganda. The image, a skull with the American flag printed on it, the big bold letters that read USA would be immediately understood as a strong critique of the capitalist nation, particularly in a heavily polarized post-Cuban revolution. The skull clearly remits death without even looking at the verses beneath it. The ability to evoke the death and destruction that the US government orchestrated is destabilized by the verses that attempt to soothe the nation's conscience by stating that "todo gran país/ tiene sus pequeños problemas". These verses are so key because of their similarity to the verses in Dalton's poem, "La segura mano de Dios" where the speaker mimics those who excuse General Martinez's repressive regime by declaring "no importa la matazón/ que él hizo en sus buenos tiempos/ al fin y al cabo/ eso le puede pasar a cualquier Presidente" (Dalton, *Taberna* 21). In Dalton's poem, the blame is clearly diverted from the General because he becomes the recipient of the historical event, the event happens *to* him in this narrative. Meanwhile, Parra's verses dismiss the accusations against the United States by pointing out that they are common and even normal. If every country behaves in the same manner, then there is nothing extraordinary about the United States therefore there is nothing for which it should be held accountable. The artefact is ironic because the imagery contrasts heavily with the verses, signaling that both what was said or what is communicated through the skull are true statements, even as they stand in tension with each other. Furthermore, the clear critique of the US is made more complex by the reference to other countries, both capitalist and communist, in other artefacts. Figure 5 is a prime example of this.

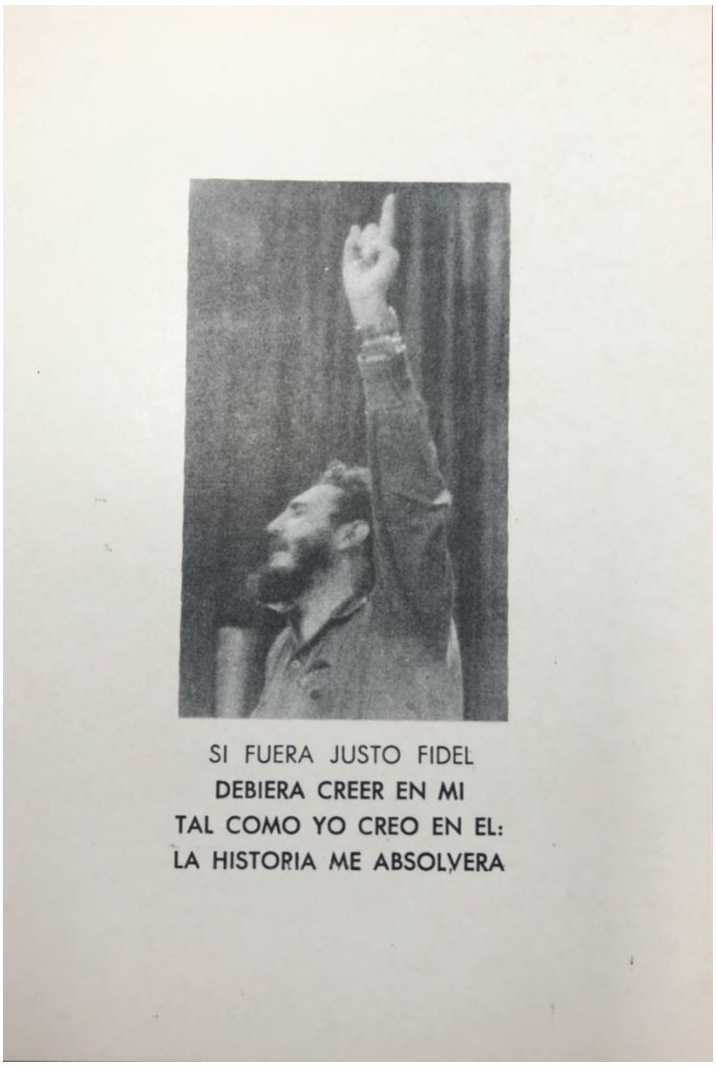


Figure 5: Nicanor Parra "Si fuera justo Fidel/ debiera creer en mi/ tal como yo creo en él/ la historia me absolverá" *Artefactos*, 1972.

Fidel Castro's famous 1953 speech, delivered as his defense after the Moncada Barracks attack in Cuba. "La historia me absolverá" is the closing line of this speech and was later adopted as the title. The deep irony of the closing statement is not lost on a 1972 audience who could now look back on the Cuban revolution and what followed and decide whether or not history absolved Castro. The complex answer to the question of Castro's absolution, or lack of, could be framed in many ways, but the speaker's bold statement that demands of Castro the same thing that he demanded in his own speech is the key to this artefact. As Parra became a controversial figure due to his perceived betrayal of the leftist

cause, he appropriates the same language used by one of the most prominent leaders of the left to defend himself before the court of opinions. The fact that the speaker directs his request directly toward Castro is a critique of the way in which Castro had come to be perceived as an absolute, faultless figure that functioned like a godlike figure that could not be questioned and consequently, his forgiveness of the speaker would be as powerful as the absolution provided by a religious figure. Another ironic twist is the idea that if Castro asked to let history be his judge, the final judgment did not necessarily sway in his favor (not that it swayed completely against him either), but with that ambiguity in mind, the speaker insinuates the possibility that he would also find himself in a similar situation to Castro after history passes its judgment of him. Again, it is important to read and understand each artifact on its own as well as in conversation with other artefacts, their ability to exist complete separate from the collective of postcards as a single postcard that could actually be sent to anyone anywhere without any context other than the one provided through the images and short verses sharpens their ability to be used in support of any ideology that one likes. Simultaneously, one could argue that is a postcard is read on its own; it lacks the complexity that the collection as a whole presents and therefore, is not the true intention of the author. Both of these statements exist in tension with each other like the artefacts do. Parra's critique of both capitalist and communist countries placed him

in a strange limbo between ideologies that he clearly communicates through two contrasting artefacts.

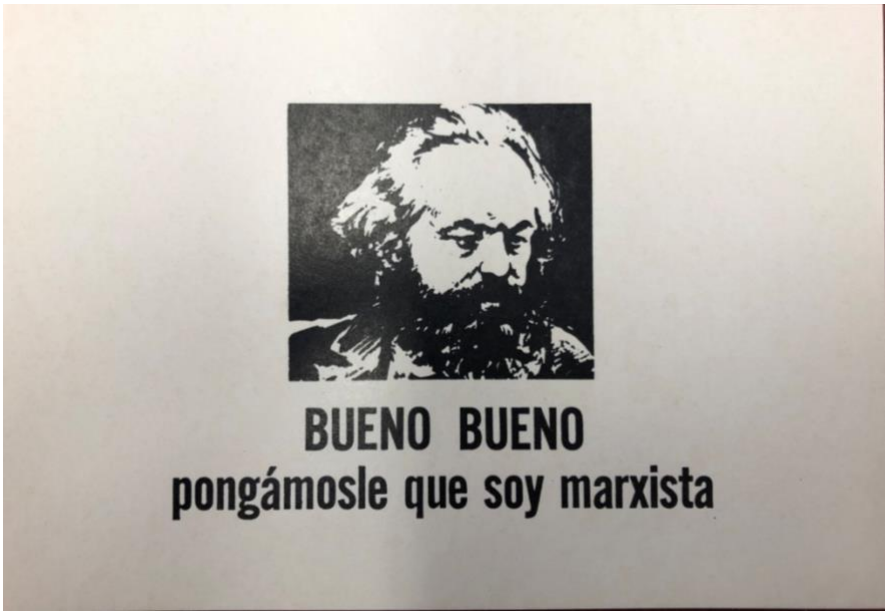


Figure 6: Nicanor Parra "Bueno bueno/ pongámosle que soy marxista" *Artefactos*, 1972.

Figure 6 demonstrates the way in which even when the speaker appears to be clearly on one side of the political spectrum, there is always room for doubt. The statement in this artefact does not read as a passionate proclamation of alliance, but a half-hearted joke. The speaker communicates an attitude of resignation, since he appears to have no other option but to "choose a side" and in such situation, he opts for Marxism. What does this say about the speaker? And what does it say about Marxism? Separated from the other artefacts, it can be read as an exasperated but lighthearted statement. It trivializes both Marxism and the decision to call oneself a Marxist. Since the postcard can be read as an individual statement without any connection to any of the other postcards, all of this is true. A whole alternative set of meanings becomes available when this artefact is connected to the other artefacts, particularly the ones that talk about the revolution and opposing ideologies. If in Figure 1, it is clear that the speaker still believes in the Revolution, even

though much damage has been done in its name in the past, it can be posited that the speaker is suggesting that between the two extremes, he still bets on Marxism over other ideologies, even with its obvious flaws and the historical context which had discredited many of the leaders who claimed to be leading Marxist revolutions. Again, the emphasis is on the possibility of a true Revolution, even though what it would actually look like in its manifestation is still completely unknown. In the final artefact that I'll be referring to, the speaker presents what could be considered the thesis of *Artefactos* as a whole.

In an artefact with an elephant at the top states "Hasta cuando/ siguen fregando/ la cachimba/ yo no soy derechista ni izquierdista/ yo simplemente rompo con todo" (Parra, *Artefactos*). If the artefacts, along with the prologue to the artefacts, pose a series of questions without clear responses, this artefact seems to provide an answer if it is read as the thesis of the project. Simultaneously, if it is understood as just another variable postcard that can be placed in any order and in connection with any other postcard, as it can be, it still serves as a form of conclusion, but one that is not what it appears to be at first reading. The clear frustration communicated through the first three verses along with the concluding fifth verse suggests a very postmodern view of ideology. But while the lack of commitment is the only certain thing, the speaker is clearly committed to his deconstruction of both leftist and rightist ideologies. This commitment when placed in conversation with artefacts like Figure 2 and Figure 3 demonstrate that there is an ideal that the speaker is seeking but has not found yet. Both the commitment to the possibility of

true revolution as well as the commitment to questioning everything attached to all ideology are what make this a profoundly ironic project.

Conclusion

Even though it is clear that Dalton and Parra not only lived very different lives in terms of their commitment, their texts both demonstrate a questioning of political commitment to different degrees. The ability to look closely at the politics of the time and the refusal to fall neatly into the categories available ultimately lead to the creation of texts that propose alternative ways to conceive commitment in art. It is even possible to argue that their ability to create such a complex landscape is partly made possible by their use of characters and masks. The following chapter will focus on that characteristic and the way in which Dalton and Pacheco's use of masks creates a rich space for the critique of concepts and structures of power.

Chapter 3: The Appropriation of Voices of Authority and Public Opinion in Dalton and Pacheco

Introduction

As mentioned in chapter one, Lastra proposes that one of the markers of Latin American poetry in the latter half of the 20th century is the appearance of the character, the mask or the double in the poetic space[16] (xii). This new esthetic tendency favors a character-like voice, one that is more similar to the one of short stories and novels than to the traditional speaker. This unique aspect motions toward a reconceptualization of the poet: "En efecto, el lugar desde donde habla este nuevo sujeto no es ya más el lugar que ocupaba el hablante inspirado de la poesía tradicional, quien se reconocía a sí mismo, de un modo u otro, poseedor de un privilegio" (xii). This changing perception of the poet, which was expounded upon more in depth in chapter one, is also expressed in the poetic subject's adoption masks, resulting in a myriad of voices entering the poetic discourse. In this chapter, I will explore Dalton and Pacheco's appropriation of voices of authority along with their use of public opinion in their works. I argue that the use of these masks ultimately reveals the contradictions behind discourses of power.

This chapter examines two of Roque Dalton's books, *Taberna y otros lugares* and *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito*, and José Emilio Pacheco's *El silencio de la luna*. Even though Pacheco's book was published in 1994, the use of masks and the appearance of multiple characters in many of the poems in the collection prompts this reading which

[16] It is important to note that before Pacheco, Fernando António Nogueira Pessôa invented heteronyms. Heteronyms are different from pseudonyms because they are separate from the author.

takes Lastra's proposition into consideration. Stylistically, these books are very distinctive from each other in that Dalton many times opts for a less poetic and more colloquial style while Pacheco's work resembles a more traditional verse with attention to form and lyrical precision. In terms of context, they are also more dissimilar than alike, as *Taberna y otros lugares* and *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* were written in the years that lead up to the decade-long Civil War of El Salvador. Conversely, *El silencio de la luna* is written at the end of the twentieth century, during the last decade of the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico and two decades after the Tlatelolco Massacre, a historical moment that marked many of the writers of that era. But regardless of the stylistic and contextual differences, they both use of masks and characters in their works[17]. Here, I will explore the way in which adopting both dominant and subaltern voices contributes to the destabilization of discourses of power and why providing an alternative or a solution to the uncertainties posed by the undoing of these foundational discourses is of little interest to these poets.

Overview of *Taberna y otros lugares*

While a few poems from *Taberna* were the focus of chapter two, instead of focusing solely on the way in which Dalton grappled with leftist ideologies and militancy, the center of this analysis will be more specifically the use of masks and characters in this text. Dalton called *Taberna y otros lugares* a "poema-objeto," and a "novela-ensayo" (Góngora 180), and, like most novels, it consists of a series of characters that take the place of poetic voices.

[17] Even though Dalton and Pacheco are not the only ones who exercise the liberty to create and speak in the voice of both fictional and existing characters, Ernesto Cardenal and Pablo Neruda are only two other examples, I will not engage their works at this time.

These voices narrate historical events, reflect on the current state of Latin America and sometimes El Salvador more specifically while others talk about seemingly banal topics. The book is divided into five parts, "El País (I)," "El País (II)," "El País (III)," "Seis poemas en prosa," and "La historia." The repetition of the word "país" signals that among many other themes, the text is guided by the motif of the homeland and exile. The first section contains poems like "El gran despecho" and "El alma nacional," in which the poetic voice speaks directly to his country and questions its very existence because its apparent insignificance. The speaker uses phrases like "País mío" and "mi bella/madre durmiente" (Dalton, *Taberna* 10-11), signaling that even though there is an unspoken rage between the lines there is also a sense of longing for his homeland. Conversely, "El País (II)" is narrated from the perspective of English foreigners living in El Salvador. Each poem belongs to a different character: Sir Thomas, Samantha, Matthew, El obispo, Lady Ann, or El primogénito, intercalated by short intermissions titled "Aterdecer" I, II, and III. It is noteworthy that even though the speaker of "Alma nacional" and "El gran despecho" were clearly Salvadoran and the speakers of the second section are not, their statements are very similar. For example, Sir Thomas says in the first poem: "Este país es una espina de acero./ Supongo que no existe sino en mi borrachera,/ pues en Inglaterra nadie sabe de él" (Dalton, *Taberna* 29), which echoes "El gran despecho" where the speaker says in the first and second stanza "País mío no existes/…/antes creía que solamente eras muy chico/…/ pero ahora sé que no existes" and finally in the third he states "Ello me alegra/ Porque prueba que me inventé un país" (Dalton, *Taberna* 10). In both poems, they conclude that the country they reside in is a figment of their imagination, with one notable difference: for Sir Thomas (and the other foreigners), there is no longing. The poet proposes that the only ones capable of caring for

his forsaken homeland are its citizens, relegating it further into oblivion. The final three sections continue to project this same antagonistic relationship between longing and hate through different voices and poetic styles.

"El País (III): Poemas de la última cárcel" consists of sixteen poems, all numbered, which is unique to this section. Many of them have dates attached, measuring the time that Dalton spent in prison. Each one is a product of reflections prompted by the sometimes banal and other times surreal moments that the poet experiences while in custody. Poem number five, titled "Día de la Patria" describes the way that the speaker celebrated independence day: "Hoy fue el día de la patria: desperté a medio podrir,/ sobre el suelo húmedo e hiriente como la boca de/ un coyote muerto, entre los gases embriagadores de/ los himnos" (Dalton, *Taberna* 65). His physical decay symbolizes the decay of the Salvadoran state, which makes the celebration of a national holiday nothing more than a wretched spectacle. The continuous motif of the homeland as a source of both longing and hate forms part of the poet's ironic worldview, as the ideal future continues to exist in permanent tension with the present. The fourth section, "Seis poemas en prosa" begins with a poem titled "La opresión y la leche (Anticlímax)" contains phrases like "mi pueblo ríe idiotamente por una gran herida" and he later says of his countrymen "Oh franja mínima de una Humanidad ya definida como atrabiliaria," "Oh monstruos amados" (Dalton, *Taberna* 85), demonstrating that he has the same complex relationship with his countrymen as he does with his homeland. The sixth and final section, "La historia: Escrito en Praga," was written from exile in communist Czechoslovakia (present day Czech Republic and Slovakia), which would appear to be a utopic state, but as the poet realizes, this is far from the truth. Through the appropriation of a myriad of voices, the poet provides a nuanced

and multifaceted observational text that critiques established political and esthetic discourses.

Political and Esthetic Critique at a Tavern in Prague

The final poem, titled "Taberna," exemplifies the narrative tendency of the book. In the prologue to "Taberna," an omniscient voice intervenes and explains that the poem was written during Dalton's stay in Prague[18]. It states that this poem "resultó del recogimiento directo de las conversaciones escuchadas al azar y sostenidas entre sí por jóvenes checoslovacos, europeo-occidentales y –en menor número— latinoamericanos mientras bebían cerveza en U Fleku, la famosa taberna praguense" (Dalton, *Taberna* 138). Even though this prologue is specific to one poem, it reveals a crucial aspect of the book as a whole: the incorporation of multiple voices in a non-hierarchical form. This omniscient voice explains that:

> En el conjunto de opiniones recogidas no hay ninguna que pueda atribuirse completamente al autor y por ello éste las presenta en el seno del poema sin ninguna jerarquización, ni frente a la verdad, ni frente a la bondad moral o política. No es el propósito del autor intentar un planteo de soluciones a los problemas que se desprenden de la existencia de tales formas de pensamiento en una sociedad socialista. (Dalton, *Taberna* 138)

All of *Taberna y otros lugares* adheres to this philosophy, Dalton presents voices that destabilize both leftist militant ideologies and fascist ideologies, and other stances that

[18] The publication of *Taberna y otros lugares* in 1969 was preceded by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which marked a moment of disillusionment with Soviet communism.

exist in between the two polar opposites. As the omniscient voice prefaces, these ideas do not belong completely to the author but a part of them *do* belong to him, exposing the internal conflict of the author. It is the many characters with diverging worldviews that reveal the contradictions inherent to ideologies and to those who adhere to them, furthermore, the inclusion of unrelated matters reveals the ironic banality that exists within them as well.

Much like other texts, "Taberna" begins by destabilizing the role of the poet. It proposes the following idea in the first stanza:

> Los antiguos poetas y los nuevos poetas
> han envejecido mucho en el último año:
> es que los crepúsculos son ahora aburridísimos
> y las catástrofes, harina de otro costal. (Dalton, *Taberna* 139)

The aging poet is a metaphor for a disenchanted view of poetry. The reference to dawn evokes the spirit of Latin American Modernism, a movement that emphasized beauty and perfection while on the other hand, the final verse of this stanza refers to the opposite, social instability that is usually associated with committed art, but even this no longer belongs to the poet. When beauty no longer inspires and the catastrophes that plague the world are no longer of interest, what is left for poetry? *Taberna y otros lugares* responds to this void with an ironic attitude, the void left by lack of inspiration is filled with the voices that resounded in a tavern in Prague.

"Taberna" engages in self-reflection with verses like "¿Me quieres obligar a decir que la literatura no/ sirve para nada?" (Dalton, *Taberna* 158) which propose questions that the poem does not intend to answer. Concepción Bados Ciria's argues that "Dalton apunta a

una redefinición y a una deliberada desacralización de la noción poética canónica y del lenguaje poético" (14). Even though I have already explored the ways in which Dalton challenges conventional definitions of poetry and the role of the poet in chapter one, what sets "Taberna" apart from the other poems is the poetic voice does not reflect on his own process of creation, instead the voices that challenge and destabilize poetic notions are external. In other words, the text provides insight into society's perception of the genre. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even though the text claims to be a transcription of the tavern's patrons, the presence of the poet who has arranged the conversations into verses is ever-present. One of the verses reads as follows: "Esta conversación podría recogerse como un poema" (150) which gestures toward the role of the poet who collected these conversations and turned them into a poem. The author in this case is both the receptor and the invisible speaker that simultaneously agrees and disagrees with the voices he appropriates. The verses that engage poetry directly highlight its shortcomings with statements like: "Los poetas comen mucho ángel en mal estado" (143) while others declare:

> Los poetas son cobardes cuando no son idiotas,
> no depende de mí.
> Ahora todos ellos escriben novelas
> Porque ya nadie traga los sonetos,
> Escriben sobre la mariguana
> Y otros equívocos menos brumosos
> porque ya nadie quiere saber nada del futuro.
> Y que maleables son:

si comenzáramos a cortarnos los dedos,

miles de narices poéticas

iban a quedarse sin su vieja caricia íntima. (Dalton, *Taberna* 149)

This portion goes from an analytical tone to a mocking one that is rooted in a disenchanted understanding of the poet. The patrons accuse poets of following trends even if they require them to mutilate their own bodies, which symbolizes a willingness to compromise their writing in order to remain relevant. In other words, they play into the capitalist market. This point is furthered by a mention of Pablo Neruda: "LA ROPA SUBIRA UN OCHO POR CIENTO,/ LOS TRANVIAS SUBIRAN UN VEINTE POR CIENTO,/ NERUDA SUBIRA UN DIECIOCHO POR CIENTO" (Dalton, *Taberna* 152). They propose that along with clothing and trolleys, poets are also subject to changes in value, they are a commodity. "Taberna" reveals a completely demystified view of both current and canonized poets and alongside these declarations, it presents a complex discussion on politics.

The conversational nature of "Taberna" facilitates an internal dialogue but the fractured nature of simultaneous discussions makes it impossible to identify who speaks and when there is a change in character. One of the common threads that echoes across the different perspectives is discussions about politics. Prague was the capital of socialist Czechoslovakia; therefore, the receptor can assume that the people in the tavern possess basic knowledge of socialism and have experienced it firsthand. Ironically, confusion seems to predominate. One of them declares:

PERO ESO ES CONFUNDIR EL PARTIDO CON ANDRE BRETON!

Pero, ¿y la ternura?

PERO ESO ES CONFUNDIR EL PARTIDO CON

MI ABUELITA EULALIA! (Dalton, *Taberna* 145).

This comical exchange between two (or more) voices exemplifies the indiscriminate nature of most of the discussions that take place inside the tavern. Every conversation oscillates between the serious (the reference to Andre Breton) and the playful (the reference to someone's grandmother). The use of all capitals in these verses hints that the speaker yelled them at the time which could mean frustration, playfulness, inebriation, or possibly all three. Conversely, it could also mean that the author decided that these were the most important statements and therefore decided to emphasize them. Since poetry lacks what narrative has, the ability to explain who said what and in what tone it was said, the reader is tasked with interpreting the meaning of the use of all capitals. The emphasized verses gesture to a frenzy, a need to define socialism and what it means in that moment even as it results in a comical comparison. In many ways, this echoes Dalton's style of committed poetry, it is not uncommon for his poems to alternate seamlessly between serious reflections and sarcastic remarks that lead to laughter. In other verses, the dialogue crosses from playful inquiry into disenchanted reflection.

In chapter two, I proposed the idea that Dalton participates in a critical view of the left and that this is a component of his ironic worldview that recognizes that no ideology can fully define human existence. In "Taberna," one of the patrons proposes the following:

No busques otro camino, loco,
cuando ha pasado la época heroica de un país que hizo su revolución,
la conducta revolucionaria
está cerca de este lindo cinismo
de bases tan exquisitas:

palabras, palabras, palabras.

Excluida toda posibilidad de terminar con las manos callosas,

claro está,

o el corazón calloso, o el cerebro. (Dalton, *Taberna* 146)

This stanza proposes dystopian answer to the question: now what? From the perspective of a leftist militant such as Dalton, a country that exists under a socialist government could represent an ideal utopia, but instead of doing that, "Taberna" invokes a disenchanted vision of what happens when the sought-after glorious revolution triumphs. Here, the speaker argues that all that is left is the realization that the promises of the revolution will not be fulfilled. Calloused hands, hearts, and minds represent bodies and states of mind that have been marked by capitalist history, but socialism is unable to usher in the promised utopia and all that is left is "este lindo cinismo." Later, another speaker begs: "NO HABLEMOS MAS DE POLITICA" (Dalton, *Taberna* 149). The frustration communicated through capital letters transmits a similar yet different message, instead of the passive acceptance of the disenchanted voice, the desperate frustration of this voice projects weariness that might or might not cross into cynicism. Even though political and literary discussions permeate the poem at almost every turn, it is worth noting that there are moments where it strays from these topics and random comments take the center stage, introducing a new theme: idleness.

The tavern is a space for idleness and enjoyment as much as it is a place for reflection and discussion. By including arbitrary conversations and comments, the poet recreates an atmosphere like the one that one might find at a tavern, but it also

demonstrates that everything that fits into life fits into poetry[19]. The verse "Vale más otra ronda de cerveza" (Dalton, *Taberna* 140) repeats a couple of times across the poem, contributing to the sense that the poet truly collected voices and included everything that was said, even the need for more beer. Among the random topics that the tavern patrons talk about is the mystery of life. One of them states:

> Yo resolví para siempre el problema de la eternidad,
> los teólogos son unos tarados temibles:
> la respuesta al problema de la eternidad
> consiste en preguntar una vez más y una vez más: ¿y después? (Dalton, *Taberna* 155)

One could easily picture a group of friends who have been drinking throughout the night deciding (due to the bravery and clarity that alcohol provides) that they had solved one of the greatest mysteries of all time. Nevertheless, even here one can see a continuity with the discussions about politics and literature, which also asked: now what? In the third and fourth stanza one of the speakers wonders if anyone has solved the mystery of the navel, "Ruta del origen, mucho más importante/ que las dobles políticas para sobrevivir" (Dalton, *Taberna* 139). These questions about origin and eternity return to existential questions that both exceed and have a place in politics and literature while simultaneously they border the banal. The banality of the conversations is furthered by the following reflection:

> Ya ves cómo la guerra no es el mayor de los desperdicios:

[19] This echoes Dalton's poem "Las feas palabras," from *El turno del ofendido*, where Dalton defends poetry made up of "ugly words". Also, his essay, "Poetry and Militancy in Latin America" where he declares that "All that fits into life fits into poetry" (Dalton, *Poetry and Militancy* 19) proposes a similar aesthetic.

cuando te parte el vientre

la cuarta parte de una granada

¿deviene obligatorio amar al resto

que mató al más cercado de los enemigos?

Es decir, quería preguntar algo mejor que eso: creo

que estoy borracho ya. (Dalton, *Taberna* 151)

This speaker attempts to ask a profound question but ends up disqualifying himself after realizing he might be inebriated. Nevertheless, his divagations were of substance, since his proposal questions whether the destruction of the enemy does not also result in the destruction of the self and whether this is a sacrifice that is worth making. Yet, idleness continues to be the center of the speakers' comments, pointing to its significance in the poem.

Seemingly unimportant comments are commonplace in "Taberna." One patron yells: "VOY A HACER ALGO QUE NADIE PUEDE/ HACER POR MI: MEAR" (Dalton, *Taberna* 156) while another explains that "Los astrólogos son unos farsantes./ Perdón: quería decir eso de los astrónomos" (Dalton, *Taberna* 140). These verses demonstrate that one of the most important aspects of the tavern is the ability to say everything and anything and the poet who collected these voices recreates this atmosphere. But these moments of idleness are crucial to the existence of the tavern patrons. The following conversation exemplifies this argument: "El movimiento comunista internacional ha venido/ sopesando/ la gran mierda de Stalin", followed by "¿Qué te buscás? ¿Un soplamocos?" (Dalton, *Taberna* 158). The politically and ethically charged reflection on the communist party arouses a threat from a second speaker who threatens the first speaker, which signals that Stalin's effects on the

international communist party is an emotionally charged subject. The stanza after this threat seems to be a defense:

> No es que quiera decir que los jóvenes
> seamos los ángeles del decoro:
> hemos aprendido rápido
> y también somos unos buenos hijos de puta,
> la diferencia es que tenemos estos ratos de ocio. (Dalton, *Taberna* 158)

This speaker, who seems to be the same one who shared a reflection on Stalin, defends the new generation of communists because of their redeeming quality: their idleness. This particular exchange illuminates the possibility that the value of "Taberna" as a whole might be its recognition of the importance of leisure. After the aforementioned stanza, another poetic voice (or the same one) declares "La moral es algo estupendo/ cuando uno no tiene ganas de nada" (Dalton, *Taberna* 159). Among politically charged discussions and disagreements there is a sense that after the revolution triumphs, what follows is very anticlimactic. Much like the earlier speaker who declared that once the revolution had passed, all that was left was a pleasant cynicism, this becomes a recurring theme across the many masks that the poetic voice uses in other parts of *Taberna y otros lugares*, particularly in the poem about the murder of a Salvadoran ex-dictator.

What they say happened in 1932: "La segura mano de Dios"

In "La segura mano de Dios," similar to "Taberna," the poetic voice adopts the voice of someone else, but this time the speaker is not being quoted, his words are a product of the poet. In this poem, the speaker is ex-president General Martínez's murderer, Cipriano

Morales. The controversial Salvadoran ex-president is a figure that is present in many of Dalton's poetic works, like *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* and *El turno del ofendido,* as well as in both leftist and rightist imaginary. His authoritarian rule was preceded by rising tensions between Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS by its initials in Spanish) and the oligarchy[20]. In 1931, Arturo Araujo, a reform candidate supported by the labor movement, was elected president, but a coup engineered by the oligarchy overthrew Araujo and replaced him with Martínez. Following these events, a round of local elections took place and Communist candidates won many positions, but Martínez did not allow them to take office and conversely began a campaign to eliminate the Communist party. In response, Farabundo Martí and the PCS planned an uprising for January 22 1932, but their plans were discovered and their leaders were executed. In consequence, the revolt was easily crushed, but the most disturbing events took place after the military had already stopped the insurrection. The military targeted multiple municipalities in the western region of the country: Ahuachapán, Juayúa, Tacuba, Izalco and Nahuizalco, and killed anywhere between 20 and 30 thousand peasants and rural farm workers of which a vast majority were indigenous[21]. Historians Hector Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A.

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[20] Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria Santiago's book, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression and Memory in El Salvador 1920-1932*, presents a more detailed account of the socioeconomic factors that preceded General Martinez's presidency.

[21] Hector Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martinez's book, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and The Politics of Historical Memory*, argues that two issues have dominated the discussion around the cause of the massacre: ethnicity and communism. They explain that even though both the left and right seem to agree that the uprising was caused by communism, this argument is challenged by ethnicity (8). They propose that "Arguably, the issue of ethnicity and the possibility of Indian rebellions were of greater concern to elite Salvadorans in the late 1920s and early 1930s than were communism and the possibility of socialist revolution" (9). Even though this analysis proposes an interesting alternative to the dominance of communism as the cause of the insurrection, I will not be exploring it in this occasion

Lara Martínez describe the varied opinions that came after the massacre: "Some people viewed these events with gratification, even if they found the violent process unfortunate. Others considered the events horrendous and lived in constant fear that the state would unleash mass terror once again" (5). The vast chasm between these two opinions plays a crucial role in setting the tone of "La segura mano de Dios," a tone tinged by cynicism and the ironic worldview of the poet. Furthermore, Beverley and Zimmerman explain that "The traumatic political unconscious of Dalton and the Committed Generation was the failure of the 1932 uprising and the *matanza*" (128). The poet adopts the mask of the murderer of General Martínez, but this character adopts masks as well, becoming the mouthpiece for those who excuse the ex-president's authoritarian rule *and* those who opposed it, creating a textured reading of the political landscape of the Salvadoran population.

In many ways, "La segura mano de Dios" prefaces what Dalton does in his last poetry book, *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito*. Much like in "Taberna," this poem incorporates many voices, but unlike the tavern where there is an absence of authority, in this case both the disenfranchised and figures of authority coexist in the verses. The poem begins with an excerpt from the Salvadoran press that reads as follows:

> El ex presidente de la República General don Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, fue cruelmente asesinado el día de ayer, por su propio chofer y mozo de servicio. El hecho ocurrió en la finca de Honduras donde el anciano militar transcurría su pacífico exilio. Se disponía a almorzar, según las informaciones, cuando el asesino lo

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because my analysis focuses on the way in which leftist academics and writers recall these events and effect that *La matanza* had on leftist's imaginary of El Salvador and the history of the party.

> cosió virtualmente a puñaladas, por motivos que aun se ignoran. Los servicios de seguridad de ambos países buscan al criminal. (Dalton, *Taberna* 15)

In contrast with "Taberna," where it is difficult to differentiate between the voices that the poet has collected, in this poem one can clearly distinguish when a character finishes speaking and the next one begins. The first character, if we may call the press statement a character, is the voice of the official discourse around General Martínez, a discourse that constructs the image of a feeble old man who was once the president, a General who served his country. This is meant to arouse both compassion and respect which would result in outrage at his assassination. The press excerpt does not make any reference to the authoritarian nature of his rule or *La matanza*, instead it puts an emphasis on the cruelty of the murder and conversely, on the defenselessness that characterizes the General. The epigraph, in its succinct description of the ex-president's death, demonstrates how this historical narrative has been constructed through the perspective of the victors who viewed the obliteration of the 1932 uprising as a triumph. The poetic voice then establishes a dialogue with the statement from the press, echoing parts of it while challenging others. The murderer ultimately proposes a fragmented, non-linear version of the hegemonic version of Salvadoran history, but this version does not eliminate the dominant discourse, it incorporates both the interpretation of events that had gone unspoken *and* interpretations that had dominated the dialogues around the *matanza*.

The excerpt from the press states that the murderer's motivations remain a mystery, so the poetic voice addresses this question in a confessional that shows both an abundance of regret and a lack of repentance. The first verses introduce a seemingly contrite man who reflects on his actions:

en el fondo pobrecito mi General

creo que debí pensarlo dos veces

uno sigue siendo cristiano

pero de ves en cuando va de bruto y le pide consejo al alcohol (Dalton, *Taberna* 15)

Here, the deeply ironic tone of the poem is revealed, he uses the phrase "en el fondo" which signals to an ultimate truth: he does, in some form, pity the man he killed. Furthermore, the speaker refers to the General using the adjective "pobrecito," echoing the press statement's tone. The use of the diminutive can signal affection, compassion, infantilization or it can be used mockingly. In this case, the speaker's ambiguity towards the General signals that its meaning behind "pobrecito" exists somewhere between all of the aforementioned definitions. In the fourth verse, the speaker blames alcohol for his actions, even though later he states "si no me hubiera escupido/ no me agarra la tarabilla de matarlo" (Dalton, *Taberna* 17) and another time he claims he did it "por pura cólera de ratero" (Dalton, *Taberna* 20). He is unable to give a concise answer to explain his motives and his account of the events makes him appear unreliable. In addition to being unable to provide a consistent narrative, the speaker appropriates a variety of voices, which furthers the perception that he might be an untrustworthy source that seems to lack conviction. This characterization ultimately destabilizes all historical narratives and refuses the concept of an all-encompassing truth. The poetic voice adopts a Socratic pose[22], feigning ignorance that destabilizes reader's view of him, ultimately constructing a narrative that means to destabilize the official accounts of history.

[22] When I say Socratic pose, I refer to what Behler and Colebrook proposed, the idea that the Platonic Socrates was represented as an ironic interlocutor, one that would feign ignorance in order to reveal the interlocutor's ignorance.

In order to establish an official narrative, the source needs to have the authority to do so. The General's murderer lacks ethos, but instead of hiding this, he exploits it and questions both dominant and subversive accounts of the ex-president's rule. It is the creation of a dubious narrator that begins the process of destabilizing the idea of history as an objective retelling of events. Feigning ignorance, he says about the General: "él siempre decía que era el incomprendido/ y que se moriría como un don Napoleón Buenaparte un su maestro" (Dalton, *Taberna* 15). The misspelling of Bonaparte's name points to a lack of education, but the poetic voice soon proves to be a lot more knowledgeable than what he initially leads to believe. He alternates between descriptions of the murder and stories about the General's time in power, while simultaneously oscillating between the two personas that he creates: an ignorant servant and a well-informed citizen.

The poetic voice reminds the reader that he is the author of a violent murder constantly. He demonstrates a total detachment when recalls his actions:

yo le saqué la cara de la sopa
y le metí cinco trabones más
valiente el hombre la mera verdad
las lágrimas que le salieron de los ojos
fue de apretarlos demasiado para parar las ganas de gritar
……
cuando fue Gobierno tampoco fue gritador
mientras más quedito hablaba más temblaban los Generales (Dalton, *Taberna* 16)

The graphic description of how the General reacted during his assassination triggers a flashback of his time in office, revealing his authoritarian rule. The murderer's violence is

matched by the violence exerted by the Salvadoran state with General Martínez as its most prominent actor. The speaker recalls other incidents of the General's presidency: "el señor Obispo que también secretea/ se escapaba a orinar" (Dalton, Taberna 16) and he continues to say:

> le mandó una vez una foto a mi General Somoza
> Presidente de Nicaragua
> donde aparecía mi General Martínez
> sentado en un canasto de huevos
> quería decirle que era valiente y cuidadoso a la vez
> digo yo (Dalton, *Taberna* 16)

This story, just like the one about the Bishop, has two functions. First, it reveals that the narrator is a lot more knowledgeable than what he has led the reader to believe but it also establishes a crucial aspect about Dalton's writing: the importance of word of mouth in the retelling of historical events.

Word of mouth is an informal discourse and therefore it does not carry much authority. It is easy to dismiss word of mouth as a problematic historical source, but the speaker of "La segura mano" challenges any preconceptions that the readers might have about the importance of rumors in the process of writing and rewriting history. When the speaker talks about the types of interactions that the General would have with his generals and the bishop, it is clear that this information has been distributed via word of mouth because the speaker was not present at the time of these exchanges. These rumors provide an alternative source that the poetic voice adopts as if they were his own voice. Granted, a lot of the information that he proposes is not based on hearsay, but the fact that some of it

is destabilizes the credibility of the poem in a purposeful way. Even though the reader knows the identity of the speaker, he adopts many masks, and this is one of them. Each one serves a purpose and when the poetic voice echoes rumors, he destabilizes authoritative historical narratives. But like most of Dalton's work, nothing is as straightforward as it appears initially. So far, it may seem like the speaker is advocating for the audience to accept word of mouth as a credible source for remembering the past, but in adopting a variety of masks, he contradicts this conclusion.

As the poem progresses, the speaker provides his audiences with more information about the General's past, shifting to what Beverley and Zimmerman called the left's "traumatic unconscious": *La matanza*. In that same detached and slightly macabre tone that he has been using throughout he says:

> debe haber tardado su buen rato en morirse
>
> porque las puñaladas fueron medio gallo-gallina
>
> hoy que lo pienso bien me pongo molesto
>
> pero le di tan suave
>
> Porque creí que así se debe matar a un viejito (Dalton, *Taberna* 17)

The continuous reflections on the death seem to be random or without reason, but they bring the reader into the subconscious of the murderer. These verses are particularly revelatory because it is one of the first times that rage seeps through the detached tone that had characterized the poem so far. Ironically and maybe a bit humorously, the speaker laments that he did not commit his crime as violently as he would have liked to. This revelation triggers collective memories about the General's time in power:

> otros le habrían dado más duro

le habrían dado puñaladas como

si lo quisieran matar pero

quebrándole antes los huesos con el sopapo del cuchillo yo no

……

sólo de muertes él tenía un costal de más de treinta mil (Dalton, *Taberna* 18)

The overflow of rage is productive because it leads to the memory of the General's crimes, more specifically, it triggers the intergenerational memory of *La matanza*. Here, the poetic voice adopts the mask of the left and more broadly, the portion of the national population that did not accept that the massacre could be a justifiable means to an end. In doing so, he begins to destabilize conceptions of law and justice.

The speaker's stream of consciousness oscillates between lucid reflections, seemingly ignorant comments, pure rage, and calm detachment. Nearing the end of the poem, he begins to complain about the way he has been treated since he committed the murder: "para mí que todo el mundo merece irse al carajo/ porque a mí tampoco me fue muy bien/…. /nadie vino a ayudarme" (Dalton, *Taberna* 20). Even though these statements appear illogical at first glance, they destabilize the metanarrative of law and justice. The logical, law-abiding citizen might easily condemn the speaker and refuse to hear his complaints, maybe even thinking that he deserved the treatment he received because of the severity of the crime and the importance of the person he murdered. But the poetic voice's statements consistently reject the metanarrative that places law and justice as two infallible and logical concepts. Earlier, he had stated that God would not forget the General's crimes, but then he reflects on his own words and says:

lo más que va a pasar es que Dios va a tardar

o se va a hacer de al tiro el olvidado

para que se los joda solito el Diablo

y así Nuestro Señor no tener responsabilidad

de tanta grosería de ojo por ojo que

no deja de manchar un poquito las manuelas (Dalton, *Taberna* 18)

This brings the audience back to the title of the poem, "La segura mano de Dios," who's irony cannot be understated, since God's hand is clearly absent from all of the human events that the speaker describes. The belief that God takes justice into his hands is a religious-based metanarrative, while the idea that the state, through the use of a justice system, executes punishments justly is a reason-based metanarrative. Therefore, both religious and reason-based metanarratives fail to execute justice in the case of General Martínez, demonstrating their fundamental flaws. The speaker of "La segura mano" finds himself before the void left by God and the State, but instead of rejecting both, he continues to make use of their authority ironically.

Throughout the poem, the poetic voice repeats the phrase "Dios me perdone" twice (Dalton, *Taberna* 17, 20), begins the poem by stating that even though he committed a murder, he continues being a Christian, "uno sigue siendo cristiano" (Dalton, *Taberna* 15) and concludes it by asking for the Virgin and God's protection: "a Él me encomiendo/ y a la Santísima Virgen de Guadalupe" (Dalton, *Taberna* 22). Even though the absence of divine intervention is blatant, the speaker never stops calling on God for forgiveness, revealing the deep irony of his faith. The relationship he establishes with the State is similarly contradictory and it is revealed when the poetic voice adopts another mask, one that

represents those who stand in defense of the General. He recalls the rebukes that he has received:

> hasta me han llegado a decir que yo
>
> no tenía vela en este entierro
>
> pero que ya me metí en camisa de once varas
>
> debo saber que el difunto
>
> fue una vez el Señor Presidente de El Salvador
>
> ……
>
> no importa la matazón
>
> que él hizo en sus buenos tiempos
>
> al fin y al cabo
>
> eso le puede pasar a cualquier Presidente (Dalton, *Taberna* 20-21)

In these verses, the poetic voice echoes the official discourse that dismisses the General's crimes and rejects the need for judgement. The poem provides many indications that the speaker himself does not agree with these statements, but including these assertions provides a glimpse of the political landscape of the nation. By appropriating multiple voices, the speaker shows the permanence of both religious and State-sponsored ideologies and that even though they prove to be deeply flawed, they are inescapable. When all metanarratives fail, new metanarratives are unable to replace them, leaving nothing but an ironic worldview that exists in tension with existing ideologies. Much like in *Taberna*, Dalton continues to adopt a myriad of masks in *Las historias prohibidas*, but in a more experimental form.

A Collage of Authoritarian and Subaltern Voices in *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito*

Roque Dalton's *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* was published in 1974, a year before his death and in many ways, it is the culmination of Dalton's poetic experimentation. The text is a collage, composed of official reports from the conquest, excerpts from the Salvadoran daily press, magazines, and encyclopedias along with original poems and texts written by Dalton. The author leaves the task of figuring out which texts are his and which have been taken from other sources to the audience, which creates the need for an active reader. Simultaneously, the amalgamation of diverse materials in a non-hierarchical form leads to the democratization of literature. Even though the texts are organized in a particular order to create the poet's desired effect, no genre is valued above another. As the title of the book signals, *Las historias prohibidas* traces the history of El Salvador starting with the conquest and concluding with the 1969 war with Honduras. Even though other historical events are highlighted in the text, like the massacre of 1932, *Las historias prohibidas* is also full of personal anecdotes, like the day Dalton met his father and other seemingly random narrations, like the time the zoo in San Salvador acquired a new hippopotamus and the chaos that followed this acquisition. Therefore, I propose that along with the democratization of literature, the text also participates in the democratization of history through its inclusion of not only numerous voices and sources, but by its incorporation of events that had been deemed insignificant. But even though there is a diversity of points of view and moments remembered, it is important to note that many of the texts come from official sources. Therefore, the title is purposely misleading because it implies that the author only included the unknown parts of history, yet he incorporates all

sorts of documents. In Frances Jaeger's article "El diálogo entre la literatura y la historia en *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* de Roque Dalton," draws attention to the way in which official texts are used to subvert the official version of history. I would like to further Jaeger's reading and propose that we think of this appropriation of authoritarian voices in relation to Dalton's ironic worldview.

Las historias prohibidas consists of a series of characters, some are historical figures, some are fictional, and, much like in Pacheco's *El silencio de la luna*, many of them are figures of authority. The poetic voice wears multiple masks, from a conquistador to Salvadoran ex-president General Martínez and the language used is many times, for lack of a better word, unpoetic. The poet, as Lastra argues, no longer sees himself as a privileged voice and poetry no longer consists of a specialized language or vocabulary, and Dalton specifically appropriates official documents and calls them poetry. I want to address the counterintuitive decision to rewrite history using texts that had already been used as part of the official discourse. Linda Hutcheon's book *Irony's Edge: The theory and politics of irony*, addresses what she calls the transideological nature of irony. Irony can be conservative and authoritarian or oppositional and subversive (Hutcheon 15) and beyond that, there is no consensus as to whether it is affirmative or destructive/negating (Hutcheon 27). I argue that *Las historias prohibidas* is an ironic text; therefore it is necessary to explore the tensions that arise out of its ironic tone. The use of official documents that have historically been used by authoritarian regimes to justify their dominance can be problematic if the reader does not realize that the poet is using them ironically. Then, the question becomes what is the value of including official texts? Hutcheon explains that "irony's intimacy with the dominant discourse it contests—it uses

their very language as its said—is its strength, for it allows ironic discourse both to buy time (to be permitted and even listened to, even if not understood) and also to 'relativize the [dominant's] authority and stability', in part by appropriating its power" (30). But she notes that this same intimacy can be seen as complicity. In the first text of *Las historias prohibidas*, "La guerra de guerrillas en El Salvador (contrapunto)" intimacy with dominant discourses functions as the basis for the poet's ironic worldview.

The first poem of the collection is composed of two official texts: the first is a report that Don Pedro de Alvarado wrote for Hernán Cortés about his effort to conquer the indigenous group of Cuzcatlán, the Pipils and the second is a speech made by the Chief of Staff during the Third Conference of High Officials of the Armies of the Caribbean Zone (Tercera Conferencia de Altos Oficiales de los Ejércitos de la Zona del Caribe). The texts are placed in chronological order only to reveal a fragmented vision of history. Alvarado's report is modified by the poet in at least two ways: he arranges it in verses and stanzas and he emphasizes certain phrases by putting them in italics. The verses in italics state certain characteristics of the indigenous people that Alvarado encountered: "me recibieron en paz pero *se alzaron para el monte*" (Dalton 3) and later "Iría a dos o tres lenguas de Taxisco/ *cuando supe que nos había caído atrás mucha gente de Guerra, golpeando/ la retaguardia*" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 4). A peaceful reception followed by fleeing to the mountains and the attacks are the common denominators across all of the italicized verses and they are crucial for discovering the unsaid ironic meaning behind the text. In the second section of the poem, taken from the Chief of Staff's speech, the reader is exposed to a contemporary view of the indigenous people of the region that is now El Salvador. In his

defense of the anti-guerrilla actions that the Salvadoran government, among other States, had taken he says:

> Esta Conferencia, y las maniobras anti-guerrilleras conjuntas de los ejércitos centroamericanos en el territorio nacional, tienen un significado profundamente patriótico, acorde con las tradiciones pacificas del pueblo salvadoreño. Nuestro pueblo siempre ha sido un pueblo pacífico y laborioso, y la actual labor militar eminentemente preventiva de contrainsurgencia tiende a mantener las condiciones para la paz permanente entre nosotros. Nunca hubiéramos pensado en asuntos guerrilleros si no nos lo hubiera impuesto la solapada amenaza del comunismo internacional que ha logrado crear una cabeza de playa en Cuba (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 12).

The overly emphatic repetition of the word peace becomes almost comical in light of the first section where Alvarado states the exact opposite. The first and most obvious reading of the poem leads to the conclusion that the official discourse from the conquest contradicts the present one and renders it obsolete. But, as Jaeger notes, the contradiction between both texts leads the reader to question the validity of *both* texts because accepting one requires rejecting the other and vice versa (22). She further argues that subverting the value of these official texts does not lead to a new and true version of Salvadoran history (Jaeger 22). In fact, according to Jaeger, the heterogeneous quality of the texts included in *Las historias prohibidas* leads the reader to conclude that knowing the past objectively is impossible. This skepticism before history is part of the larger ironic worldview that defines Dalton's work. Here it is useful to think about this in terms of Jean-François Lyotard's argument about metanarratives in postmodernism as summarized by Behler.

Metanarratives, as defined by Lyotard, are "comprehensive as well as foundational discourses in which all details of knowledge and human activity find ultimate sense and meaning" (Behler 11). Each epoch, the premodern, modern and postmodern are in part defined by metanarratives, their origins, and the attitudes towards them. The modern period begins when metanarratives ceased to be mythical or religious in origin and reason and philosophy became the basis for the new metanarratives. Postmodernity then comes to be when all metanarratives are questioned. It is crucial to note that after a metanarrative is dismissed, it cannot be resolved by another form of totalization or the creation of a new metanarrative (Behler 12). This dismissal of metanarratives is reflected in *Las historias prohibidas* in the questioning of the very project that the text proposes: rewriting history. The consciousness of the project's limitations is woven into the text, much like the German romantics who found themselves before the paradox of critiquing reason and responded to it with "a speech which at once made a claim to be heard, but which also signaled or gestured to its own limits and incomprehension" (Colebrook 47). In *Las historias prohibidas* the speech that is making a claim to be heard, many times, does not belong to Dalton but to official discourses.

In "La guerra de guerrillas en El Salvador (contrapunto)," neither one of the texts used by the poet were meant to be ironic in their original context, it is in their reproduction that they become ironic. Dalton's intervention in the order of the excerpts, the use of italics for emphasis, and the recontextualization of the texts destabilizes their original meaning and makes them ironic. But, as Hutcheon maintains, irony happens in the space between the said and the unsaid, and more importantly, the ironic meaning cannot be reduced to an either/or meaning (60). In other words, the said carries just as much weight as the inferred

unsaid. Therefore, even though Jaeger concludes that placing two official texts in juxtaposition with each other prompts the reader to question the veracity of both of them, there are other plural and multiple readings possible.

If the explicit meaning of the texts carries as much weight as the implied or inferred meaning, then it is necessary to weigh the said in relation to the unsaid. Alvarado's letter describing his experience with the land and with its inhabitants emphasizes specific characteristics of the Pipils to explain why Alvarado failed on his mission to try to bring the indigenous people to the service of the Spanish crown: "pues por cuanto hice y trabajé por ello/ nunca los pude atraer al servicio de Su Majestad" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 11). In other words, the portrayal of the Pipils as a warrior people who knew the mountains well enough to hide in them was necessary for the narrative that Alvarado built in order to justify his failure. In juxtaposition, in the second part of the text, the Chief of Staff benefited from portraying the Salvadoran people as peaceful and hardworking in order to rationalize the anti-guerilla war. In making war and guerilla warfare seem foreign to their nature, he succeeded in making communist ideals appear like an invasive ideology brought to the country by intruders. He wants to prove that the leftist ideals have contaminated the minds of those who would have otherwise remained peaceful and content, therefore fighting becomes patriotic duty. In both occasions, the authors create a historical narrative that supports their current actions. But even though their descriptions are contradictory, they are simultaneously complimentary. If part of what "La guerra de guerrillas en El Salvador (contrapunto)" succeeds in doing is creating a skeptical reader who questions not only the said, but also doubts the unsaid, another aspect of the text's irony is the realization that there is truth to both Alvarado's letter and the Chief of Staff's statement. Juxtaposing these

two texts leads to a more nuanced and multifaceted image of the Salvadoran people's history, avoiding a static, one-dimensional imaginary that is neither productive nor realistic.

Humor in *Las historias prohibidas*

Another important characteristic of *Las historias prohibidas* is the comedic effect aforementioned in the reading of "La guerra de guerrillas en El Salvador (contrapunto)." Everything from self-deprecating humor, antipoetic humor, and mocking humor can be found in Dalton's work. Even when Dalton borrows from official discourses, the placement of the texts and storytelling techniques used create a comedic effect that many times subverts and destabilizes the dominant discourse. James Iffland's article, "Hacia una teoría de la función del humor en la poesía revolucionaria: A propósito de Roque Dalton," explores the subject of humor in Daltonian poetry. It is interesting to note that one of the first observations that Iffland makes is in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnival in the Middle Ages. He explains that laughter in the carnival is directed towards the oppressiveness of those in power but simultaneously, it functions as an escape valve that allows for a continuation of the current power structure (Iffland 116). In other words, carnivalesque laughter is ambiguous in nature, much like irony. I want to make it clear that I do not equate irony and with humor nor humor with irony, but there are interesting parallels between Bakhtin's observations on humor and Hutcheon's on irony[23]. But even though humor and irony are not equivalents, I would like to argue that many times in

[23] Hutcheon states that "not all ironies are amusing…—though some are. Not all humor is ironic—though some is" (26).

Dalton, irony has a humorous effect. Hutcheon explains that "there do exist theories of humor as incongruity, disparagement and release that find their echoes in those elements of irony that its politics foregrounds" (26). This theory of humor as incongruity can be applied many times in Dalton's works and it is rooted in an ironic worldview that destabilizes the discourse that the text establishes.

If we return to the first poem of *Las historias prohibidas*, "La guerra de guerrillas en El Salvador (contrapunto)", the incongruity between Alvarado's report and the Chief of Staff's statement is the source of both irony and humor. The Chief of Staff's statement is only humorous in the light of Alvarado's report. Both statements come from authority figures, but they cancel each other out, therefore destroying their authority and making their statements appear empty and questionable. This laughter is the result of a tendentious joke[24]. Tendentious humor has a victim, one laughs at the person or people who are the target of the joke, not with. In this first text, the targets are both the Chief of Staff and Alvarado, who discredit each other and therefore appear comical in their self-assured statements, which are both untrustworthy. But in some cases, the target is larger and less personal and it even can cross time and challenge linear temporality. Another text from *Las historias prohibidas*, "Los buenos vecinos", is the perfect of example of the transversal quality of the ironic humor found in Dalton's work.

"Los buenos vecinos" is written in prose describes the arrival of the USS Bennington, an Essex-class aircraft carrier, at Salvadoran shores. The text is detailed and full of

[24] In James Iffland's article, "Hacia una teoría de la función del humor en la poesía revolucionaria", he explains that Sigmund Freud explored different types of humor, in particular the tendentious joke which is aggressive in nature (119). Iffland argues that tendentious humor involves a process of recruitment in which the author invites the reader to join him in his hatred against someone or something through laughter (120).

references to important governmental figures and the pomposity of the occasion stands out as if it were one of the main characters: "Apenas fue anunciado el ingreso de tan distinguidos huéspedes y su galante objeto de visitar al Presidente de la Republica, fueron a su encuentro el Secretario de la Presidencia, el Comandante del Departamento y el Coronel Mariano Pinto, Jefe de la Guardia de Honor" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 69). The use of words like "distinguidos" and "galante" signals that the American's visit was viewed as a great occasion. The narrator is careful to name every single official who went to welcome them and this interminable list of names becomes overwhelming:

> Media hora después, el Comandante de la cañonera, Mr. Charles Thomas, y su oficialidad, compuesta por los señores Robert Jaspers, Teniente-Comandante; Ralph Anton, Primer Ingeniero; y C.T. Hibbett, cirujano; acompañados por el Cónsul de los EEUU, Mr. A. Pollock, se dirigieron a Casa Presidencial de gran uniforme, a presentar sus respetos al Jefe del Estado. (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 69)

The narrator also mentions the title of each of the important governmental figures that formed part of this moment, taking note of each detail for posterity. "Los buenos vecinos" in particular resembles a newspaper article because of its descriptive nature. To add to this tone, the narrator is also meticulous in his description of the celebrations that took place.

The Salvadoran president holds a banquet for the American guests and the narrator declares that at this event "Reinó la cordialidad" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 69) and he quotes the president's speech: "Terminó diciendo que aquí cada ciudadano de los Estados Unidos tenía un amigo, no sólo en el Presidente, sino hasta en el último de los salvadoreños" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 70). Commander Thomas then answers:

> que le había dado una sorpresa y un placer muy grande esta visita a la capital salvadoreña donde hallaba un verdadero centro de cultura y progreso… que las ideas del Excelentísimo Presidente, de tanta benevolencia y liberalidad para con los americanos, correspondían exactamente con las que abrigan los Estados Unidos, país cuyo principal objetivo político es estrechar relaciones con las demás repúblicas de América Latina (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 70).

In between the exchange of praise and flattery, it becomes obvious that there is a vertical relationship between the Salvadoran president and the Commander. Even though the Commander compliments the President, he praises the fact that the President's ideas are in line with American ideals. The fact that the praiseworthy characteristic of the President was the fact that he adopted American principles demonstrates the way in which the United States asserts dominance over which systems of ideas are allowed. The officials present at the banquet repeatedly express their hope that the political conflict in El Salvador be resolved soon so that the country could continue its progress. The narrator describes the way in which the Americans stood up as a signal of respect for the Salvadoran national anthem and that the Salvadorans did the same for the Americans. The emphasis on the cordial nature of the meeting sets up the ironic reveal that the text concludes with. The final sentence reads "La cañonera "Bennington" permanecerá en aguas salvadoreñas hasta nuevo aviso del Departamento de Marina de los Estados Unidos" (Dalton, *Las historias prohibidas* 71). There are many factors that make the final statement stand out in comparison to the rest of the text. First, it is devoid of the colorful and descriptive language that had dominated the entire text, making it incongruent in tone. But, the factual tone of this last phrase is also incongruent with the words and actions of those present at the

banquet. It becomes obvious that the cordial nature of the encounter and the pleasantries exchanged between both governments' officials was a superficial yet necessary ritual to maintain the peace. The presence of the USS Bennington signals to the reader the unreliability of words. It is only by destabilizing the meaning of those words that one can begin to trace out the multiple meanings behind them. The final sentence of the text functions much like a punch line in a joke, giving an unexpected conclusion to a long setup. Here, once again, the use of dominant voices is the destabilizing power behind the text.

The act of adopting multiple voices allows for a comprehensive exploration of politics, history, and nationalism, all of which are dominant metanarratives. By placing all of these voices from across time and space in conversation with each other, Dalton proves that each metanarrative contains within itself its own destruction. In these poems, using official narratives destabilizes authoritarian narratives, the many voices at the tavern in socialist Prague ask uncomfortable questions about the realities of living in a post-revolutionary nation, and the murder of a controversial dictator leads to further division within El Salvador. Even though from a biographical standpoint the poet, Roque Dalton, had a clear political alignment (and I do not mean to diminish this aspect of his writing) his poetic works contain challenging perspectives that do not fit into a propagandistic left-right binary. Later, more than two decades after Dalton's death, José Emilio Pacheco's book *El silencio de la luna* participates in this same ironic worldview through the use of masks and voices of authority, a theme that can be traced back to his earlier text, *No me preguntes*.

The Voices of *El silencio de la luna*

El silencio de la luna, published in 1994, consists of four sections: "Ley de extranjería," "A largo plazo," "Sobre las olas," and "Circo de noche." The first part contains various poems centered around the theme of alienation, like "Ley de extranjería," in which the speaker, a citizen of the ancient city of Ur, expresses a sense of strangeness not only in other countries, but also in his own homeland, while in "Armisticio" the poetic voice is a multitude of soldiers who return home after many years at war to find that their countrymen reject them because they prefer dead heroes over living reminders of the war. In "Navegantes," the narrative shifts away from the heroic Ulysses and instead, his crewmen speak as they accept that death is their homeland. Similarly, in "Titánic," the ghosts of the deceased accept their end with resignation. But other poems in this section do not follow this theme, like "El Gran Inquisidor" and "El Padre de los Pueblos," in which the speakers are authoritarian figures that pronounce ideological mandates that prove to be internally flawed. The second part, "A largo plazo," is full of intertextual references and homages to other artists, like "Lolita," where the poetic voice explains how a woman claiming to be the inspiration for Vladimir Nabokov's novel begged him to write a new novel telling the story from her perspective and in another poem "Homenaje a la Compañía Teatral Española de Enrique Rambal, Padre e Hijo," the speaker reminisces on the experience of going to the theatre for the first time. The penultimate section, as prefaced by its title "Sobre las olas," contains multiple references to bodies of water, which elicit both fear and wonder. The vastness of the ocean exists in contrast with other poems in this section in which the speaker utilizes the short lives of insects as a metaphor for human existence ("Horas contadas," "Enigma," and "Mariposa"). In contrast with the other parts, which are loosely organized around certain motifs, the final section, "Circo de noche,"

maintains thematic uniformity, centering around the allegory of the circus, a microcosm that contains the same power structures that shape society. The poet works through how mankind's many destructive habits in conjunction with the external forces that defy the concept of human free-will create a chaotic world that intends to find Order and meaning, both of which are ultimately unattainable.

In "La condición humana en *El silencio de la luna de José Emilio Pacheco*," Eduardo E. Parrilla Sotomayor argues that in order to understand this book as a whole it must be seen through the lens of its two central themes: "por un lado, el efecto aniquilador del tiempo; y por el otro, el efecto aniquilador del hombre respecto de sí mismo y de la humanidad entera" (258-259). To this I would add a third aspect: the destructive effect of ideologies. As the previous analysis suggests, this book can appear nihilistic, but Parrilla proposes that Pacheco is neither nihilistic nor hopeful which leads to my next proposal: Pacheco's work, like Dalton's, is the product of an ironic worldview. This is evident in the first poem, "Prehistoria," where the poet critiques the language of foundational metanarratives while simultaneously recognizing its undeniable role in the foundation of societies past and present.

An Alternative Genesis: The beginning of man, language and God in "Prehistoria"

The entirety of the contents of *El silencio de la luna* can be found in "Prehistoria," a narration of the genesis of the world that explains the origin of foundational metanarratives that have shaped societies in the past and present. The poem is divided into four parts, the first one narrates the birth of images, God, language, and law. The first

stanza reveals that ultimately, the creation of images was the result of man's desire to posses everything and everyone around him:

> En las paredes de esta cueva
> pinto el venado
> para adueñarme de su carne,
> para ser él,
> para que su fuerza y su ligereza sean mías
> y me vuelva el primero
> entre los cazadores de la tribu. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 17)

To recreate the likeness of the deer was to possess it, and to possess it means to own its desired attributes, which ultimately would allow the speaker to rise in the ranks of his tribe and attain power. This stanza reinterprets the first caveman painting as a political power move which is not easily deduced from initial impressions. What the poetic voice reveals is that before the written word was invented, there were images, and just like language, they were signifiers that man used to establish authority. Then, after creating the image, man creates God in the second stanza: "Invento a Dios,/ a semejanza del Gran Padre que anhelo ser/ con poder absoluto sobre la tribu" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 17). If in the Judeo-Christian Genesis God creates man in his image, in "Prehistoria" man creates God in his image, and more specifically, he creates him in the image of the authoritarian Father whom he aspires to be. Therefore, both the creation of the image and God are attributed to man and both were created with the purpose of attaining sovereignty. The third and fourth stanza present the creation of words, the third step in the establishment of the man of authority.

To further possess the universe, man created language, the written word. The poetic voice narrates as following: "trazo las letras iniciales,/ el alfabeto con que me apropio del mundo al simbolizarlo./ la T es la torre y desde allí gobierno y vigilo." (Pacheco, *El silencio* 17). Language, like all of the previous creations, contains within itself the power to organize the world around a central authority and in doing so, give meaning to existence. In other words, language in itself is a metanarrative while simultaneously it helps establish other metanarratives. The speaker utilizes it to solidify the sovereignty of his mandates:

> Gracias a ti, alfabeto hecho por mi mano,
>
> habrá un solo Dios: el mío.
>
> Y no tolerará otras deidades.
>
> Una sola verdad: la mía.
>
> Y quien se oponga a ella recibirá su castigo. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 17)

Language dictates the existence and dominion of God, and it also creates the concept of truth. The man who creates language then yields its power to obtain authority over humankind. The last stanza of the first section foreshadows the motifs that shape many of the other poems in the book: "Habrá jerarquías, memoria, ley:/ mi ley: la ley del más fuerte/ para que dure siempre mi poder sobre el mundo" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 18). The poetic voice uses the possessive to emphasize that there is to be one centralized powerful overseer, himself, and that he is the source of truth and law. In the beginning of the world, the creation of the first paintings, God, and language were all necessary for man to transform himself into an authoritarian ruler and if in the beginning there was the man of authority, then his existence will always be an inherent part of society. The following three sections of the poem continue to narrate the creation of multiple metanarratives. The

second explains how man created the Demon in order to explain the existence of that which he feared within himself, the third describes how man hunts the mammoth into extinction in order to assert himself as the master of all living things and finally, the fourth section chronicles how man utilized force to subjugate the woman and threatened punish anyone who might try to rebel against his command. "Prehistoria" tells of the strategies that the first man used to create every metanarrative that shaped the course of history, revealing the nefarious underlying intentions for everything that was created. Ultimately, it was necessary to relate this origin tale through the perspective of the one who created it all because it was his creation of language that allows the existence of the verses that give an account of the nature of societies. In other words, it is necessary to use language to uncover the totalitarian nature of language which leads to the ironic conclusion that authority can destabilize itself. For instance, "El Gran Inquisidor," through the appropriation of an authoritarian voice, makes evident the absurdities of the metanarrative founded on the seemingly rational sovereignty of Law, Order, and Justice.

Justice on Trial: Conceptions and Executions of Justice in "El Gran Inquisidor"

Franz Kafka's 1925 novel, *The Trial* (*Der Prozess* in German), narrates the story of a man named Josef K. who faces trial for a crime unknown to both him and the reader. The absurd situation is narrated in the third person from the moment of the confusing arrest to the execution of the accused. The internal monologue that the narrator provides reveals that K.'s initial reaction to the arrest is an unwavering faith in the protection of the law: "K., after all, lived in a legal state, there was universal peace in the land, all the laws were upheld, who had the temerity to assault him in his own home?" (Kafka 5-6) This firm belief

in legality and justice proves to be misplaced, as all of the laws and procedures that were supposed to clear his name only lead him in endless circles. "El Gran Inquisidor," a deeply intertextual poem, evokes Kafka's novel through its narration of a trial where the accused is, much like K., unaware of his crime. Like in *The Trial*, the poem is not narrated by the accused nor the accuser, but in this case the speaker is clearly on the side of the Law. The voice of the accused is completely absent from the poem and the poetic voice belongs to a figure of authority, much like in many of Dalton's poems. Through this appropriation Pacheco claims the right to be heard and the emptiness of the metanarrative of the rationality of Law becomes evident.

The speaker begins by silencing the accused, as he calls upon the sovereignty of the Law to justify his power: "Señor, guarde silencio o le cerramos la boca/… Con las tenazas de la Ley retorceremos su lengua" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). The irony of the first verse is that the accused is never heard, nevertheless, the speaker's need to silence him gestures to his role as a quiet recipient in this exchange. In fact, there are repeated calls to silence in the second stanza ("Cállese. No hable.") and the sixth ("No, no abra la boca. No interrumpa. /…/… Acepte y calle.") (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). But, even though the voice of authority is the only one allowed to speak, his accusations soon prove to be founded on metanarratives that collapse under scrutiny. Soon it becomes evident that the case for executing the accused is built it upon empty concepts and ideologies, upon words whose meaning can be easily manipulated and utilized by whoever yields them.

The poem contains capitalization irregularities, emphasizing the words that have been given significance that transcends the every day use of language. "Ley" in the first stanza, "Juez" "Justicia" and "Mente" in the second, "Alta Investidura" and "Lesa Majestad"

in the sixth and "Bien," "Bondad" and "Orden Fraterno" in the ninth and final stanza. "Dios Padre" is also capitalized and even though this is not an irregular capitalization, the paternal figure of God and the Judge become synonyms. The second and third stanzas set up a hierarchy between the Judge and the accused, as the poetic voice establishes the sovereignty of the Law and the Judge: "Al Juez no se le juzga./ Él imparte Justicia, decide todo./ Es la Mente que piensa por nosotros" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). A crucial metanarrative becomes apparent in these verses: the Judge is a god-like figure, his decisions are not to be questioned because his judgement brings forth Justice. Therefore, the Judge is the physical manifestation of Justice, a concept, a metanarrative that means to organize and give meaning to existence. Conversely, the accused stands in opposition to both the Judge and Justice: "En cambio usted no es nadie, no sabe nada./ Se llama simplemente *el acusado*./ Qué soberbia aspirar a defenderse" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). The omission of both the accused's name and his voice uncovers his vulnerability before the all-powerful word of the Law. Ironically, the Law sets limitations to humans' free will with the purpose of protecting humanity from themselves as much as from others. But as the accused faces the Law, there is not outside force to protect him from the power of Justice. In the third verse where the speaker describes the accused's attempts to defend himself as proof of his "soberbia." Hubris, or pride, is many times considered the first sin against God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as Satan's hubris leads him to believe he could be greater than God himself. Furthermore, pride forms part of the seven deadly sins. To charge the accused with hubris is more than an insult to his character, it furthers the parallels between the Judge and God. Moreover, it shows the continuity between religious-based metanarratives and reason-based metanarratives.

Behler cites Lyotard's reading of the premodern, modern, and postmodern periods through his understanding of metanarratives. The postmodern period, marked by its skepticism toward foundational metanarratives, is also marked by a "crisis of legitimation," a term coined by Habermas. Lyotard borrows this idea to further his claims about the disbelief that characterizes the postmodern period, particularly because the crisis of legitimation expands to a general fading away of all authority and legitimacy (Behler 12). This crisis of legitimation manifests itself in "El Gran Inquisidor" through the speaker, who demonstrates a complete confidence in the metanarrative of Law and Justice. Notably, he does not rely solely on this reason-based metanarrative to condemn the accused, but he utilizes both religious and reason-based metanarratives to build his case. The parallels between the Court of Law that the accused stands in and the Judgement of God become evident in the third and fourth stanzas, beginning with the use of the word "soberbia" and followed by a rhetorical question: "¿Supone que en el valle de Josafat/ se atrevería a increpar a Dios Padre/ por la forma tan justa en que creó este mundo?" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). Josafat, which means "God will judge" in Hebrew, is referenced in the Judeo-Christian scriptures as the place where the final judgement of humankind will occur. The speaker's rhetorical question reveals that the modern period's metanarratives, which claim their authority from reason, require absolute faith to maintain their authority just like religious metanarratives demand faithful believers. Even though the speaker never doubts the sovereignty the Law, his unwavering confidence in this metanarrative destabilizes the both the Law's and the speaker's authority.

In Dalton's poetry, particularly in *Las historias prohibidas* and *Taberna*, the poet appropriates a myriad of voices, both authoritative ones and powerless ones, in order to

create a collage of the history of El Salvador. Conversely, in "El Gran Inquisidor" the accused is denied a voice, a name, the right to speak and the right to know what he is accused of: "¿Se da usted cuenta? Es el culpable de un crimen./ No sabrá cuál, no sabrá cuál,/ morirá sin saberlo" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36). Like Kafka's K., who is convinced of his own innocence throughout the whole novel, even though he does not know what he's been accused of, the accused in Pacheco's poem is denied the right to know his crime and is unable to prove his innocence. The poem relies solely on the absurdity of the speaker's words to destabilize all authority, just like the official documents that Dalton utilizes collapse when put in conversation with each other. In turn, the speaker relies on his words to establish his authority along with that of the Law. The metanarrative contains within itself the seed for its own crisis of legitimation. But this still does not fully explain why the accused is denied a voice. A logical progression of the poem might have been a restoration of Justice that would have only been possible by allowing the accused to speak, but this would have restored the metanarrative of Justice instead of delegitimizing it. Therefore, Law, Justice, Order and the ability to restore any of these three becomes unattainable through the absence of the accused's voice and his eventual end proves that he is nothing more than a sacrifice required to appease the gods of Law, Justice, and Order.

The poem oscillates between the language of religious and reason-based metanarratives flawlessly, as they are one in the same. But, interestingly enough, religious language dominates the last three stanzas. In the antepenultimate stanza the speaker threatens the accused: "No me obligue a salir de mis cabales./ Añadiré a su cuenta de pecados/ el delito de la blasfemia" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 37). Now instead of standing before a court a law for his crimes, the language shifts completely and he stands before a court for

his sins. Finally, in the penultimate stanza the speaker reveals the reason for the trial: "No me venga con cuentos de derechos humanos./ Usted ya no es humano: es el enemigo./ Vea en esta faramalla un pretexto formal/ que disimula y cubre el expediente" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 37). The possibility of reaching a just judgement was an illusion, a formality, the veridic had been reached long before trial. The final two verses provide this final veridic: "Dentro de unos instantes ofrendaremos su cuerpo/ en el altar del Bien, la Bondad, y el Orden Fraterno" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 37). These gods who have replaced the old gods have proven to be a continuation of the previous in many ways, requiring absolute, unquestioned loyalty and sacrifices in order to maintain their sovereignty. In contrast with Dalton's poems, Pacheco's lack specificity. There is no location, names, or timeframe to contextualize "El Gran Inquisidor," which points to a more general crisis of legitimation, one in which there is no need to specify a case or situation, because all authority has been destabilized, from the laws that give order to society to those who enforce these laws. Furthermore, the Law verse introduces an important motif: Order. If the Law, which means to establish Order, is destabilized, then Order no longer has a foundation. Order and disorder permeate *El silencio de la luna* through voices that dialogue with each other across multiple poems.

In the Name of Order

Cronologically, "Obediencia debida," "El Padre de los Pueblos," and "La derrota" follow "El Gran Inquisidor." There is a clear connection between all four poems and not only because they are all in the first section of the book, but because they all demonstrate a different aspect of the ideologies that need to be in place for Order to maintain its sovereignty. It can be deduced that the speaker of "Obediencia debida" is a military official

or a high ranking official as the first verse begins with him quoting an order: "Dispare, me dijeron. Obedecí" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 43). He embodies the basic principle of Order: obedience. The speaker reflects on his actions in the first stanza where he notes that "Siempre he sido obediente. Por obediencia/ conquisté un alto rango" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 43). He recognizes the utility of obedience, as it has lead him to a respected position, but in the third and final stanza he makes an observation about the ethical implications of what he does: "No soy un hombre bueno ni un hombre malo./ Me limito a cumplir las órdenes./ Pienso que es por el bien de todos" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 43). These verses demonstrate another crucial aspect of obedience: there is no time to ponder on the ethics of one's actions when obeying. The poetic voice expresses unwavering loyalty that is rooted in the belief that the orders he is following are for a greater good, in other words, the ends justifies the means. Notably, the ends is "el bien de todos," a phrase that carries a similar weight that Justice does in that its significance goes beyond its simple semantic definition. The greater good can be defined and redefined constantly and its malleability is problematic when it becomes the only reasoning behind ethically ambiguous state-sanctioned actions. Herein lies the parallel between the accused in "El Gran Inquisidor" and the official in "Obediencia debida": both are denied knowledge and the right to speak for themselves. Even though the official speaks, he serves a mouthpiece for the authority figures above him. The first verse demonstrates the unity between the poetic voice and his superiors: "Dispare, me dijeron." It is noteworthy that in that verse the words of "dispare" were not the speaker's words, yet they are not in quotations or in italics, pointing to the lack of differentiation between him and the ones who give orders. They are one body; the speaker simply functions as the limbs that do as the brain commands. Just as the poetic

voice of "El Gran Inquisidor" metaphorizes the role of the Judge: "Es la Mente que piensa por nosotros" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36), the official of "Obediencia debida" manifests the acceptance of this rule of Order. The poem that follows, titled "El Padre de los Pueblos," contains the same motifs as the previous two, but the poetic voice is an authoritarian figure who justifies his rule through reason.

Much like the figure of the Judge, the figure of the Father resembles a God who establishes Order through his words. But, "El Padre de los Pueblos" appears to be more affable than the speaker of "El Gran Inquisidor," as he begins by pleading for understading: "Por favor no me malentiendan./ Mediten antes de juzgarme" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). This contrasts deeply with the speaker who began by demanding that the accused be silent before the Law. But this speaker proves to be a benevolent dictator whose words are much more nefarious than what is assumed initially. The second stanza establishes two metaphors, one that the intended audience believes while the other is the one that the speaker wishes the audience would adopt: "No soy el lobo feroz/ sino el padre prudente y sabio/ que por el bien del rebaño/ ha de tener mano dura" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). These verses are full of inter-textual biblical references: the wolf, the sheep, and the Father. The metaphor of the wolf is often used in Judeo-Christian scriptures to symbolize Satan who attacks sheep, which symbolize the believers and finally, the figure of God is oftentimes compared to a father. In other words, the poetic voice rejects the idea that he might be a malevolent force and instead proposes that he be understood as a father who uses discipline to protect his children. From a place of authority, the speaker not only demands obedience, but gratefulness. He also positions himself as the Mind, which both "Obediencia debida" and "El Gran Inquisidor" evoke. But, imagining himself as a Father and the people

he rules over as children makes evident that he is not benevolent, but pejorative. When in the first verses he pleaded that they reflect before judging him it was not an actual appeal to thinking, but the introduction to the justifications for his actions. In the third stanza he reveals the more nefarious aspects of his fathering methods while simultaneously continuing to justify his authority.

In the second stanza he sates that he simply applies a "mano dura" in order to maintain the common good, a common thread among "Obediencia debida" and "El Gran Inquisidor," but in the third stanza defines what this "mano dura" looks like in this manifestation: "El orden se mantiene con el terror./ Si los dejo sueltos/ acabarán devorándose" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). These verses foreshadow the motif of the final section of the book "Circo de noche" as it utilizes animality as a metaphor for human's violent inclinations. These verses demonstrate the way in which the ends justify the means, terror being the means to the end of keeping humans from destroying each other. Again, this echoes the past poetic voice that defended the sacrifice of the accused in the name of the greater good as established by the Law. It also demonstrates that violence is only condoned when executed by authority and not when it is employed by its subjects. By the fourth stanza all the pleasantries of the beginning have disappeared and the speaker's tone parallels that of the apologist for the Judge in "El Gran Inquisidor":

> Me deben hasta el aire que malrespiran.
> En vez de arrojarme piedras
> o hablar de una "libertad" que es el mirlo blanco
> (nadie lo ha visto),
> denme las gracias (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44)

His superiority bleeds through the words, as his use of the word “malrespiran,” which does not exist in the dictionary, suggests that the ruled lack the ability to breathe appropriately, which is most likely not a literal description, but it is an offense that indicates the dullness that the voice of authority attributes to them. The second verse in this stanza makes another Judeo-Christian reference as the Torah states that a variety of sins are punishable by stoning. This suggests that the speaker might be facing a mob, ready to stone him for his crimes, but, as in previous poems, the only one allotted a voice is the one who embodies authority. Therefore, it can be inferred that the reference to stoning might point to a backwards mentality that resorts to violence. Ironically, the poetic voice himself defends the use of terror, but only when it is used to establish Order. In the third verse, the demands of the people become clear but the Father dismisses them as something that is unattainable and demands gratitude. This is what makes the character of the Father more nefarious than the Judge, the Judge did not demand gratitude, only respect, while the Father demands both. “El Padre de los Pueblos” demands perfection from his subjects because it asks that they not only follow his orders without question, but that they feel indebted to authority for terrorizing them into submission, in other words, not only does he demand obedience, but he also expects loyalty, the Father wants to be feared *and* loved. The last verse stands alone and concludes the transfiguration from man to God: “y canten mi alabanza a la hora del ángelus" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). The man of Order, a Father, fuses with the figure of God because they are derivations of the same type of metanarrative regardless of their basis, religion or reason. The poem that follows, “La derrota,” is not narrated through a voice of authority, but it follows the same motif as the previous ones and provides the antonym to “El Padre de los Pueblos.”

Much like the three previous poems, "La derrota" does not provide a specific sociopolitical or historical context. The poetic voice provides a vague setting, in which only the crucial details are revealed in the verses. The poem is haunted by a nameless man of authority who becomes known to the reader through the speaker's description of him. He describes him using verbs: "El que piensa por todos prohibió pensar./ Su palabra es la única palabra./ Él dice todo sobre todas las cosas" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 45). He *thinks,* he *prohibits,* and he *speaks*, and it is these actions that characterize his essence. Without resorting to adjectives like cruel or authoritarian, the speaker evokes the figure of a dictator. Much like the Judge, who is "la Mente que piensa por nosotros" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 36), the one described in this case also thinks for everyone. But unlike previous poems, in this case the one who speaks is not the figure of authority, even though his presence haunts the verses. Consequently, the second stanza offers an alternative reality: "Sólo existe algo que él no puede prohibir:/ los sueños" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 45). The subconscious world that is accessed through sleep becomes the only form of escape from the prohibitions of the dictator. The third and final stanza provides insight into these dreams: "Noche tras noche/ la gente sueña en acabar con el que piensa por todos" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 45). The ends of these dreams are clear, but what demands our attention is the overlap between this ending and the previous poem where the Father appears to be standing before a mob who threatens to stone him to death, "En vez de arrojarme piedras/ o hablar de una "libertad" que es el mirlo blanco/…../denme las gracias" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). In both of them, the people stand in opposition to their respective authoritarian figures, in one they demand freedom through the death of the Father, while in the other their dreams revolve around fantasies of eliminating the dictator.

The destruction of the sovereign becomes a means to an end, but what's striking is that while the means are very clear, the ends are not. The Father in "El Padre de los Pueblos" notes the vagueness of their demands when he questions their desire for freedom, something that he claims is essentially a myth. Meanwhile in "La derrota," ending the one who thinks for everyone seems to be both a means and an end, leading to a question that a tavern patron asked in Dalton's "Taberna": "y después?" This interrogative is unspoken in Pacheco's work, but it exists between the said and the unsaid, in the ironic meaning of the words.

Deceitful Words: The Impossibility of Finding Meaning

If in "El Gran Inquisidor" "Ley," "Juez," "Justicia," "Bien," "Bondad," and "Orden Fraterno" lose their sovereignty because they rely solely on the authority that is attributed to them through metanarratives. Conversely, even when words are yielded by those without power, they are still questionable. "Libertad" and the freedom to think may seem like reasonable ideals, but the conundrum arises when we realize that these alternative ideals can become the basis for new metanarratives. If, like Lyotard proposes, the postmodern era is defined by a crisis of legitimation and the distrust of *all* metanarratives, it is impossible to destabilize established ideologies just to replace them with new ones. In other words, every new ideology becomes suspect, and in this case, words become the culprit that is not to be trusted. In the second section of *El silencio* a seemingly unrelated poem explores the instability of language.

"El uso de las palabras" combines nostalgia with a nuanced reflection on semantics. The epigraph is a dictionary definition of the word semantics: "Semántica: Estudio del uso

de las palabras./ María Moliner: *Diccionario de uso del español*" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 69). The play with this definition bring the reader back to the title of the poem, which is the definition that is cited in the epigraph which signals that the poem is just that: a postmodern study of the use of words. The first stanza takes a specific phrase and defines it using a mix of phrases and examples of how these words depended on actions for meaning: "En los feroces días de mi adolescencia tristísima/ la expresión "hacer el amor" significaba "cortejo"./ "Te hacía el amor" enviándote flores/ o escribiendo versitos y nada más" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 69). This nostalgic reflection results in meanings upon meanings, in signifiers that lead to other signifiers. Behler proposed that postmodernism was in part characterized by the fact that signifiers no longer refer to something signified, but to other signifiers and that as a result, the "true meaning" of things can not be reached, the only possibility is the "interpretations of interpretations" (6). These first four verses demonstrate that, as the signifier "hacer el amor" is defined by another signifier "cortejo" which inevitably leads to other signifiers "enviándote flores/ o escribiendo versitos y nada más." But the last signifiers are not the end, they too could be interpreted, because sending flowers and writing verses could be further defined by other signifiers. In other words, "mandar flores" could mean "hacer el amor" just as much as "hacer el amor" could mean "mandar flores," both of which could potentially mean lead to a myriad of other signifiers. The speaker's nostalgic reflection on the meaning of making love begins with this impossibility of finding a "true meaning" in the first stanza but in the second he analyzes the effects that time can have on signifiers, furthering the instability of language.

The idealized vision of love that the first stanza holds transforms as the speaker moves into the stage of adulthood:

En algún momento,

entre mis diecinueve y mis veinticuatro,

"hacer el amor"

llenó el lugar que ocupaban

obscenidades, vocablos técnicos

o impregnados de incienso y confesionario. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 69)

Making love then evolves from a signifier that evoked other signifiers like writing verses, to eliciting obscenities that would eventually lead to a guilt-laden confession of sin. Time expands the possibilities of language, but so does the one who yields the words. The signifiers did not evolve on their own, but they changed as the speaker became aware of other possible meanings. The poem ends with a lamentation, with the regret of what was but could no longer be: "Nuestros mejores años para "hacer el amor"/ se disiparon en la frustración,/ se hundieron lamentables/ --por engaño y por culpa de la semántica" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 69). What was implicit in "El Gran Inquisidor" and "La derrota" becomes explicit in "El uso de las palabras.[25]" Signifiers prove to be unstable and consequently, untrustworthy, deceitful, and empty of true meaning. Ironically, all communication and metanarratives happen in the midst of endless interpretations of interpretations. The poetic voices, which take the form of authoritarian rulers of different kinds, utilize the dominant discourses that hinge on the sanctity of certain words, like "Order," for their validity. Order is a metanarrative in itself, because it organizes human

[25] There are other poems in *El silencio de la luna* that engage the relationship of the poet and language. For example, "Las vocales", is an intertextual poem dedicated to the French poet Arthur Rimbaud and it centers around the disappearance of vowels which does not allow the poetic voice to write even though he so desires to do so. The poem culminates with the resurrection of the missing vowels and the poet rejoices at the reunification.

existence, justifying the rule of the few over the masses. “El Gran Inquisidor” and “El Padre de los Pueblos” destabilize metanarratives by appropriating the language of oppression whose original purpose is to justify the rule of the Judge and Dictator. Ironically, these discourses turn on the ones who yield them as they prove that all authority depends on deceitful words whose true meaning can never be reached and if the language used to establish metanarratives is inherently uncertain, the ideologies themselves are mutable and they lose their sovereignty. But it is crucial to note that the instability of words is not limited to when they are used by authoritarian figures because as “La derrota” and “El Padre de los Pueblos” demonstrated, even when the oppressed revolt, they depend on signifiers that do not have a “true meaning” to justify their rebellion. This exudes the disenchantment that characterized the Romantics of the 18th century, as the 20st century poet stands before the realization that signifiers are crucial to existence and the way humanity has given order and meaning to existence, but that ultimately, they are no more than a series of interpretations that shift over time and in the hands of whoever uses them. In the fourth and final section of the book, “Circo de noche,” Pacheco uses the allegory of the circus to continue reflecting analytically on metanarratives and the language on which they are built.

The Darkest Show on Earth: “Circo de noche”

All twelve poems in the last part are numbered, unlike the rest of the book, signaling its coherent unity. Some of the poems are narrated in the third person while others are narrated in the first, but none of them deviate from the circus allegory. Parrilla Sotomayor proposes that in this section, “la imagen humana se corresponde con personajes de ficción,

pero absolutamente deformados por un espejo cóncavo" (266). The poems function as a behind-the-scenes tour of the circus, letting the reader stand before the cages and listen to the different performers after the audience has left. The first poem "El Domador" is narrated in the third person, focusing on the perspective of one of the central authority figures in the circus, while the last poem, "Las Jaulas" ends with the circus owner's monologue about the violent nature of humans. In the space between the two dominant defenders of the circus, the tragic lives of circus freaks, Siamese twins, clowns and many others take the center stage, providing the oppressed with a voice. But, as with Dalton's work, it is the poems in which authoritative voices take the center stage that best demonstrate the ironic worldview that destabilizes all established authority.

"El Domador" contains many parallels with "El Padre de los Pueblos," because initially the Tamer appears to be benevolent, but his words betray him. The poem begins with a narrator's voice: "El Domador dice que no:/ él no tortura a sus bestias./ Su método infalible es la persuasión,/ su recompensa el cariño" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 155). Much like the Father who begins by begging his people to not midjudge him, "no me malentiendan./ Mediten antes de juzgarme" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44), the Tamer proposes that there is a misunderstanding between him and those he holds power over: he is not a torturer, but a loving master. It is also worth noting that his title is also capitalized, like Judge and Father, which indicates the continuity between all these figures. As the Father, the Tamer follows a methodology, and furthermore, he even claims to reward obedience with kindness, which might be the most nefarious statement of all. The second stanza returns to the motif of Order, another mark of continuity with previous poems:

El Domador se muestra como un tirano benévolo.

Con mano ya perlada por la vejez,

acaricia indolente unos cachorritos.

Es el espíritu del orden.

Cada cual tiene su lugar

bajo esta carpa y en las jaulas de afuera. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 155)

The oxymoron, "tirano benévolo," signals that there is meaning between the said and unsaid, because in spite of the objective tone of the speaker, the word tyrant slips through the cracks, prompting the need for a qualifier, benevolent, whose purpose is to mitigate the negative interpretations triggered by that word. The kindly image of the Tamer is furthered by the reference to his age in the second verse, simultaneously evoking respect and compassion. As with the ex-dictator in Dalton's "La segura mano de Dios," the advanced age of the Tamer forms part of his defense because even if he committed dastardly crimes in his youth, he is no longer perceived as threatening and the time for punishment appears to have passed. Furthermore, in the second and third verse of this stanza, the narrator creates an image that mirrors that of an elderly grandfather with his grandchildren, which is why the shift in tone in the following three verses is almost unnoticeable. The elderly man suddenly becomes more than a loving grandfatherly figure, he is the manifestation of Order and he exists to make sure that it is maintained both inside and outside of the circus tents. Of course, the reference to "las jaulas de afuera" is twofold. Yes, the animals are kept in cages, but so are humans, cages that help maintain the rule of Order intact[26]. In the

[26] This is not the only time that Pacheco utilizes the lives of animals or insects to reflect on existence. "Horas contadas," "Mariposa," and "Enigma" are some examples in which the focus is the pass of time through reflections on the short time that insects have to live.

following five stanzas the Tamer becomes the speaker and the parallels between the Father and him become evermore prevalent.

The Judge, the Father, and the Tamer incarnate Order. All three rely on signifiers to justify the metanarrative that gives them authority to enforce the Law in the name of a greater good. Their voices remain the center, overshadowing the protests of the oppressed, and this is their undoing. In the third stanza the Tamer justifies the need for the circus:

> lucho por el bien de mis animales.
> Sin la misericordia de este Circo
> ya los habrían cazado. Serían tal vez
> pieles de lujo en un aparador
> o simples organismos de sufrimiento
> en los laboratorios del infierno. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 155)

He explains that even if the circus puts the animals in cages, their lives could be worse. Ironically, all of these dangers that the captive circus animals have been spared from are perpetuated by humans. The trophy hunter derives the authority to kill from the superiority of the human race above non-human beings, while researchers who utilize animals in labs justify the suffering of the animals as a means to an end, following the same ideology that places human beings at the center of the universe. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the allegory of the circus, the human race symbolizes authority as they submit animals to their will, all of which is justified by a metanarrative of Order that places humans over all other living beings. In the same way, tyrants justify their reign through a discourse centered around Order which needs to be established to protect the greater good.

The fourth and fifth stanza echo "El Padre de los Pueblos," repeating the same persuasive arguments to defend his sovereignty. The Tamer says "'En mi Circo no existe la ley de la selva./ Viven en paz. Se encuentran protegidos/ por mi benevolencia, a veces exigente" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 155), while the Father stated "Si los dejo sueltos/ acabarán devorándose" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). The similarity between these two statements further demonstrates the cohesive unity between all of these figures of authority, they all yield the same types of discourses. Furthermore, in the fifth stanza "'Ahora observen la cara de mis bestias./ Sólo les hace falta hablar; si pudieran hacerlo/ entonarían a coro mi alabanza" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 155), echoing the words of the Father "y canten mi alabanza a la hora del ángelus" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 44). In both cases, gratitude is not only welcome, but expected. But the tyrannical aspects of the Tamer are kept mostly hidden until the last three stanzas, where he marvels at his own power in the antepenultimate: "ver cómo tiembla el tigre cuando empuño mi látigo" and finally in the penultimate one he says "¿Pueden negarlo? El Circo es el Estado perfecto" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 156). He obtains obedience through fear, and ultimately, the allegory at play is outlined by the speaker. The Circus is a utopia for authoritarian figures because it is organized around a centralized power structure in which the Tamer establishes the Law and the animals have no option but to obey. The final stanza, composed of three verses, provides a brief response to the Tamer: "Cuando él termina de hablar/ el silencio no colma el Circo:/se oyen protestas entre rejas" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 156). These verses carry much weight because everything that has been left unsaid is contained in the phrase "se oyen protestas entre rejas" and the illusion of an ideal State contained within the Circus ends with that revelation.

The final poem of the book begins in medias res as the fist verse addresses an audience and asks them to let the Circus owner speak, "Dejemos que termine el empresario del Circo" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174), which signals that he had been interrupted. He compares humans and animals, following the allegory that shapes the last section of the book:

> En la arena del mundo somos tigres y leones.
> Nacemos con las garras bien afiladas.
> No hay nadie que no tenga agudos colmillos,
> disposición para la lucha, talento innato
> para la herida, para el desprecio y la burla. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174)

These verses clearly reference "Prehistoria," because it suggests that violence is part of mankind's nature just as much as hunger for power is also inherent to man. Considering the intertextuality of *El silencio*, it can be deduced that the reference to the animality of humans exists within the same framework as the Tamer's explanation for the authoritarian style of training that he uses with his animals. Therefore, if dominion over wild animals is justified because of their nature, then dominion over humankind can also be justified with the same logic. "El Padre de los Pueblos" and "El Gran Inquisidor" utilize the same explanation to rationalize the rule of the Father and Law. Authoritarian rule is not only preferable, but necessary. In the second stanza, the speaker emphasizes that there are no exceptions to this rule, that there might be some who are more sadistic, but there is no significant difference: "todos ganamos nuestro diploma/ en la escuela del desamor,/ en el colegio del odio,/ el seminario de la intolerancia" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174). He emphasizes hatred and intolerance, both of which are born out of the creation of the Other. The key

difference between the circus owner's monologue and the monologues of the Father, the Law and the Tamer is that he focuses on the way that humans have internalized metanarratives in such a way that has lead them to hatred. He presents an extremely pessimistic view of humanity that differs from the others because it lacks the internal contradictions that existed in previous poems. In other words, even though the poetic voice revisits previous motifs, he does so as an observant. In the third stanza the concept of Justice is revisited in this new context, but this time it is justice with a lowercase.

As the circus owner continues his speech, he begins to offer not only observations, but analysis of these said remarks. In the third stanza he proposes that there is a form of universal justice inherent to man's violent nature:

> La inmensa paradoja es que se ha hecho justicia:
> a nadie en el reparto de los males
> se le negó su rebanada.
> Daga es la mano, proyectil el puño,
> flecha incendiaria y venenosa la lengua
> y látigo los dedos que abofetean. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174)

In comparison to the Justice that "El Gran Inquisidor" proposes, this form of justice is not the basis of a metanarrative, but an inherent equalizer that all humans possess. The body with which the average person is born is imbued with the weapons necessary for declaring war against others. In the fifth verse the synecdoche of the tongue stands in for language, which is but another weapon that can be used to harm. "Prehistoria" first introduces the written word as the means by which the first man established his sovereignty, and other poems like "El Padre de los Pueblos" and "El uso de las palabras" destabilize the meaning of

words, and finally, "Las Jaulas" emphasizes the violent nature of language, bringing the reflection on words in full circle. The speaker himself observes the cyclical nature of human existence: "'El gran tema del mundo es la venganza./ Me haces algo, contesto, me respondes./ Perpetuamos el ciclo interminable" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174). He identifies vengeance as a motif that advances the world, as what motivates humankind to continue moving forward. This too is another reflection on justice, because vengeance can be rationalized as another aspect of executing justice, but as the poetic voice points out, carrying it out requires endless human sacrifices. The fifth stanza returns to the motif of war heroes, which was prevalent in the first section of the book, and delineates the only alternative to war: cowardice.

Other poems in *El silencio*, like "Armisticio," focus on the aftermath of the soldiers who return, or are unable to return, home after a war. In "Las Jaulas," the speaker centers on those who refuse to engage in conflict, "'Y si alguien se atreve a interrumpirlo/ será siempre marcado a fuego y hierro/ con el terrible epíteto: *cobarde*" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 175). The weight of language is once again evident in these verses. A single word, coward, is heavy with negative connotations and destructive abilities. In the following three verses the circus owner poses a question based on an observation: "¿A quién honran los pueblos y los artes?/ Al que deja montañas de cadáveres/ para salvarlos de su error: ser distintos" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 175). The speaker of Dalton's "La segura mano de Dios" also makes a reference to a mountain of bodies, even though in his case he is focused on General Martínez. The mass murders for which the Salvadoran ex-dictator was responsible are dismissed because they could have happened to anyone, the dead are the inevitable collateral damage of war. "Las Jaulas" expands upon this and proposes that not only is it

acceptable to murder in the name of vengeance, it is celebrated. Difference is a capital crime, punishable by death. The poetic voice creates a narration that proposes that mankind is lead by its worst instincts and that society has utilized these instincts to establish ideologies. Ultimately, the circus owner proposes that this analysis is a metanarrative, as he dissects the way in which vengeance has given meaning to human existence since the beginning of time. In the sixth stanza, he offers both a final analysis of the necessity of this cycle and an alternative that is unattainable.

"Prehistoria" set the stage for "Las Jaulas" in many ways. The first man creates the world to fulfill his need to have dominion over his fellow man and woman. Many centuries later, the circus owner notes that "'La vida sólo avanza gracias al conflicto./ La historia es el recuento de la discordia/ que no termina nunca" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 175). In "Prehistoria," the first conflict arises when someone disagrees with the man who created God and Law, beginning the cycle of violence that would plague humanity for eternity. The circus owner proposes that without these conflicts, there would be no history. The genesis narrated in "Prehistoria" suggests something similar because one of the greatest advancements of mankind, the written word, was the result of a violent need to dominate others. In conjunction, these poems conclude that all of human history has been shaped by human-made conflicts and that ultimately, it could not be any other way. But, he does offer the alternative, granted, as an impossible dream:

> El heroísmo auténtico sería
> entender las razones diferentes,
> respetar la otredad insalvable,
> vivir hasta cierto punto en concordia,

sin opresión ni miedo ni injusticia. (Pacheco, *El silencio* 175)

The speaker proposes that in theory, humans know that living in peace is possible, but it would require an uprooting of every ideology that the first man created. But the final stanza proposes the final and most nefarious interpretation of human history: "'Pero entonces, señores, no habría Circo,/ no habría historia ni drama ni noticias." (Pacheco, *El silencio* 174). Violence and suffering not only form the fabric of society, but it is a source of entertainment and this is perhaps the most nefarious proposition of all. The sixth poem in this section, "Fenómenos," foreshadows this conclusion through the voice of circus freaks who reflect on the monstrosity of those who call them monsters because they enjoy witnessing the pain of others while they simultaneously fear that they might find themselves experiencing that same suffering sometime in the future. The circus allegory introduces the idea that human suffering is a source of entertainment and the speaker of "Las Jaulas" reminds his audience that they are the Circus's perfect consumers. Finally, he finalizes his speech by returning the audience to the present, and the last two verses offer a final twist.

"Las Jaulas" and "El Padre de los Pueblos" both feature an authority figure who speaks to a hostile audience. The Father chastises his people for doubting his strong hand and it is implied that the audience is not only antagonistic, but intends to kill him. The concluding lines of "Las Jaulas" reveals that this speech is the final words of the circus owner. The last two lines, which follow the verses where the speaker proposes that it is hatred and violence that have pushed history forward, betray the context that had previously been unclear: "No estaría bajando esa cuchilla/ que ahora mismo cercena mi cabeza.'" (Pacheco, *El silencio* 175). The circus owner has been sentenced to death by

beheading but before he died, he proposed a final analysis of the state of society and those who passed judgement on him. The twist that "Las Jaulas" introduces is that hatred, intolerance and oppression have been internalized in such a way that they have become the fuel that moves all human societies, so much so that the only way to topple dictators is to murder them. In this way, the implicit question that the circus owner asks his audience is the same one that the tavern patron in Dalton's "Taberna" asks: "y después?" If the circus audience finally succeeds in killing the circus owner, if the people who want to stone the Father in "El Padre de los Pueblos" finally attain their goal, what happens then? In Dalton, he asks: what happens after a leftist revolutionary victory? These are the imperative questions, the ones that neither Pacheco nor Dalton offer an answer for because to do so would be to propose a new metanarrative, which would inevitably come toppling down as soon as its foundations are scrutinized.

Conclusion

The act of creating multiple characters, both fictional and real, and appropriating their voices results in a textured account of history and the present in *Taberna y otros lugares*, *Las historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* and *El silencio de la luna*. The juxtaposition of opposite accounts of events results in the questioning of established metanarratives, because they contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. Furthermore, even alternative metanarratives are unsuccessful because they would simply create an alternative source of authority. But the void left behind by the vacuum of metanarratives leaves room for hope and it is this hope that marks the difference between a nihilistic understanding of Dalton and Pacheco and an ironic one. The ironic meaning of the poems where they adopt masks is found between the said and the unsaid, so even though they

question all metanarratives and propose that it is not possible to create alternative ones, they recognize the necessity of their existence. They are ultimately contradictory, critical, and fragmentary texts that do not provide neat answers to the questions they pose.

CONCLUSION

Through a close reading of Dalton, Pacheco, and Parra's poetry it becomes clear that they approach a myriad of complex concepts through an ironic worldview. In chapter one, the focus is their critique of poetry and the role of the poet. They question the esthetic precepts that had limited poetry to specific language and themes and excluded others. They also turned their critical eye inward and explored the complexities of the writing process and the idealization of the poet as someone that exists away from others and possesses a special privilege. In other words, they gesture toward the limitations of the genre but yet still continue to create and gesture toward the possibility of renewal. The second chapter argues that both Dalton and Parra present an ironic perspective of opposing political ideologies. Due to the volatile situation of the mid 1900s, their critique is even more important as it sets them apart from other authors at the time who presented overtly idealized imaginaries of the left. Furthermore, they used humor as a way to mock the United States, showing that no one is exempt from their critical eye. Finally, in the third chapter Pacheco and Dalton's use of masks and characters is at the forefront. They adopt a myriad of voices, some of which they may agree with and others which they do not, risking, as Booth might say, disaster. Attention to their ironic tone becomes increasingly crucial as some of the characters that speak are authoritative and if one were to miss the irony, they could potentially be read as defending authoritarian ideas.

Ultimately, irony provides these authors with the ability to escape being categorized and limited to one specific role. Parra's ironic tone, which has been interpreted as destructive by literary critics like Pedro Lastra, becomes more complex when one pays close attention to the interplay of said and unsaid meanings. While he is clearly critical of

everything and everyone (including himself), the fact that he uses irony points to a multiplicity of interpretations that could potentially be contradictory. As critics like Behler, Colebrook, and Hutcheon have pointed out, irony leads to further ambiguity instead of providing clear answers to the questions it poses. Irony allows Parra to reflect on controversial topics and makes it impossible to characterize him as solely destructive. Dalton, whose political commitment played a key role in his writing, expresses a harsh critique of dogmatism on the left even as he formed part of the leftist militant movement of his country. This in itself can be read as ironic because he participates in presenting an unidealized version of the political ideologies that he championed. In other words, Dalton's ironic worldview is what sets him apart from more traditional committed authors and prevents his poetry from falling into the category of propaganda. Meanwhile Pacheco's adoption of masks and heteronyms not only prompts a crisis of literature but one of concepts. Pacheco in particular adopts heteronyms that separate his author self from himself and further questions the concept of originality while simultaneously attempting to create something new. All three poets demonstrate that they are aware of their limitations both in literature and of the limits of political ideologies and therein lies one of the most important contributions of their works.

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