

Vicente Huidobro and the 'Two Souls' of Romanticism

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“Naive enough to set off in pursuit of Truth, I had explored - to no avail - any number of disciplines. I was beginning to be confirmed in my skepticism when the notion occurred to me of consulting, as a last result, Poetry: who knows? perhaps it would be profitable, perhaps it conceals beneath its arbitrary appearances some definitive revelation ... Illusory recourse! Poetry had outstripped me in negation and cost me even my *uncertainties* ...”

— E.M. Cioran, *All Gall is Divided* (trans. Richard Howard)

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyse the often contradictory viewpoints concerning the role of the poet and the nature of poetic creation expressed in the writings of the Chilean *vanguardista* Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948). In particular, it looks to focus on the tension between Huidobro's doctrine of *creacionismo* (with its emphasis on the idea of poetry as the product of conscious willpower bringing forth new worlds *ex-nihilo* from the mind of the poet) and the Neo-Platonist concept, implicit in many of Huidobro's more lyrical compositions, that the images and metaphors deployed by the poet are no mere arbitrary inventions but instead analogical representations of an inexpressible Infinite (existing *a priori* to language) which cannot be apprehended through rational modes of thought and expression. This tension is studied in the context of the hybrid discipline known as the "History of Ideas" with attention being paid as much to the philosophical as to the purely literary sources of these clashing aesthetic principles (ranging from Schelling and the German Romantics to Nietzsche and the French Decadents), which the present author contends spring ultimately from a common motivation: namely the desire to rediscover in art that which the discoveries of the Enlightenment had rendered impossible through either religion or systematic philosophy – a road to the Absolute.

A Note on Translations

When reproducing poetry or dramatic works in languages other than Spanish or English, I have opted to keep the quotation in the source language and then provided a translation into English immediately following the original (either in square brackets, in the case of block quotes, or in a chapter endnote, in the case of in-text quotations). In the case of poetry in French these translations are my own, in the case of poetry in German the source for the translation will be indicated in parentheses.

With respect to prose works (such as essays, literary criticism and philosophy) in languages other than Spanish or English I have opted to use English translations wherever they are available.

Introduction

The career of the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro has traditionally been viewed as one of abrupt zigzags and internal contradictions. In particular, scholars have tended to highlight the obvious disjunction between Huidobro's doctrine of *creacionismo* as propounded in his various literary manifestos and his actual poetic praxis – with emphasis also often placed on a demarcation or periodisation of Huidobro's poetry into separate and discrete 'stages'. According to this narrative of linear progression, we begin with a pre-avant-garde stage characterised by Huidobro's youthful infatuation with Ruben Darío and the *modernistas* before moving on to the period of Huidobro's active participation in the Parisian avant-garde in the years immediately following the First World War. Finally, in the period from 1931 onwards most critics appear to discern in Huidobro's work a gradual disillusionment and increasing scepticism in the redemptive or generative capacity of art, characterised by a move away from 'pure' *creacionismo* to a more 'humanist' or 'impure' kind of poetry.¹

Such schemas are not without their uses and, insofar as their ability to describe the course of Huidobro's evolution on a purely textual or stylistic level is concerned, they are difficult to fault. However, it is my contention that the manifold and often sudden changes in Huidobro's poetic praxis can only be understood in the context of tensions that were, right from the outset, inherent in the Chilean *vanguardista's* personal philosophy and temperament. I argue that on the one hand, Huidobro draws heavily on Neo-Platonist transcendentalism (characteristic of the poet-philosopher Hölderlin and the so-called 'Jena School') which casts the poet in the role of 'Nature's priest' and aspires to a union with the divine. Yet, at the same time, he is attracted to an alternative 'vitalist' artistic current represented by figures such as the young (Wagnerian) Nietzsche and the French Decadent Baudelaire that denies the existence of a link between artistic creation and any kind of objective reality. Put another way, Huidobro is torn between the impulse towards dissolution of the poetic self in Nature on the one hand and the assertion of the poet's consciousness as the only verifiable 'reality' in the universe on the other. In this reading of Huidobro's work then, his frequent revolutions against conventions of language, logic and temporal or ontological causality are not mere word games played for aesthetic effect (as some critics such as David Rock have charged²) but rather the symptoms of a fundamentally Romantic, lyrical impulse constantly at war with itself. A lyrical impulse divided between what I have chosen to refer to in my title as the 'two souls' of Romanticism.

Literature Review

Since Huidobro's death in 1948 there have been a number of important monographs published on the subject of the poet and his contribution to the 20th century literary avant-garde. The first of these is Cedomil Goic's 1956 book *La poesía de Vicente Huidobro* which remains one of the most comprehensive general surveys of the subject. Goic highlights the strong influence of the German Romantics and New England transcendentalists as well as of the 16th century Spanish mystic San Juan de la Cruz on Huidobro's conception of poetry as an act of truth-telling, an expression of life's inner essence realised through a moment of controlled delirium (Goic 74-92). Goic also emphasises Huidobro's fundamentally tragic view of human existence and the strategy of *ludicismo* which he uses (particularly in *Altazor* and in *Ver y palpar*) as a means of diffusing somewhat this existential anguish (180, 201). The fundamental contradiction however between the Neo-Platonism of the German Romantics and New England Transcendentalists, with its emphasis on Nature as a means of accessing the Divine, and the vitalism which is the other major undercurrent in Huidobro's aesthetic creed is however not fully explained or explored.

Approaching Huidobro's work from a post-colonial/literary nationalist perspective, Ana Pizarro in her 1971 monograph *Vicente Huidobro, un poeta ambivalente* contrasts what she describes as the "telurismo" of his earlier and later career ("...una poesía americana, de expresión impuesta por el elemento natural, poesía de comunicación del hombre con la material") with the poetry of his cosmopolitan, European "middle" phase and finds clearly in favour of the former (18, 107). An earnest disciple of Lukács, Pizarro ends by reducing Huidobro to little more than an artistic cipher for the fickle "gran burguesía chilena" and its perceived lack of commitment to the tasks of the national-democratic revolution (110-116).

Enrique Caracciolo-Trejo's *La poesía de Vicente Huidobro y la vanguardia* (1974) provides a comprehensive overview of Huidobro's interaction with the avant-garde movements of Cubism, Surrealism and Futurism – arguing that his personal creed of *creacionismo* combines elements of all of these and that Huidobro is a poet whose style changes depending on his literary and geographical environment (Caracciolo-Trejo 41). By contrast, Cecil Wood's 1978 study *The Creacionismo of Vicente Huidobro* takes the Chilean poet's aesthetic creed seriously as an integrated philosophical system whose underlying message is that by indulging in the "ocio lúdico of poetry" man can "...purge himself of the moments of intense

spiritual conflict and mental anguish which beset his life” (18). In Huidobro’s epic poem *Altazor* Wood claims that the poet succeeds in realising exactly this goal, liberating language from the tyranny of representation and in so doing gaining for himself “...a sense of the infinite” (230).

Another important study (also published in 1978) is George Yúdice’s *Vicente Huidobro y la motivación del lenguaje*, which draws upon the work of theorists such as Iván Fónagy and Umberto Eco to analyse the Chilean poet’s writings in terms of their relationship to structural linguistics and semiotics. Yúdice discerns in Huidobro’s work a fundamental concern with the need to revivify or repurpose language, which (as famously described by Emerson in his 1844 essay “The Poet”) has been degraded from its status of original metaphor to become now mere cliché and convention. In this respect he contends that

...la motivación en el nivel del significado (la figura en *Poemas árticos*), en el nivel del significante (la autoreferencia en *Altazor*) o en el nivel del enunciante (la autodefinition en *El ciudadano del olvido*) corresponden a un mismo anhelo poético. (Yúdice 17)

The spectre of Emerson is once again invoked in Mireya Camurati’s *Poesía y poética de Vicente Huidobro* (1980) which provides an invaluable close study of the influence of the New England Transcendentalist (as well as of the *mallorquín* writer Gabriel Alomar) on the formation and development of *creacionismo* (especially as embodied in the texts “Non serviam” and *Adán*). Meanwhile Eduardo Mitre in his *Huidobro, hambre de espacio y sed de cielo* (published in the same year) emphasises Huidobro’s key role in transmitting the key doctrines of the French Symbolists and Decadents (particularly concerning the supremacy of the poetic image or metaphor over rhyming technique) to Latin America.

René de Costa’s *Vicente Huidobro: the Careers of a Poet* (1984) is an indispensable work insofar as it provides probably the most comprehensive biographical overview of Huidobro’s life. As far as Huidobro’s philosophical and aesthetic principles are concerned de Costa discerns no real consistency and argues that

The only constant element in Huidobro’s complicated life and works is not his much touted Creationism, at best a banner of the 1920s, his personal label for literary Cubism, but rather change and the ferocity with which he defended the integrity of this thinking as it evolved. (de Costa 4)

De Costa also asserts that “Huidobro, despite all his posturing over avant-garde principles and practice was fundamentally a lyric poet” (ibid 12), that is to say a poet for whom like Walt Whitman verse is viewed first and foremost as a “Song of Oneself”.

Perhaps one of the most thorough-going examinations of the various sources of and influences on Huidobro’s emerging aesthetic is Luisa Marina Perdigó’s 1994 work *The Origins of Vicente Huidobro’s “Creacionismo” (1911-1916) and its Development (1917-1947)*. Underneath all of Huidobro’s manifold changes in style and mood Perdigó discerns a “unifying symbolist current” (117) and a desire to rediscover the original Platonic Forms behind the veil of the material world. While acknowledging Huidobro’s debt to Romanticism, she also sees in his tendency towards mysticism and use of various hermetic motifs the strong influence of the Belgian Symbolist Georges Rodenbach (130). In Perdigó’s view (as in Goic’s, although with certain differences) the mystical tradition within European literature and philosophy is of primary importance in shaping Huidobro’s personal aesthetic, conferring as it does upon the poet a privileged position as an interpreter of the divine – an Orphic emissary bridging the gap between two worlds.

Oscar Hahn in his 1998 book *Vicente Huidobro o el atentado celeste* falls back once again into the general scholarly consensus regarding the allegedly fragmented and inconsistent nature of Huidobro’s body of work, plagued as he sees it by yawning gaps or ‘desfases’ between theory and practice (15). Like de Costa, he views Huidobro as fundamentally a lyric poet who when he succeeds does so *in spite of*, rather than because of, his aesthetic creed (7). For Hahn, Huidobro’s doctrine of *creacionismo* is anti-humanist and focussed too much on cunning artifice, appealing to intellectual conceit as opposed to emotion.

Samuel Porrata’s 2001 comparative study of the poetry of Vicente Huidobro and Gerardo Diego advances the novel contention that in its anti-mimetic standpoint Huidobro’s *creacionismo* should be seen not so much as a radical departure from pre-existing theories of art but rather as the ‘logical continuation’ of ‘classical’ Spanish 16th and 17th century models (63-64). Supposedly, it was this anti-materialist, mystical aspect of *creacionismo* that allowed a devout Catholic such as Gerardo Diego to become such an enthusiastic disciple of Huidobro. Yet given the latter’s frequent invocation of Nietzsche and the French Decadents we are left with the distinct impression that while Diego may have been a ‘true believer’ in the transcendentalist, idealist aspect of *creacionismo*, for Huidobro himself it was only half of the story.

Other monographs dedicated to the study of Huidobro which are of lesser importance in relation to our present investigation (but whose existence is nonetheless worth mentioning in passing) are David Bary's *Huidobro o la vocación poética* (1963) and Leonardo Garet's *Vicente Huidobro: antipoeta y mago* (1994). With respect to the body of academic essays and theses published on the same subject however, a handful of works appear especially useful to our investigation and deserve to be briefly discussed here.

José Quiroga in his 1988 PhD thesis "Los hilos del paracaídas: Vicente Huidobro y *Altazor*" contends that what is most notable in Huidobro's work is his refusal (unlike many of the European avant-garde poets such as Reverdy and Breton) to acquiesce in the destruction of the "yo romántico" as centre of the poetic universe ("Los hilos" 21). Yet at the same time Quiroga also discerns a concurrence between Huidobro's doctrine of *creacionismo* and the aesthetic of Reverdy and Breton for whom the poem was a product not of mere lyrical subjectivity, but instead an analogical manifestation of some fundamental (though hidden) laws of the universe (115-121).

Two essays by José Quiroga and Saúl Yurkievich also provide some useful insights into the philosophical paradox of Huidobro – for Quiroga, Huidobro's *Altazor* can be read as "...una pugna entre la voz de Walt Whitman y la de Nietzsche" ("El entierro de la poesía" 344) in which the latter ultimately predominates. Meanwhile, for Saúl Yurkievich the poetry of Huidobro is characterised by two opposing tendencies – one towards subjectivity and "confesión personal" and the other towards impersonality and "poesía lúdica/experimental" ("Vicente Huidobro: el alto azor" in *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana* 133). As Yurkievich notes elsewhere, despite Huidobro's insistence on poetry as an act of conscious, willed creation, in practice his art "reniega del intelecto y quiere adentrarse con un salto intuitivo" ("Altazor", o la rebelión de la palabra" 308).

Finally, Lisa Frederick's 2003 MA thesis *Let There Be Revolution: the Destructive Creacionismo of Vicente Huidobro and Gertrude Stein* argues that while Huidobro's literary manifestos and polemics emphasise his poetic creativity and generative capacity, his actual poetry is best characterised as an act of destruction or negation, rupturing the linguistic relationship between signifier and signified. Yet, as she reminds us, the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive for "a phase of destruction must occur prior to the phase of creation" (28).

Theoretical Approach

In an earlier paper I argued, adopting the framework of the critical theorist Theodor Adorno, that (objectively speaking) the poetry of Huidobro's *vanguardista* phase (and indeed of the Hispanic *vanguardia literaria* in general) represents a kind of "negative dialectic" or rebellion against the breakdown of the relationship between artist and audience caused by the onset of impersonal capitalist commodity relations and the twin failures of modernity and Enlightenment rationality.³ At the end of that work, I also tentatively suggested that in this respect Huidobro has much in common with the Romantics who came before him and that Huidobro could perhaps be classified as an essentially Romantic poet. My purpose in this study is to move beyond the parameters of the early 20th century avant-garde to a more detailed inter-textual study of Huidobro's writings (in both poetry and prose) from the various different phases of his career, that is to say not only the *vanguardista* phase of 1916-1931 but also the pre- and post-*vanguardista* periods of his work. In this way, I hope to be able to test this 'Romanticist' hypothesis as well as to focus to a much greater degree than was previously possible on the relationship between Huidobro's poetry and his conceptions of teleology, ontology and aesthetics – that is, taking into account more thoroughly the subjective as opposed to merely objective aspects of his art.

The focus of the present work is then neither philosophy nor pure literary analysis but rather that hybrid discipline known as the "History of Ideas" – defined by Arthur Lovejoy in the following terms:

By the history of ideas I mean something at once more specific and restricted than the history of philosophy. It is differentiated primarily by the character of the units with which it concerns itself. Though it deals in great part with the same material as the other branches of the history of thought and depends greatly upon their prior labours, it divides that material in a special way, brings the parts of it into new groupings and relations, views it from the standpoint of a distinctive purpose. (Lovejoy 3)

In other words, what the historian of ideas seeks to examine is not the totality of a philosophical doctrine or school but rather one or more of the individual concepts that go to form part of it and the way in which these individual concepts manifest themselves in turn in the works of other (often radically opposed) writers and philosophers. Moreover, while the

historian of ideas will often "...seek for the initial emergence of a conception or presupposition in some philosophic or religious system or scientific theory" they will yet look "...for its most significant manifestations in art, and above all in literature." (Lovejoy 17) This is especially true in the case of an intellectual movement such as Romanticism which saw in art the only possible way in which, after the death of God at the hands of the Enlightenment, philosophy could hope to continue. Indeed, as far as the pre-eminent philosopher of early German Romanticism was concerned, the only "...universally acknowledged and incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For the aesthetic intuition simply is the intellectual intuition become objective." (Schelling 229)

In this study we are concerned then with two basic "unit-ideas" (to use Lovejoy's terminology) – one dating at least as far back as Plotinus, the other only to the nineteenth century – and the way in which they have combined in the epoch of capitalist modernity to form the two warring 'souls' of not only Romanticism in general but also (I hope to prove) of the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro.

While some might argue that to follow this path is to risk (in the words of Lovejoy's great critic Quentin Skinner) creating a "mythology of doctrines" – of reading into the works of Huidobro and his Romantic forebears a coherence and consistency that they themselves would not have recognised⁴ – it is my belief that on the contrary the primary value of the present approach is that it stresses the essential self-contradictory and paradoxical nature of their aesthetic. This is not to say that the twin impulses of transcendentalism and vitalism which form the central framework of this study are the *only* set of contradictions which may possibly be discerned in the work of Huidobro and those whose writings most strongly influenced him: merely that they exist. As such, if in seeking to establish and defend the line of argument outlined above it has been necessary to emphasise certain texts or authors and to leave out others, this has not been done in order to mislead the reader but rather because my approach calls for a focus on a single set of ideas rather than the attempting of exhaustive literary surveys and biographies.

Scope and Organisation

Due to the limited amount of space available in an MA thesis it is obviously not possible to study the entirety of Huidobro's work without failing to do it justice. In any case, the purpose of the present study is not to undertake a general survey, since this work has already been

admirably performed by Cedomil Goic and René de Costa (among others). Rather, following my somewhat less ambitious and more specific line of inquiry, priority will be given here firstly to Huidobro's writings on aesthetic theory, beginning with *Non Serviam* and *Pasando y pasando* dating from 1914 and including his collection *Manifestes* published in Paris in 1925 and *Vientos contrarios* (1926). Consideration will also be given to the meta-poetical "nivola", *Sátiro o el poder de las palabras* (1939). Secondly, I will consider a representative selection of Huidobro's poetry that I consider best illustrates the progressive evolution of his aesthetic principles. These selected 'case studies' are: *Canciones en el noche* and *La gruta del silencio* (both 1913), *Las pagodas ocultas* (1914), *Adán* (1916), *El espejo de agua* (1918), *Altazor* (1931), *Ver y palpar* and *El ciudadano del olvido* (both 1941) and *Últimos poemas* (1948). The first three and last two selections I feel are of particular interest, as they have been glossed over or neglected entirely by many of the previous studies of Huidobro which tend to focus only on the period from 1916-1931.

In terms of the organisation of the work, I propose to divide the thesis into 4 chapters (not including the Introduction and Conclusion). The first of these chapters will deal with the theoretical and literary heritage of 19th century German Romanticism as well as of the New England Transcendentalists, Hispanic *modernistas* and French *poètes maudits*, including the key figures Schelling, Hölderlin, Novalis, Schlegel, Lugones, Emerson, Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Lautréamont and their contribution to the development of Huidobro's artistic vision. Following on from this, the second chapter will pick up the chronological narrative by covering the early period of Huidobro's work before 1916 when he was still very much in the process of experimenting with different literary models without yet having developed a fully-formed aesthetic of his own. The third chapter will deal with the "época de creación" or *creacionismo* – beginning with the highly significant *Adán* (1916) and also including the 1918 collection of poems *El espejo de agua* (coeval with Huidobro's first foray into the ranks of the Parisian avant-garde) as well as his many literary manifestos of the early 1920s – before concluding with the publication of *Vientos contrarios* in 1926 not long after Huidobro's return from Europe. Then in the fourth and final chapter I propose to investigate the increasingly existential concerns in Huidobro's writings in the period dating from the publication of *Altazor* until his death, as he searched for a means of reconciling the two main counteracting impulses of his artistic personality within (as the poet himself expressed it in his 1931 manifesto *Total*) some kind of "gran síntesis".

¹ See for example Braulio Arenas' prologue to the 1964 edition of Huidobro's *Obras completas* (reprinted in René de Costa's 1975 critical anthology) which distinguishes no fewer than 9 separate "estados" of *creacionismo*, or Enrique Lihn's "El lugar de Huidobro" according to which the 1931 epic poem *Altazor* represents the demise of literary cubist influences and the resurgence in Huidobro of "el joven poeta seudosimbolista o neomodernista de Adán" (Lihn 380).

² See David A. Rock. *Aestheticism and Poetic Impurity: the Latin American Avant-Garde and Beyond*. PhD thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1996. 33-34.

³ Tim Bowron. "Negative Dialectic or Fatal Paradox? Tension and disunity in the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Vicente Huidobro 1916-1935". *Experimental Poetics and Aesthetics*. Inaugural issue (2010). <http://www.experimentalpoetics.com>

⁴ See Quentin Skinner. "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas". *History and Theory*. 8 1 (1969): 12, 17-18

Chapter 1: The ‘Two Souls’ of Romanticism

As has been outlined in the introduction, the main thesis being proposed in this study is that within the literary current of Romanticism there exist two fundamental conflicting ‘souls’ or antagonistic tendencies – and that these same antagonistic tendencies can also be seen to operate in the work of the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro. Briefly stated, these two antagonistic tendencies are on the one hand the idea of the poet as creator *ex-nihilo* and, on the other, the Neo-Platonist idea of the poet as hierophant or high priest of Nature, the visionary who can perceive and interpret a reality that is *prior to* human existence and the physical world. The purpose of this chapter is to establish some of the preliminary groundwork necessary to this investigation by defining in more precise detail the parameters of the Romantic movement, as well as the nature of these ‘two souls’ which I believe it is possible to see at work within it. Following on from this, the chapter will attempt to sketch out the way in which these hypothesised ‘two souls’ of Romanticism manifested themselves in the work of those poets and philosophers who – it will subsequently be shown – played a major role in the development of Huidobro’s aesthetic.

Defining Romanticism

In the pages that follow, the term ‘Romanticism’ has been given a somewhat broader and more liberal definition than is generally accepted within the field of academic literary criticism. By ‘Romanticism’ I mean to encompass not only the literary movements that self-consciously laid claim to this name (such as the German ‘Jena School’), but also the Romantics’ spiritual children, the French Decadents and Symbolists, as well as the Spanish-American *modernistas* and early 20th century avant-garde(s). All of the artistic currents mentioned above shared as Octavio Paz points out in his series of 1972 Charles Eliot Morton lectures (subsequently published in book-form as *Los hijos del limo*) a disdain for or disillusionment with both the bourgeois-rationalist narrative of the Enlightenment and the socio-cultural phenomenon known as ‘modernity’ (*Los hijos* 72-73, 88-94). Yet, at the same time, they were conscious that a return to the old certainties of the pre-Raphaelite age was impossible since, thanks to the philosophical and scientific advances of the Enlightenment, the concept of a personal and imminent deity was now, to all intents and purposes, dead (*Los hijos* 44-51).

Alienated in this way from both the present and the past these writers appear as artistic orphans – uncertain of both themselves and of their audience. Although the particular strategies that the members of this broader Romantic Movement deploy in order to try to overcome or compensate for this sense of essential abandonment vary, what unites them is a common conviction in the superiority of the poetic or analogical as opposed to the empirical or rationalist vision of reality. While some of these writers (such as Novalis and Schlegel) devote themselves to the task of re-enchanting the world through the creation of a new mythology and others (such as Baudelaire and Lautréamont) to an inner voyage down into the depths of the human psyche, all (I contend) ultimately partake of the same ‘Romantic spirit’.

In *Eros and Civilisation* Herbert Marcuse argues that the turn towards a poetic or analogical vision of the world among the German Idealists at the end of the 18th century represents the revenge of the aesthetic function – incarnated in the mythological archetypes of Orpheus and Narcissus – against instrumental reason and productive labour, represented by the figure of Prometheus (161-2, 170-171). Theodor Adorno and E.M. Cioran also reinforce this point concerning the impossibility of an instrumentalist view of art in the epoch of capitalist modernity. Adorno notes that the capitalist “culture industry” desires nothing more than the complete “deaestheticisation of art” (*Aesthetic Theory* 14) and that as such the only true art is that which insists on its complete autonomy from empirical reality – art for art’s sake. Meanwhile Cioran writes that:

The modern artist is a solitary who writes for himself or for a public of whom he has no precise notion. Linked to an epoch, he struggles to express its features; but this epoch is necessarily faceless. He does not know whom he is addressing, he does not imagine his reader... When we imagine that once upon a time a mangled metaphor discredited a writer, that an academician lost face for an impropriety, or that a witticism uttered in a courtesan’s hearing could procure a situation, even an abbey (such was Talleyrand’s case), we measure the distance that has been covered since. (Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist* 129-130)

In this way, we can see that in Romanticism (which along with poetry Cioran ironically claims to abhor) we are confronting not so much a literary style or technique but a socio-historical phenomenon, arising out of the ‘death of God’ and of the Middle Ages at the hands of the European Enlightenment. In support of this contention, it is possible to cite the words

of two distinguished scholars of the Romantic literary phenomenon - Mario Praz and M.H. Abrams. In his book *The Romantic Agony*, Praz declares that Romanticism resides "...in that which cannot be described" – a *zeitgeist* to which word and form are in the end only secondary accessories, but which can perhaps best be summarised by Schiller's quixotic comment on reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, that "automatically we take the side of the loser" (Praz 14, 57). Meanwhile for Abrams it is with the "...disappearance of a homogenous and discriminating reading public" at the end of the 18th century that poetry – that most subjective of literary forms – comes into its own (Abrams 25). While deprived of a social function, the poet/artist is at the same time liberated from the need to faithfully mirror the world around them and can instead as Abrams suggests become a lamp projecting outwards, envisioning and creating fresh worlds and fresh realities.

Theoreticians of the 20th century avant-garde such as Renato Poggioli have also observed that Romanticism shared with that particular artistic movement a common bond in their sense of alienation from capitalist modernity, and that as such "any historical synthesis of avant-gardism will begin with...the earliest romanticism" (226). Poggioli further notes that there is a crucial distinction to be made between theoretical and polemical consciousness, such that avant-garde artists were often moved to deny their relationship to the very movements or schools (Romanticism, Symbolism) out of which their aesthetic has evolved (48).

Underlining this distinction between the objective and subjective classification of artists, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre note that artistic labels such as 'Romantic' have often been bestowed retrospectively on literary figures such as the English Lake Poets despite these artists never having claimed this distinction for themselves (Löwy and Sayre 44).

While Poggioli assigns primacy to the label of "avant-gardism" over Romanticism in describing the unifying artistic current that threads together artists such as Wordsworth, Mallarmé and Breton, the point of the forgoing has been to emphasise that we are dealing with Romanticism as an objective, historically defined phenomenon with a shared underlying *weltanschauung* rather than a purely stylistic tendency. In addition, it has – I hope – also been demonstrated that the identification of an avant-garde poet such as Vicente Huidobro with Romanticism – while certainly controversial – is not however entirely without precedent.

Admittedly it must be conceded that those few scholars who have previously explored the possibility of a link between Huidobro and Romanticism have done so only in order to ultimately reject it. David Rock for instance in his 1996 PhD thesis "Aestheticism and Poetic

Impurity: the Latin American Avant-Garde and Beyond” argues (following Ortega y Gasset) that in the “aesthetic individualism” of Huidobro “...when the individual is affirmed it is in a specifically artistic capacity” while the Romantic poet adopts a tone that is much more personal or confessional (Rock 33-34). However, it is one of the central contentions of this thesis that both of these seemingly contradictory impulses (aesthetic nihilism and lyricism) can be contained within the work of the same poet and of the same literary and philosophical movement.

The ‘Two Souls’

In his book *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Umberto Eco shows that the fundamental dilemma with which we are here concerned (does the poet really create *ex-nihilo* or merely intuit a pre-existing divine order of things?) can in some sense be traced all the way back to the Book of Genesis. After citing the passage in Genesis in which Adam gives names to all of the birds and animals brought before him by God following the original act of Biblical Creation, Eco then comments

Clearly we are here in the presence of a motif, common to other religions and mythologies – that of the nomothete, the name-giver, the creator of language. Yet it is not at all clear on what basis Adam chooses the names he gave to the animals...Adam might have called animals ‘by their own names’ in two senses. Either he gave them the names that, by some extra-linguistic right, were already *due* to them, or he gave them those names we still use on the basis of a convention already initiated by Adam. In other words, the names that Adam gave the animals are either the names that each animal intrinsically *ought* to have been given, or simply the names that the nomothete arbitrarily and *ad placitum* decided to give them. (Eco 8)

The passage above was worth, I think, quoting at such length because it provides such a wonderful analogy for the predicament of poets writing in the post-Enlightenment age. For, as Eco demonstrates in the course of his unfolding narrative, until the discoveries of the Enlightenment the universal assumption among Western theologians, artists and philosophers was that the names chosen by Adam were given in a ‘perfect’ language – now sadly lost – that corresponded to the divine essence of the entities so named. In other words, the act of

name-giving was in no way arbitrary but rather inspired by the deity, with Adam in the role of intermediary vessel.

While efforts to recover this ‘perfect’ language of creation over the millennia yielded only rather disappointing (if nonetheless fascinating) results, the possibility of enacting – through art – an analogic version of the original (divine) creation was however finally discovered by the early Romantics in the writings of the 3rd century philosopher Plotinus. Plotinus, while claiming to be no more than a humble disciple of Plato and his anti-materialist ontology, dissented from the conventional Platonic view that art represented merely a copying of the material phenomena of the physical world, which in turn were only imperfect copies of the Ideal Forms from which all things take their essential nature. Against this proposition, Plotinus’s argument as set out in his *Six Enneads* is twofold:

- 1) First of all, that “...the soul – by the very truth of its nature, by its affiliation to the noblest Existents in the hierarchy of Being – when it sees anything of that kin, or any trace of that kinship, thrills with an immense delight” and from this recognition of the shared origin of the soul and the object of perception in the All-Soul and divine Intellectual Principle derives our sense of the Beautiful (I VI.2). However it arises that not all souls are conscious of this fact and so many mistake the image (i.e. the object of perception) for reality (i.e. the First Principle from which it derives its existence) and so instead of being led through a process of internal contemplation back to the higher realm remain forever mired in the plane of surface appearances (III V.1). Yet the true “lovers” (i.e. lovers of the Good), Plotinus tells us, “...in pain of love towards Beauty but not held by material loveliness...reach to the source of this loveliness of the Soul, thence to whatever be above that again, until the uttermost is reached” (V IX.2). So in this way the vision of Beauty in the external world is reflected inward and causes the individual to realise the essential identity between their soul and the rest of the universe. This kind of synthetic self-knowledge, Plotinus tells us, is analogous to that “painless labour” by which the Intellectual Principle (mythologised as Kronos) engendered Creation (V VIII.12).
- 2) Following on from this line of argument Plotinus argues that the beauty of the arts¹ lie not in their ability to act as a simulacrum of the physical forms, “...for they give no bare reproduction of thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives” (V VIII.1). In other words, the artist when in the act of creative

production has in mind not the external (ephemeral) appearance of that which they paint, sculpt or describe but rather the eternal essence – what Plotinus calls the “Reason-Principle”. Using the analogy of a sculptor working upon stone, Plotinus argues that the finished sculpture derives its “beauty of form” not from the crude block of stone out of which it was fashioned, but rather “...in virtue of the form or idea introduced by the art. This form is not in the material; it is in the designer before it even enters the stone; and the artificer holds it not by his equipment of eyes and hands but by his participation in his art” (ibid). Therefore the artist may be numbered among the race of superior beings for whom the relationship with the physical universe is no longer that of spectator and spectacle (V VIII.10-11), since to them such arbitrary distinctions and modes of separation have been abolished with the realisation that “...Soul is not in the universe, on the contrary universe is in the Soul” (V V.9).

Although in the philosophy of Plotinus this transcendentalist theory of art was little more than a side note – a useful analogy for his fundamental doctrine concerning the original unity of the cosmos and the possibility of the soul’s return to that state of eternal repose – in the writings of the early Romantics – particularly F.W.J. Schelling and the Jena School – the idea assumed a much deeper importance.² In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) Schelling builds on Plotinus’s dialectic of a divided world-soul striving perpetually to return to its original condition of absolute unity by arguing that the work of art, as the union of the conscious and unconscious – of freedom and Nature – is the only path by which Man can proceed to the rediscovery of the Absolute. This is so Schelling argues (echoing Plotinus) because what we call beautiful is nothing more than our recognition of the Infinite finitely displayed (225). The work of art is therefore legitimated as the tangible expression of that which can only be *intuited* through rational discursive philosophy, namely:

...the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must fly forever apart. The view of nature, which the philosopher frames artificially, is for art the original and natural one. What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognise in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvellously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from

itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers, as through words the meaning, as if through dissolving mists and the land of fantasy, of which we are in search. (Schelling 231-2)

At the dawn of the post-Enlightenment Age when empirical science seemed to have swept away the entire rational basis of faith, art was then for Schelling and his fellow members of the Jena School the only means by which a belief in the Christian God or the Neo-Platonist Absolute could still in some manner be maintained. Yet, in the space of little more than half a century this doctrine would undergo so radical a modification that art, from being a means of approximating the Absolute, became instead for many poets and philosophers the Absolute itself.

The philosophical spokesperson for this dialectical outgrowth of the original Neo-Platonist current of Romanticism (with which however it continued to co-exist in a situation of permanent tension) was Friedrich Nietzsche, though he was not in the truest sense its initiator (the founder of the French Decadents, Charles Baudelaire, was some two decades ahead of him). In one of his earliest works, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche tells us that the world as we see and experience it is only an artistic illusion or dream (analogous with the qualities of the Greek sun-god Apollo) born out of the need for escape from the primordial reality which is Nothingness – the awful “wisdom of Silenus” that the greatest thing for humanity would be never to have been born (Nietzsche 16-26). However at the same moment that we embrace this comforting semblance (*schein*) of beauty (*schönheit*) we are aware that it is but a subjective illusion and so periodically are tempted to succumb to the “horrible ecstasy” or intoxication of the primal non-individuated reality (*Das Ur-Eine*, represented for Nietzsche by the emblem of Dionysos). Thus the Idealist conception of art promulgated by Plotinus and Schelling has been separated from its divine source with the somewhat paradoxical result that the position of the individual artist is at once exalted and negated. For, says Nietzsche,

“...what must be clear to us above all, both to our humiliation *and* to our elevation, is that the whole comedy of art is certainly not performed by us, neither for our edification nor for our education, just as we are far from truly being the creators of that world of art; conversely, however, we may well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity lies in our significance as works of art – for

only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally
justified... (Nietzsche 32-33)

In other words, the artist creates not "...as a willing individual in pursuit of his own, egotistical goals" (32) but rather because they are compelled by the objective necessity of filling an otherwise empty vacuum with a semblance of order and beauty, however arbitrary. Returning then to the original passage cited from Genesis we can say that in the Nietzschean universe the naming of Creation would proceed on the basis of purely aesthetic – rather than theological – considerations. The elevation of the artist to the position formerly occupied by the Biblical Creator at once exalts and devalues the significance of the artwork, since as something which emerges *ex-nihilo* it no longer holds any relation to ontological or epistemological truth. Art has become, as Stéphane Mallarmé termed it, a cosmic "roll of the dice".

Having thus established the philosophical parameters of our investigation, let us turn now to the way in which each of these 'two souls' of Romanticism has been reflected in literary praxis.

Hölderlin: the divine vessel

The German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) provides in many ways the perfect archetype of the Neo-Platonist trend within Romanticism. Although his literary career developed largely in isolation from his contemporaries in the Jena School who were the first to openly identify with the term 'Romantic' (del Caro 12), Hölderlin's belief in poetry as a special type of knowledge and a conduit to accessing the divine has for most scholars justified his retrospective inclusion within the Romantic movement. In particular, his unfinished tragedy *The Death of Empedocles* (which exists in three draft versions) and a number of his later odes and hymns from the period 1798-1803 deal in explicit terms with what Hölderlin regarded as the quasi-religious vocation of the poet.

Hölderlin's fascination with the figure of Empedocles is especially significant, argues Adrian del Caro, due to Empedocles' philosophical view of the cosmos as ruled by two primal forces – love and strife, or *eros* and *eris* – reflecting Hölderlin's own deeply-felt personal struggle between the contradictory impulses towards union and separation with humanity (del Caro 26). Hölderlin was also drawn to Empedocles due to his status as an exile banished from his

Ionian homeland who (according to legend) perished by jumping into the fires of Mount Etna – thus overcoming his internal contradiction and becoming, in a sense, immortal through union with the earth’s elemental forces. Significantly, it is in the mouth of Empedocles that Hölderlin puts many of his most profound observations on the relationship between poets, the gods and men. Thus he has Empedocles ask:

Was wäre denn der Himmel und das Meer
Und Inseln und Gestirn, und was vor Augen
Den Menschen alles liegt, was wär es,
Diß todte Saitenspiel, gäb’ ich ihm Ton
Und Sprach’ und Seele nicht, was sind
Die Götter und ihr Geist, wenn ich sie nicht
Verkündige?

[And what indeed would Heaven be and Ocean / And islands and the stars,
and all that meets / The eyes of men, what would it mean or be, / This dead
stringed instrument, did I not lend it / A resonance, a language and a soul? /
What are the gods, and what their spirit, if I / Do not proclaim them?]
(Hölderlin tr. Hamburger 382,383)

In one his earliest poems, “Menschenbeifall” (“Human Applause”) Hölderlin had already voiced his belief that the true measure of an artist’s worth could only come from the gods and not from the vulgar public which “...gefällt, was auf den Markplatz taugt” (84).³ Yet, paradoxically, the gods are no longer accessible to mankind except through the intermediary of the poet, as he describes it in one of the most famous of his later odes, “Brod und Wein” (“Bread and Wine”):

Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter,
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.
Endlos wirken sie da und scheinens wenig zu achten,
Ob wir leben, so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns.
Denn nicht immer vermag ein schwaches Gefäß sie zu fassen,
Nur zu Zieten erträgt göttliche Fülle der Mensch.

[But my friend, we have come too late. Though the gods are living, / Over our
heads they live, up in a different world. / Endlessly there they act and, such is

their kind wish to spare us, / Little they seem to care whether we live or do not.
/ For not always a frail, a delicate vessel can hold them, / Only at times can our
kind bear the full impact of gods.] (Hölderlin tr. Hamburger 384,325)

However, as Hölderlin would later write prophetically (in view of his own impending descent into madness) in “Am Quell Der Donau” (“At the Source of the Danube”) when the gods too greatly love a man “...Er ruht nicht, bis er euer einer geworden” (480).⁴ In this version of Romanticism then, the poet draws his creative visionary power from a state of *ekstasis* or self-abandonment and is filled with the divine fire, just as one of the maenads of Dionysos. However, equally as assuredly as the followers of the wine god, the poet who follows this path will in the end lose their sanity and perhaps even their life.

Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis: the priests of the new religion

In 1799, shortly after reading his friend Schleiermacher’s apologetic *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, Novalis (the pen name of the young Friedrich von Hardenberg) sat down to write what would become one of the defining documents of German Romanticism, the essay “Christianity or Europe”. In that essay, Novalis castigates the European Enlightenment and Protestant Reformation for “...cleansing nature, the earth, human souls and learning of poetry, rooting out every trace of the sacred, spoiling the memory of all uplifting incidents and people by sarcastic remarks, and stripping the world of all bright ornament” (144). Much more than a nostalgic paean for Mediaeval Catholicism, Novalis’ essay is a call-to-arms or appeal to re-awaken the human sense of wonder and mystery, asleep in Europe for over three centuries. Novalis looks forward to the proximate demise of the secular-rationalist “delusion” which he says “...had to be exhausted for the benefit of posterity” for soon “...poetry, like a bejewelled India, will stand more captivately and more colourfully over against the cold, dead Spitzbergen of that stuffy understanding” (148).

Although Novalis was undoubtedly influenced by Schleiermacher in terms of his teleology, ontologically speaking his essay pointed in a radically different direction. While the purpose of Schleiermacher’s apologetic was to highlight the limits of rational inquiry and human understanding so that a remaining quotient of mystery could be reserved for religion, Novalis (although also rejecting the rationalism of the Enlightenment *philosophes*) believed that human beings *could* access a higher, transcendent plane of reality beyond the veil of surface appearances - through the power of analogy. As one scholar has expressed it, Schleiermacher

“...considered it a vain pretension to try to remove the veil and thus could not concur with the poet who, though he agreed that no mortal can lift the veil, suggested that the mortal (Hyacinth, Heinrich, the poet or whomever) become an immortal god” (Forstman 84). Expressed in Nietzschean terms, while Schleiermacher views the ideal human type as occupying a middle ground between the dialectical poles of the Apollonian *principium individuationis* and Dionysian *ekstasis* or between the eternity of *appearance* and the eternity of *Will*, Novalis wants to embrace these extremes to the exclusion of all else.

Perhaps the best summation of Novalis’ poetic theory of ontology can be discovered in the following fragment, written only a year before his death:

The poet is truly bereft of his senses – instead everything takes place within him. In the truest sense he presents *subject object – mind and world*. From this comes the infinity of a good poem, eternity. The sense for poetry is closely related to the sense of prophecy and the religious, the seer’s sense itself. The poet orders, combines, chooses, invents – and even to himself it is incomprehensible why it is just so and not otherwise. (Novalis 162-3)

To put it even more succinctly, as he wrote in his earlier unfinished *General Draft*, “it is all one whether I posit the universe in myself or myself in the universe” (Novalis 133). In this way, poetry can be understood as kind of “synthetic” knowledge in the same sense employed by Kant (129). Precisely because it *does not* aim (in the manner of the *stile rappresentativo* or declamatory operatics so excoriated by Nietzsche) at the imitation of the external world, poetry is to be preferred in this Neo-Platonist school of aesthetics:

We dream of travelling through the universe – but is not the universe *within ourselves*? The depths of our spirit are unknown to us – the mysterious way leads inwards. Eternity with its worlds – the past and future – is in ourselves or nowhere. The external world is the world of shadows – it throws its shadow into the realm of light. (Novalis 25)

If in this respect Novalis appears to approximate the position of Hölderlin it should however be emphasised that whereas for the latter poetry was entirely an act of self-abandonment or passive surrendering, in the case of the former the poet is both the possessed and the possessor – both object (self-negating) and subject (self-affirming). The poet is the priest of a new religion, but it is a religion entirely of his own creation.

This seemingly paradoxical combination of the idea of the poet as both original creator/inventor and as medium/conduit to some reality beyond the confines of the physical universe found perhaps its fullest expression in the work of Novalis' close friend and collaborator, the essayist and critic Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel, speaking through his *dramatis persona* Ludovico in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, manages to reconcile these two elements by arguing that what the poet creates (or at least *ought to create*) is neither a representation nor something completely new – but rather a *mythology* (81-82). “And what else,” Schlegel has Ludovico ask rhetorically, “is any wonderful mythology but hieroglyphic expression of surrounding nature in this transfigured form of imagination and love?” (85). Poetry is therefore only a kind of provisional truth, but it is nevertheless a truth that belongs to the artist alone and depends on their agency for its realisation. This somewhat existential adaptation of the Idealist philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte perhaps goes some way towards explaining Schlegel's fundamentally ironic world view, according to which – as he put it in one of his aphorisms – “everything must be jest and yet seriousness, artless openness and yet deep dissimulation” (131).

As a means of acquiring knowledge of the Infinite or divine element, poetry is likened by Schlegel to religion and the role of the poet to that of the priest. “The priest as such exists only in the invisible world”, Schlegel comments. “How can he appear among men? On earth he will only want to transform the finite into the eternal, and thus, whatever title he may have, he must be and remain an artist” (150). Poetry has this special mystical status because it refuses to confine itself to a utilitarian concept of language; instead of serving the purpose of communication words take on an allegorical or analogical function and “if the harmonious dullards fail to understand” then so much the better in Schlegel's view! Precisely because it is anti-rational and tends towards the hermetic, poetry is deemed capable (unlike systematic philosophy) of approaching the “highest beauty” in the universe which is “that of chaos” (82). In summary, the poet is a seer-mage who fashions “from the deepest depths of the spirit” a mythological version of the inexpressible Infinite.

Emerson: the role of the poet-shaman

As Robert McGahey notes in his study of the Orphic motif in the work of Plato, Nietzsche and Mallarmé, the figure of Orpheus is the living and breathing embodiment of the contradiction between Dionysos and Apollo. Orpheus, it will be recalled, was the Greek

tragic hero who, following the sudden death of his wife Eurydice travelled to the underworld and so moved Hades and Persephone with the playing of his lyre and the power of his song that they agreed to release his beloved. While on one level Orpheus represents the triumph of the Apollonian artist imposing order upon chaos and maintaining what Schopenhauer and Nietzsche would refer to as the protective “Veil of Maya” (witnessed also by his ability to calm wild and savage beasts), at the same time he also stands for surrender to the unconscious since his lyrical ability stems entirely from the fact that he is divinely possessed.

So too, then, the Orphic bard or poet feels themselves to be at one and the same time an “instrument” of the Muses and an autonomous individual whose verse is the product of a process of *willed* creation. The Orphic poet disdains the mere mimetic representation of the external world and instead aims at *anamnesis* – the recollection of the original Platonic Forms from which everything derives its essential nature (McGahey 3, 8). Yet, in the act of singing or utterance (the word ‘poet’ we must remember comes from the Greek verb *poiesis* meaning ‘to make’) they become in a very real sense a creator or demigod (as Huidobro would say “un pequeño dios”) in their own right.

McGahey finds that this Orphic tradition is resuscitated after remaining largely dormant for over two millennia in the figures of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. As McGahey puts it, “central to this tradition is the effort of poetry and philosophy to reunite and refind their ground, a recognizable romantic hope” (51-52). However, given that both Nietzsche and Mallarmé (along with Mallarmé’s literary *confrères* Baudelaire and Lautréamont) regard the poet’s act of creation as an essentially negative one it would seem more appropriate to look elsewhere for the incarnation of the Orphic aesthetic of liminality. In the New England poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson we can detect perhaps a more suitable intermediary.

In a famous passage from his 1844 essay ‘The Poet’, Emerson contends that

...it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem, – a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and form are equal in the order of time, but in order the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form. (*CW III* 6-7)

Thus in the act of naming things the poet in a sense creates them anew by penetrating to the Platonic essence behind the physical form:

He perceives the thoughts independence of the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidentality and fugacity of the symbol. As the eyes of Lyncaeus were said to see through the earth, so the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession. (*CW III* 12)

The privileged status of the poet is due to the fact that, according to Emerson, Nature can only be truly perceived by those who can "...stand out of our low limitations, like a Chimborazo under the line, running up from the torrid base through all the climates of the globe, with belts of herbage of every latitude on its high and mottled sides" (*CW III* 6). Since the "Universe is the externisation of the soul" (*CW III* 9) it is only natural that those least preoccupied with the material world and closest to the divine – the poet-philosophers – should be the best qualified to interpret it.

Lugones' *Las montañas del oro*: the poet as visionary

This likening of the role of the poet to a lofty mountain – solitary and remote – also emerges as a strong theme in the early *modernista* poetry of the literary and political iconoclast Leopoldo Lugones. That this should be the case is not especially surprising given that, as Gwen Kirkpatrick notes in her study of the Argentine poet (notwithstanding his later violent reaction against this literary mode in *Lunario sentimental*) "the *modernista* concept of the artist as one who is divinely inspired and who possesses the gift of perceiving the interrelationship of nature and spirit, has its roots in romanticism" (Kirkpatrick 38-39). For the youthful Lugones, the poet is the incarnation of the world-soul, as is made clear in the Introduction to his 1897 volume *Las montañas del oro* which is worth quoting at some length:

Parece que en los hombros lleva amarrado el viento
Es el gran luminoso y es el gran tenebroso.
La rubia primavera le elige por su esposo.
Él se acuesta con todas las flores de las cimas.
Las flores le dan besos para que él les dé rimas.
El sol le dora el pecho, Dios le sonr e – apenas

Hay nada más sublime que esas sonrisas, llenas
De divinidad, que hacen surgir sobre la obscura
Siluete de las montañas una inmensa blancura
Zodiacal. (Lugones 16)

As with Emerson, Nature clearly occupies a subordinate position in relation to the poet; as evidenced in the line “Las flores le dan besos para que él les dé rimas”. However, the overall impression is of a figure who is not so much Orphic shaman as prophet or visionary (vidente). While God has not yet been banished completely from the heavens, the relationship between the poet and the divine is closer to being one of equals rather than a strict hierarchy of Father/Knower and Son/Sayer, as Emerson’s theodicy expresses it. Later on, Lugones refers to the poet as “Uno de esos enjendros del prodigio, uno de esos / Armoniosos doctores del Espíritu Santo” and likens the relationship between poet and God to that of the skylark and the sun, who he hastens to remind us “...tienen de común estos puntos / Que reinan en los cielos y se levantan juntos” while “El canto de esos grandes es como un tren de guerra / Cuyas sonoras llantas surcan toda la tierra.” In the poem ‘La vendimia del sangre’ from the first cycle of *Las montañas*, Lugones goes as far as to describe the soul of the poet as a veritable micro-cosmos, filled with jungles, stars weeping fire and shooting comets (34).

If Emerson’s ‘The Poet’ provides much of the theoretical underpinning to Huidobro’s *Adán*, it is clear that *Las montañas del oro* prefigures aspects of not only that work but also *Altazor*. The motif of the descent of the poet-mage from the heavens to earth is one obvious point of similarity between the two (cf. Lugones 23-24), although the heroic couplets of Lugones’ Introduction do admittedly contrast with the free verse encountered in the Preface of *Altazor*. The poem ‘A histeria’, also from the first cycle of *Las montañas*, invites still more comparisons in its invocation of a vertiginous plunge into the abyss so deep “que allí no había dios” (28) and stern injunctions to an unnamed female interlocutor not to look directly into the eyes of the poet because they are filled with “...relámpagos – de fiebre en sus honduras misterioasas, – y la noche de mi alma más abajo: – ¡una noche cruzada de cometas – que son gigantes pensamientos blancos!” as well as being “...sangrientos como dos cadalsos” (ibid). Yet in spite of this, Lugones is not yet prepared to take the Luciferic rebellion to its ultimate conclusion and deny completely the role of the divine in poetic inspiration, as in the third cycle of *Las montañas* (‘El himno de las torres) skylark and sun – poet and God – are reunited once again.

Nietzsche, Mallarmé and the French Decadents: the world in a beautiful book

As mentioned in the discussion of Emerson above, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and poet Stéphane Mallarmé have been viewed by some scholars as belonging in the Orphic tradition due to their apparent desire to reverse the entire course of Western philosophy since Socrates and reunite philosophy with poetry and mysticism. However, the key differences it seems to me separating the aesthetic of Nietzsche and Mallarmé along with the rest of the French Decadent school from the Orphic model are, first of all, the denial of (or at least profound scepticism concerning the possibility of accessing) the realm of the divine/Platonic Ideal Forms and secondly (and necessarily flowing on from the first proposition) the fact that there is therefore no longer any correspondence between the linguistic province of poetic creation and the physical world. Denied access to the divine Muse, the poet or artist can have recourse only to madness, dreams or drug-induced delirium.

In the writings of Nietzsche, Mallarmé and the *poètes maudits* the artist for the first time claims absolute sovereignty and authorial originality – yet far from proving to be a moment of self-affirmation the result is in many respects tantamount to self-abnegation. This is the paradox of the “other soul” of Romanticism, now that the Orphic bridge has been crossed and the sunlit lands of Neo-Platonist transcendentalism been left far behind. Having wrestled with and defeated God, the poet discovers that in the process they have also lost their privileged station in the great cosmic Chain of Being. Hence the reproachful cry of Lautréamont’s protagonist in *Maldoror*:

Moi, comme les chiens, j’éprouve le besoin de l’infini... Je ne puis, je ne puis contenter ce besoin! Je suis fils de l’homme et de la femme, d’après ce qu’on m’a dit. Ça m’étonne... je croyais être davantage!” (Lautréamont 29)

[I, like the dogs, feel the thirst for the infinite... I cannot, cannot satisfy this thirst! I am the son of man and woman, so they tell me. That astounds me... I thought myself more!]⁵

Or, as Sartre puts it in his study of Mallarmé, having once vanquished God the *poètes maudits* are filled with a sudden and overwhelming “nostalgia for the Infinite” – for now poetry becomes a mere mechanical technique and “...sacred delirium...just another kind of quirky obsession” (Sartre 24-29).

Face-to-face with this tragic realisation the question must be asked, of what use is it for the poet to go on creating? Nietzsche sums up this dilemma in a memorable passage in *The Birth of Tragedy* discussing a post-Apollonian world, in which all that remains is ‘Dionysos’ (Nietzsche’s term for the *Ur-Eine* or unmediated reality) and the abyss:

...Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things, they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. (Nietzsche 40)

One possible answer, as expressed by Mallarmé in a letter to his friend Henri Cazalis dated from 1864 discussing the preparation of his dramatic poem *Hérodiade*, is to forge a “...new poetics, which I could define in these very few words: *paint, not the object, but the effect it produces*” (Mallarmé, *Selected Letters* 39). Since the Death of God has irrevocably sundered the poet from the natural world, the poet must traffic in sense-impressions and language (or as Nietzsche would say in “representations”) rather than Platonic Essences. In any case, the existence of the empirical world is highly doubtful since, as Nietzsche quipped, even Descartes could only prove its reality by “...an appeal to the existence of God and his inability to lie” (Nietzsche 63). So then who is to say that an act of purely verbal creation is of any less consequence than the construction of the grandest palace or city? Indeed, as far as Mallarmé and Nietzsche are concerned the entire world is validated only when it is converted through the medium of art into an aesthetic spectacle. “...Tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre”⁶ Mallarmé wrote in ‘Le Livre, instrument spirituel’ (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* 378) or, as Nietzsche expressed it “only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified” (Nietzsche 33). Thus the original relationship between Aesthetics and Reason defined by Kant is, as Hegel might say, stood on its head.

Making a virtue out of their lack of regard for and relevance to the empirical world, the poet-aesthete or ‘Dandy’ considers themselves to be “...a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to break down because established...on the divine gifts that neither work nor money can give” (Baudelaire, *Selected Writings* 421). They write poetry solely in order to escape existential *ennui*, like the traveller in Baudelaire’s *Le voyage* who departs purely for the sake of departing rather than in order to reach any particular destination. The final canto of that poem makes this aesthetic of Decadence explicit:

Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,
Nos coeurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous reconforte!
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau!* (Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* 134)

[O death, old captain, the time has come! Let us weigh anchor! / This land bores us, O Death! Let us sail! / If the sky and the sea are as black as ink, / Our hearts which you know are filled with rays! / Pour out your poison so that it will comfort us! / The fire searing our brain is such that we want / To plunge to the bottom of the abyss, whether it be Heaven or Hell, / To the bottom of the Unknown in order to find something *new!*]

This then is the “ocio lúdico” identified by Cecil Wood in his study of Huidobro (referred to earlier in the introduction) which forms the dialectical counterpoint to the poet-mage or poet-priest, each of these impulses representing one half of the ‘two souls’ of Romanticism. How they are concretely manifested in the work of the Chilean *vanguardista* we shall now turn to in the next chapter.

¹ It is true that Plotinus does appear to contradict this view somewhat in a later passage comparing the “imitative” and “intellectual” arts (V IX.11) according to which only those arts concerned with abstract symmetry (such as music, and presumably poetry) partake *directly* of the Intellectual Beauty, however this passage seems to have been largely ignored by the Romantic movement and in any case since our investigation does not concern the plastic arts (sculpture, painting etc.) seems largely irrelevant.

² For a detailed examination of the influence of Plotinus on Schelling, see Werner Beierwaltes “The Legacy of Neoplatonism in F.W.J. Schelling’s Thought.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. 10 4 (2002): 393-428

³ “likes best what sells in the marketplace” (Hölderlin tr. Hamburger 84)

⁴ “He finds no rest till he is one of you” (Hölderlin tr. Hamburger 481)

⁵ Although it should be noted here that some scholars such as Anna Balakian see in Lautréamont’s *Maldoror* a kind of democratic inversion of the Chain of Being, rather than a destruction (Balakian 63). However, as Peter Nesselroth points out Lautréamont’s primary strategy for overcoming his *besoin de l’infini* seems to be a purely

nihilistic one – namely by creating, in *Maldoror* and *Poésies*, two dialectically opposed artistic personae and points-of-view (Nesselroth 122).

⁶ “everything in the world exists to end up in a book”

Chapter 2: The Prehistory of Huidobro's *creacionismo*

Having sketched out in the previous chapter the 'two souls' or countervailing tendencies of poetry in the epoch of modernity, it is now possible to begin an assessment of the extent to which these antagonistic impulses are reflected in the work of the principal subject of this investigation – the Chilean *vanguardista* Vicente Huidobro. In the pages that follow, I propose to pick up the traces of our literary inquiry in what I have called for want of a better term the "prehistory of *creacionismo*": namely the period up until 1916 when he had still yet to elucidate his aesthetic in programmatic form.¹

Discounting the adolescent poetry of *Ecos del alma* (1912) which consists essentially of a series of exercises in imitation –or in some cases mere translation – of 19th century Romantic poets (most notably Heinrich Heine and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer) focussing on conventional and unoriginal tropes of religious piety, romantic love and patriotism, we accordingly begin with the first two 'mature' collections of Huidobro – *Canciones en la noche* and *La gruta del silencio* – both published in 1913. The other principal works to be included from this period will be *Las pagodas ocultas* as well as the collection of essays *Pasando y pasando* (both dating from 1914) and finally the text of his public address given in the same year (though it remained uncollected and unpublished until 1945) "Non serviam".

Canciones en la noche

Although published almost concurrently with *La gruta del silencio* (1913), the poems contained in *Canciones en la noche* were in fact the product of a slightly earlier stage in Huidobro's literary evolution when he was still emerging from the phase of youthful imitation. The poet himself was keen to emphasise this fact in his preface to the collection:

Con excepción de algunas composiciones, no tengo a este libro gran cariño. Lo publico como una muestra de mi evolución entre aquel primer libro de los diecisiete años, *Ecos del alma*, y *La gruta del silencio*, libro que quiero y del cual estoy plenamente satisfecho. (*OP* 181)²

As such there is less here that is pertinent to the study of Huidobro's personal aesthetic than in *Gruta*; however there are a handful of poems which are worthy of a brief discussion in relation to our theme.

While many of the poems in the first section of *Canciones* such as “La Orquídea” and “Apoteosis” are essentially literary homages to the founder of Hispanic *modernismo*, Rubén Darío³ or to his Spanish disciple Valle-Inclán (“Estas Trovas”) – with a few nods to French Symbolists such as Mallarmé thrown in for good measure (“Salomé”) – in the second part of the collection entitled “Japoneñas de estío” Huidobro begins for the first time to break new literary ground.

In particular, it is worth paying some considerable attention to the calligram-poem “La Capilla Aldeana” (see Appendix) which besides the obvious typographical innovations (influenced no doubt by Huidobro’s reading of the poetry of Apollinaire in the literary review *Mercur de Paris*) begins to reveal for the first time traces of the analogical vision that is at the real heart of the Romantic project and regarding which Octavio Paz has written:

La poesía es una de las manifestaciones de la analogía; las rimas y las aliteraciones, las metáforas y las metonimias, no son sino modos de operación del pensamiento analógico. El poema es una secuencia en espiral y que regresa sin cesar, sin regresar jamás del todo, a su comienzo. Si la analogía hace del universo un poema, un texto hecho de oposiciones que se resuelven en consonancias, también hace del poema un doble del universo. Doble consecuencia: podemos *leer* el universo, podemos *vivir* el poema. (*Los hijos* 63-64)

Thus the figure of the bird announced in the opening lines of “La capilla” is, through the arrangement of the typography, made to resemble the shape of a cross atop a church spire (a motif that will undergo metamorphosis in Huidobro’s later poetry to that of the aeroplane-crucifix). More interestingly through from the perspective of our current investigation is the way in which Huidobro establishes in this poem a series of correspondences between Man and the external world, to such a degree that it is impossible to say which came into existence before the other – recalling Novalis’ aphorism already quoted in the previous chapter: “it is all one whether I posit the universe in myself or myself in the universe”.

This series of correspondences or comparisons begins at lines 16-22, where the chapel bell (to whose notes the bird addressed in the opening passage is urged to join its song) “se despereza ebria de mañana / Evangelizando la gran quietud aldeana” while the chapel itself is described as being “...ante la paz de la montaña / Como una lismonera está ante una capilla”.

This begins a process of “humanisation” of the landscape so that in the lines that follow (22-27) the surrounding countryside appears to be caught in an action of devotional worship. Close by the chapel a grove of chestnut trees huddle together (lines 29-31) “...como una bandada de mendigos...que se asoman curiosos por todos los postigos” while at lines 34-35 the cassock of the priest is likened to a brushstroke painting itself across the wild yet “linen-chaste” landscape, further heightening the sense of unreality. However, the true “turn” or *volta* of the poem is provided in the penultimate and ultimate stanzas, where Nature reasserts herself in the form of evening shadows entering in to the inner recesses of the chapel – at the same time that the “carrion-sparkle” of sunset paints white the outer walls and the night-wind causes the masonry to “snore” and creak.

The boundaries between Man and World, or between Interior and Exterior Space are in this way blurred and conflated as Huidobro makes explicit in the closing lines: “La oscuridad va amalgamando y cunfundiendo así las cosas / Y vuela un “Angelus” lloroso con lentitud del campanario”. It is this, rather than the superficially orthodox pietist theme, which makes this poem especially significant in terms of the evolution of Huidobro’s literary aesthetic as it hints at the creation of a new kind of supra-sensory, poetic reality which will be more thoroughly explored in later works. Furthermore, the presence of trace-elements of this new poetic reality in a poem belonging to the initial protean phase of Huidobro’s *creacionismo* tends to suggest that neat periodisations of the *creacionista* project, such as the one advanced by Ana Pizarro in her monograph *Vicente Huidobro: un poeta ambivalente* (according to which Huidobro’s work in this early period confined itself to a rebellion against the mimetic reproduction of the natural world without necessarily aspiring to create anything new) – while still valid in respect of what Poggioli (discussed earlier in Chapter 1 under “Defining Romanticism”) would call Huidobro’s “polemical consciousness” – tend to overlook awareness of the positive or generative power of the poet already by this stage implicit in some of his work.

This urge to “poetise” or re-enchant the world, which as we have already seen in the previous chapter derives from early 19th century German Romanticism, can also be detected in the opening poem in the third section of *Canciones en la noche*, “Madrigalizándote”. Here, the presentation is less innovative when viewed in comparison with “La capilla aldeana” or indeed with Huidobro’s later poetry, but nevertheless the poet’s desire to “madrigalizar” his beloved to the point where the entire world is converted into music reveals striking

similarities with both the aesthetic credo of Friedrich Schlegel and with the doctrine of “la musique avant tout chose” espoused by Paul Verlaine and the French Symbolists.

Admittedly, Huidobro seems closer here to the humanist vision of Schlegel in his invocation of his beloved’s “ser ideal” than to the vitalist-aestheticism of Verlaine, Baudelaire and Mallarmé – however, between the two as David A. Rock notes there is a common underlying bond:

Aestheticism is a product of the romantic era; nevertheless, between romanticism and aestheticism there is a difference of focus as far as the individual is concerned. In the case of aestheticism, when the individual is affirmed it is in a specifically *artistic* capacity. In other words, the romantic poet is an individual who just happens to have chosen poetry as his medium, whereas the aestheticist’s value as an individual is a function of his specifically artistic activity (Rock 33-34).

The career of Huidobro demonstrates that both these positions – humanist individualism and aesthetic nihilism – can in fact coexist (albeit uneasily) in the work of a single poet, although the relative preponderance of each tendency will tend to be variable rather than fixed (as a simple comparison of *Canciones en la noche* with a later work such as *Altazor* will at once make plain) over time. Contrary to Rock’s assertion that the poetry of Huidobro “...has less to do with human solidarity than it does with authorial distinction” (72) or the desire to impress an audience, it would seem from a reading of poems such as “Madrigalizándote” that in fact both motivations have a part to play.

In “El augurio fraterno”, also from the third and final section of *Canciones en la noche*, a similar duality is evident. This time the tension concerns the role of the poet, or rather the poetic brotherhood as a whole which (we are told) constitutes an aristocracy of sentiment due to the many hours spent by poets in meditation and divining the mysteries of the universe. Unlike the aristocratic dandy of Baudelaire the poet is more than just an arbiter of good taste – they are humanity’s only surviving conduit to the celestial Infinite or as Hölderlin might say the residual legatees and distant collateral heirs of the Gods. Thus, Huidobro addresses his rhetorical interlocutor and brother poet as “...mi hermano en nuestra Santa Madre la Luna / En l’alma de la tarde y en la de la laguna” (lines 13-14) who in his “real Soledad” lives a life full of intensity. And yet at the same time somewhat undercutting this noble appearance, the poets’ quest for the Infinite is shown to be a futile one as Huidobro (echoing Lautréamont

in *Maldoror*) recognises in his comparison of their situation to that of a dog barking at the moon (line 6) and in his declaration that at the end of their career all that awaits them is "...la Neurastenia / Como una novia pálida, ojerosa de anemia" (lines 19-20).⁴

La gruta del silencio

Huidobro's next collection of poems opens (once again) under the triple constellation of Darío, Verlaine and Mallarmé – with excerpts from the poems "Art poétique" and "L'Azur" forming the epigraph to the first section of *La gruta del silencio*. Taken together, these two poems amount to a compelling argument in favour of poetry's essential *otherness* or separation from the world, a radical otherness that may seem to those mortals captured by its charms at once both frightening and intoxicating. This seeming paradox is summed up neatly in Mallarmé's declaration closing out the second of the two poems: "Je suis hanté. L'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur! l'Azur!"⁵

The first poem in the collection, "El poeta alaba los ojos de la muy amada" echoes Verlaine's injunction also quoted in the preceding epigraph: "Que ton vers soit la chose envolée / qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée / Vers d'autre cieus, à d'autres amours".⁶ Here Huidobro begins with the conventional trope of the eyes as the "window to the human soul" (the first five stanzas) before turning to consider them no longer as mere passive pools for reflection but rather sources of (spiritual) illumination, casting light outwards over the physical world. Thus he exclaims in the sixth and seventh stanzas:

Su mirada me penetra, me traspasa y me adivina,
Llega al fondo de mi alma y la ilumina
Como una raya de la luna
Que se clava en la laguna.

¡Oh sus ojos!
Que me bañan en un baño que suaviza
Y poetiza. (lines 42-48)

It is this passage I believe that marks Huidobro's poem out as being more than merely a derivative work (in which the influence of the great Colombian *modernista* José Asunción Silva, and especially of his celebrated "Nocturno III", is clearly visible). The conventional

(small 'r') romantic conceit is undeniable, but equally important is the metaphysical, Neo-Platonist notion of the human (and hence also artist's) soul as a spark of divine fire which, by gazing upon the physical world, imparts a little of its essence and so also in some way justifies that world's existence.

The second composition to feature in *Gruta*, entitled "La balada triste del camino largo", sees a regression towards the other (negative, existential) polarity within Romanticism – that which we might call the poetics of "non-being" or "nostalgia for the Infinite" (Sartre 28,29) – as Huidobro describes the rationale for poetic/bardic creation in the following bleak manner:

¿Y nosotros? Nosotros auscultando emociones
Y acechando con miedo a la "Dama de la Hoz"
Seguimos deshojando canciones y canciones,
Con el prestigio de "la musique avant tout chose" (lines 51-54).

This existential attitude is undercut somewhat however by the constant anthropomorphism of the landscape, as in the classic Huidobrean simile (later deployed in his 1918 epic poem *Ecuatorial*) "Se aleja una cadena de montes milenarios / Como una caravana larga de dromedarios" (lines 25-6), suggesting that the poet is an authentic creator whose verse is far more than just a collage of pleasing images cut and pasted from nature. Consequently, his situation resembles that of an atheist priest or prophet who unfolds visions of a hidden, magical realm behind the world of physical forms even while he disclaims any belief in it himself. This quasi-religious sense of the poet's vocation is further heightened by Huidobro's speculative musing (in "Monotonía de las tardes nubladas") that "...parece / Que en mi cerebro hay alguien que de muy lejos viene" (*OP* 141). Again, there is the constant implicit suggestion or presentiment that the poet is more than just a travelling player who performs for the idle amusement of himself and his audience.

Setting aside the landscape poems in the style of the Uruguayan *modernista* Herrera y Reissig that feature in the sequence entitled "Los frescos ilusorios", we come next to the satirical work "Tríptico galante de jarrón de Sevres", in which Huidobro plays with the by-now clichéd tropes of French Parnassianism (so influential on the young Ruben Darío and Paul Verlaine) as we wander through (in succession) a garden seemingly awash with classical deities and mythological creatures, a Venetian carnival and a secret lovers' tryst spied upon

by a lecherous viscount – all of these scenes set to a musical score written by Beethoven and Schubert. The obvious point that Huidobro seems to be making here is that once poetry or art descends to this sort of derivative/imitative sport it has lost its original *raison d'être* and serves only as an exercise in intellectual amusement.

Among the next group of poems (“Los poemas sencillos”) the last composition (“Idilio de la tarde y de la luna”) stands out for its inversion of the usual temporal and spatial relationships, though here it appears to be not so much the poet as the presence of a divine spirit that is the cause of this revisioning or recreation of the physical universe. The reader encounters a disorientating blend of synaesthesia and allegory in which “...la tarde cae con suavidad de lana” and “se deshojan las horas una a una” while (recalling the previous discussion of “La capilla aldeana” in *Canciones en la noche*) there is also a deliberate confusion of attributes between the chapel/Carthusian monastery and the surrounding landscape so that it is impossible to tell where the borders of the man-made and physical worlds actually lie (“se alarga el camino la apacible oración”). This sense is further heightened in the penultimate stanza where we encounter the lines “Bajo la superficie del estanque alumbrado / Se dijera que hay una gruta de cirios”, once again suggesting that the true reality is to be found beneath the surface of human consciousness and at the same time combining two of the most famous analogies for the process of artistic creation (the mirror and the lamp, see the discussion “Defining Romanticism” in the previous chapter).

The veiling of the authorial presence is such that the poem has the appearance of a dream-revelation and points towards not only the later work of Huidobro in his Parisian “literary cubist” phase but also the work of his contemporaries such as Pierre Reverdy and André Breton. Indeed, as Anna Balakian has pointed out in her indispensable study of Surrealism, one of the most notable characteristics of Breton and his followers was that they “...set out to revitalize matter, to resuscitate the object in relation to themselves so that they would no longer be absorbed in their own subjectivity”, hence their great affection for both Hegel and Freud (46). If this attitude seems at odds with Huidobro’s later insistence on poetic creation as a conscious and premeditated act, we have only to look as far as the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson to see that, in the words of one percipient critic, “...no hay mutua exclusión entre la temática romántica de la videncia y la estética de la autonomía del objeto poético” since the achievement of the poet is not in the creation of the objects themselves but rather the discovery of new relations between them (Yúdice 30).

The second section of *Gruta*, entitled “El libro de la meditación”, begins with the intriguing quotation from the Gospel of St Matthew, which when translated from the Latin reads “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces”. The categorical imperative of this quotation is however immediately ironised by the epigraphs from the French Decadents/Symbolists Gustave Kahn, Arthur Rimbaud and Georges Rodenbach following below it, which all speak to a pervasive mentality of doubt, imprecision and inexactitude – as exemplified by the citation from Rimbaud’s *Le bateau ivre*: “Je sais le cieux crevant en éclairs / ...je sais le soir / Et j’ai vu quelquefois ce que l’homme a cru voir”⁷ (Rimbaud 67).

In “El libro silencioso” Huidobro seizes upon the idea of the book as a microcosm, a world within which Man may hope to listen in on “el dialogar de los astros” and perceive “el lirio azul de los ideales muertos” though – like Rimbaud – he is clearly agnostic as to the lasting significance of these peregrinations within the realm of the literary imagination (as evidenced by the ironic statement “Allí ví el modo de pasarme a solas / Los sesenta fastidios de la hora”). Again, the image of the pool (lines 13-15) not as a mere site of passive reflection but rather as a gateway or active conduit to an alternative plane of existence (namely the world of the poetic imagination) recurs, drawing the reader down into the depths of the book into which the poet has poured all of his “luz del ocaso” (line 22). The inward quest is then continued in “Versos de un viejo triste” in which the poet urges his readers:

Hagamos una vida más rica de interior
 Con mucho más ensueño, con mucho más dolor.
 Hagamos una vida silenciosa,
 Pero más plena de felicidad;
 Volvámonos los ojos hacia adentro (lines 9-13)

The next poem, “El poema para mi hija”, appears as an attempt at self-vindication on the part of Huidobro who like so many of his contemporaries is concerned to justify the status of poetry and poets in a post-Christian society, recalling Sartre’s acerbic observation on the French Decadents that:

Poetry discovers a new mission for itself: to reconstitute, *in the face of truth*, a phantom Nobility. To oppose the public Truths of Science, it establishes a *realm of the incommunicable*. Beauty becomes its selective principle.

Outwardly available to everyone but in reality only accessible to a privileged handful, Beauty, solely by virtue of its existence, has the mission of breaking down the irreducible differences which divide men, and which cause a hierarchical break in society. Above the common herd, a select group of connoisseurs will band together with the artists to establish a knightly order based on poverty and mysticism. (Sartre 37-38)

Accordingly in “El poema para mi hija” (as with the poem “El augurio fraterno” from *Canciones en la noche*), Huidobro evokes the grand aristocracy of sentiment which binds together the elect few in adoration of the “alas del cisne” (line 23) before going on to enjoin his daughter not to believe “...en la ironía de los blasones / Sé tú misma toda aristocracia, / La gran aristocracia de los bosques / Que se resume en levantar sus ansias” (lines 38-41). The membership of this aristocracy depends therefore not on one’s wealth or noble birth but rather the possession of an aesthetic sensibility and an apprehension of another plane of existence beyond the physical world. The next two compositions in *Gruta* (“Las flores del jarrón” and “A la hermana buena”) are essentially meditations on this same theme.

Passing over the Edgar Allan Poe-inspired sequence “Los poemas alucinados” (a series of poems meditating on death), the Neo-Platonist idea of the poet as a divine vessel is picked up once more in the section entitled “Coloquios espirituales”. In “Coloquio I” Huidobro calls upon his soul to “...musicaliza el dolor de la vida / Espiritualiza la carne brutal / Exterioriza tu música dormida / Y cristaliza tu Hora Sentimental” and upholds the “aristocracy” of the soul’s sadness as a new type of “internal theology”. Similarly, in “Coloquio II” he entreats his spiritual self not to forget that “...en ti llevas un loto azul: el Arte”. Again, neither the concept nor its presentation can be said to be particularly original – and yet, these poems along with the rest of their companion pieces in *Gruta* are a crucial part of the philosophical background to the formation of Huidobro’s emerging aesthetic. This is all the more true in the case of the next poem “La alcoba”, which appears almost as a dress-rehearsal for the title-poem of the 1918 collection *El espejo de agua*. In this particular composition the debt to the Belgian Symbolist Georges Rodenbach is made explicit, with a direct quotation from Rodenbach’s *Le règne du silence* used (at line 5) to describe a mirror in the poet’s bedroom as “l’âme-soeur de la chambre”.⁸ By insisting on the essential passivity and negativity of the mirror however (“el espejo es un viejo pagario atrevido”), Huidobro points towards the need for poets to move beyond dependence on the realm of memory and the unconscious to

embrace also the “embriaguez de horizontes lejanos” (line 28) symbolised here by the outward-looking windows – the world of the active imagination or consciously willed creation. Recognising perhaps his own inner paradox, Huidobro concludes with the lines: “Yo tengo la obsesión de las ventanas / Tengo la obsesión de los ojos clavados / La de los espejos que tienen alma / Y de los retratos”. In this sense he is not dissimilar to Mallarmé’s dying man who clings to the windows of his hospital room “D’ou l’on tourne l’épaule à la vie” and imagines himself reborn in the golden light beyond (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* 33). Yet unlike Mallarmé’s patient who is paralysed with the tragic conviction that such an escape from the stench and stupidity of the human race is ultimately impossible, Huidobro clearly believes that poetry can hope to transcend this condition. This refusal to be reconciled with a mere corporeal existence is aptly dramatised in the final poem “Las palabras de la anciana” which rounds out *Gruta*, in which the poet rejects the quietist counsel of an old woman to be content with the “amor de los hogares pobres” in favour of the company of his fellow poets and their “ojos floridos de paisajes internos”.

Las pagodas ocultas

Continuing the increasingly metaphysical preoccupation of the previous volume, Huidobro’s 1914 collection of poems in prose *Las pagodas ocultas* is notable for its frequent deployment of religious iconography (particularly that of the Virgin) and for its general adherence to the transcendental/Neo-Platonist strand of Romanticism. The title poem sets the tone with its declaration that “Las almas son Pagodas Ocultas y misteriosas cuya soledad está llena de mundos y tiene extrañas resonancias” (lines 3-4), a declaration strongly reminiscent of the passage from Novalis already quoted in the previous chapter (“We dream of travelling through the universe – but is not the universe *within ourselves?*”). This theme of an internal quest is then added to at lines 15-16 where the poet tells us that “Mis ojos han cegado mirando en vano la obscuridad de la luz, y por eso buscan ahora la luz de la obscuridad” – blinded by the light of heaven, he now seeks for the absolute in the depths of the human soul. Thus the poet urges his soul in an extended soliloquy:

Has de cubrir tus oídos con tu manto para no sentir ningún ruido externo, sino el delicioso canto interior, que es semejante a esos ruidos de la noche que se escuchan en las montañas.

Has de amar a la Naturaleza con un deslumbramiento fervoroso...

Busca siempre el verdadero sentido de todo. El sentido de los árboles, del río y del fuego; el sentido de las montañas y de la noche; el sentido de la tierra y del aire, del amor y del dolor.

Tú, Alma mía, has de estar en contacto con el alma de todas las cosas, has de llegar a sus últimas raíces. (lines 24-35)

Manifestly the author of these lines believes that behind the world of physical *noumena* – trees, river, air, fire, mountains and so forth – there exists a realm of Ideal Forms which more closely embodies the essence of these entities than any set of material or scientifically-defined attributes, and that the poet’s goal is to recall these through a process of *anamnesis* (see the earlier discussion of Emerson in Chapter 1). In order to do this, however, the poet must reject the external world and “busca el sendero de seda que va por dentro”. To be sure, in this schema the poet can only aspire to channel and interpret rather than to create something truly original, but he does at least occupy a privileged position in comparison with the rest of humanity.

This sense of the poet’s sacred vocation is emphasised again in the next poem, “Mis palabras”:

Le llamaron loco y el Poeta respondió:
Al escribir ya sabía que mis palabras no eran para vosotros
.....
Por eso no podéis entenderme
Ya no hay puertas cerradas para mí espíritu, porque ya poseo la suave
tristeza llena de bondad de los profundos. (lines 1-2, 12-14)

In “El poeta dijo una tarde los salmos del árbol” Huidobro analogises the various parts of his anatomy with a tree which strikes its roots in the earth but reaches its arms perpetually heavenward, immersed in quiet meditation. The tree, like the poet, is also “el compendio del paisaje” (line 19) and weaves of base matter products of great beauty. A similar analogy between the poet and Nature is also extended in the following ode “El río”, in which for the first time we are also introduced to (what will prove to be) a recurring motif of the nameless woman (almost certainly the Virgin Mary) with “los ojos luminosamente hondos” (lines 19-20), a symbol of the poet’s yearning for union with the divine. In “La Montaña” we then encounter the familiar identification of the poet with a mountain peak which (together with

“la muy amada de los ojos luminosamente hondos”) he yearns to ascend (lines 43-47), before shifting in the final poem in this first section of *Pagodas ocultas* to an invocation of elemental Fire, which we are reminded is alike to Art in that it “...brota y crece grande sólo sobre lo que ha destruido” (line 25).

The next section, entitled “La amada reflejándose en el agua” opens with a dedication to the by now very familiar woman with “los ojos luminosos y absortos” and consists essentially of a series of meditations on the tension between carnal and spiritual love, which while interesting (particularly in its prefiguring of Canto II of *Altazor*) does not pertain directly to our current investigation. Only in the final poem, “Iremos una tarde” do we find a passage of some possible significance for the theme of artistic creation with a recrudescence of the idea (already expressed in one of the earlier poems of *La gruta del silencio*) that the eyes can act as an outward conduit for the light of the soul and thus allow the poet to “...diluirse en todas las cosas y darse por entero a todo” (line 14).

Again the opposition between the physical and spiritual worlds is played out in the third and fourth sections, “El paseo de los amigos” and “El primer amante”, the whole of which is played out as one long continuous dramatic dialogue between various personae – on the one side, defending the merits of physical love, “el amigo sátiro”, while on the other side inveighing against it are ranged (in order of succession) “el amigo místico”, “el amigo artista”, “el amigo doloroso” and “el amigo solitario”. The entire sequence is, however, clearly marked by irony and comic exaggeration, such that it almost seems as though Huidobro is deliberately parodying the ideas put forward in the preceding poems.⁹

The fifth section of *Las pagodas ocultas*, “El patio de los niños”, is dedicated to Huidobro’s infant children Manuela and Vicente and comprises only some sentimental and juvenile verse of no relevance to this study.

The penultimate section, “El libro de la noche”, commences with two odes to the night (emulating perhaps Novalis’s volume of poetry on the same theme) which stress once again the idea – already expressed in the first section of this volume – that only in darkness can the poet’s soul hope to penetrate the mysteries of the universe. Then in the following poem, “El silencioso por la noche”, Huidobro turns to an imaginary dialogue between the mystic poet – “El silencioso” – and a champion of more populist/less complicated verse, “el poeta viejo”:

La noche es su hermana. Él ama a la noche aristocrática y odia al día burgués

.....

A usted nadie le entiende –ha dicho el poeta viejo, y el Silencioso ha pensado en su refinamiento, en su anhelo impreciso de algo impreciso; ha mirado los gestos de las cosas ocultas y de las almas pequeñas y se ha sonreído.

.....

Nadie me comprende y qué importa, piensa el Silencioso; mis ojos son cada día más luminosos y la noche me ama. (lines 7-8, 12-15, 18-19)

A similar desire to follow Novalis's "mysterious way" leading inwards is evident in "Los estanques nocturnos" which returns us to the notion (previously outlined in "Idilio de la tarde y de la luna" from *La gruta del silencio*) of the pool (clearly analogous to the poetic imagination) as both reflector of the celestial and portal to the subterranean worlds. Then following a series of three "invitations" to friends urging them to follow him in taking to "...los caminos de la noche", the poet appeals finally in "La luna de los arroyos" to the nameless woman "que tiene los ojos luminosos y absortos" to join him also in this spiritual quest.

The seventh and concluding section of *Las pagodas ocultas* attempts to chart with greater precision the final destination of the poet's internal voyage. "El Sendero de Seda", we learn, is equivalent to that which (as Schelling would say) can only be intellectually intuited through the poetic imagination – "...el personaje que queda más allá. El que nadie ve y sólo las grandes almas sienten latir" ("El Sendero de la Seda" lines 9-10). The key to finding this "verdadero sentido de las cosas" – as Huidobro makes clear in a series of poetic parables addressed to a friend known to us only as "Sebastián" – is to be found not "...en ellas mismas sino en el amor que ponen los ojos al mirarlas" ("Parábola de la belleza de las cosas" lines 2-3). This provides perhaps some of the clue to Huidobro's obsession with the Virgin Mary, whose love of God stems from a purely emotional rather than intellectual impulse and because of this is able (unlike the philosophers and systematisers of scientific knowledge) to open for those who follow her "...puertas luminosas en el infinito" ("Salmo a la madre" line 10). But now let us turn to some of Huidobro's more discursive and less enigmatic writings.

***Pasando y pasando* and “Non Serviam”**

The year 1914 was also significant in that it saw Huidobro voice for the first time some of his evolving (as yet un-systematised) aesthetic principles in an address entitled “Non Serviam” (“I will not serve”), given at the athenaeum in Santiago de Chile, and a self-published collection of short essays, *Pasando y pasando*. We begin with a discussion of the second of these works.

The first essay in *Pasando y pasando*, simply entitled “Yo”, is essentially a mini-autobiography in which Huidobro combines the story of the first twenty-one years of existence with a series of throwaway remarks concerning the merits of other poets as well as his own artistic values. Along with the by now clichéd tropes that we recognise from the discussion of Romanticism in the previous chapter we find statements such as:

Lo único que deseo para mis libros es el aplauso de unos cuantos, de esos exquisitos, de esos refinados y quintaesenciados cuyo espíritu alcanza hasta las mayores sutilezas y observaciones...quiero que mis libros queden muy lejos de la visual de las multitudes y del vientre de la sana burguesía. (*OC I* 657)

More significant though from the standpoint of our current literary investigation is the following passage:

Admiro a los que perciben las relaciones más lejanas de las cosas. A los que saben escribir versos que se resbalan como la sombra de un pájaro en el agua y que sólo advierten los de muy bien vista.

Y creo firmemente que el alma del poeta debe estar en contacto con el alma de todas las cosas. (*OC I* 658)

Again, the poet still functions very much as an intermediary or bridge between the natural world and the divine, like Emerson’s “Chimborazo under the line” or the *poeta-vidente* of Lugones’ *Las montañas del oro*. Strong parallels can also be drawn with the work of Schleiermacher, who wrote in his *Soliloquies* that “The artist is on the alert for whatsoever may serve as a sign and symbol of humanity; he ransacks the treasury of language, and builds a world of music from a chaos of sound; he searches for a hidden meaning and a harmony in nature’s lovely ply of colours” (*Soliloquies* 35). The poet does not create *ex-nihilo* but rather works to re-weave the fabric of Nature in new and unexpected combinations and so to re-

enchant the world. This poetic vocation is however reserved for an elect priesthood to which only the farsighted few (those who of “muy bien vista”) can hope to ascend.

Further on in the same essay the young Huidobro writes of the great poets whom he admires (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Poe, Baudelaire, Heine, Verlaine, Hugo and of course Rubén Darío) that:

Esas son las cumbres que se pierden en el Azul. Entre esas cumbres hay muchas más pequeñas y hay muchos abismos.

Yo amo las grandes cumbres y los grandes abismos. Lo que da vértigo.

Mirando a esas grandes cumbres no se ve la cúspide.

Mirando a esos grandes abismos no se ve el fondo.

Por eso los miopes bufan. (*OC I 659*)

The need to renovate the tired fabric of reality is again emphasised in another of the essays in *Pasando y pasando* entitled “El arte de sugerimiento”, in which Huidobro declares “Guerra al cliché” and implores of his fellow poets

Que no haya más mujeres humildes que se ocultan cual la violeta entre la hierba. Que ya no vuelen más las incautas mariposas en torno de la llama.

¡Por Dios! ¿Hasta cuándo?

...Que si hay una montaña no sea una alta o encumbrada cima. Es preferible que sea una montaña que dialoga con el sol o con pretensiones de desvirgar a la pobre luna. Todo menos alta o encumbrada. (*OC I 691*)

What Huidobro is clearly hinting at here is the key role of the metaphor in revivifying both language and the objects of language – that which in one of his later manifestos he would refer as the imperative to “humanizar las cosas”. Descriptions such as Homer’s “rosy fingered dawn”, which once really were poetic metaphors with their own special power and enchantment, have in the hands of neo-classical epigones become mere conventional tropes (something which is clearly not the fault of Homer). The only way to avoid falling into this trap, Huidobro suggests, is by “Recogiéndonos en nosotros mismos, analizando con un prisma nuestro yo, volviéndonos los ojos hacia adentro” (*OC I 692*) – the better then to recombine the elements of the external world in a chain of subjective or allusive associations in which the ordinary links of logic and causality have been entirely suppressed. This,

according to Huidobro (citing again the words of Mallarmé and of Verlaine's "Art poétique" as his points of reference) is "el arte de sugerimiento" – "...esa poesía lejana, vaga, que podríamos llamar del horizonte" (693) – a poetry in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is only implied or hinted at.

Passing now from French Symbolism to the beginnings of the 20th century avant-garde, a separate essay contained in *Pasando y pasando* entitled "El futurismo" provides the interesting revelation that the most important member of this movement for Huidobro was not its most famous international exponent, the Italian Filippo Marinetti, but rather the *mallorquín* Gabriel Alomar whose 1904 essay "Futurismo" (first published in Catalán under the title "El futurisme") antedated Marinetti's manifesto of the same name by some five years. As Huidobro says "...lo único en que estoy de acuerdo con el señor Marinetti es en la proclamación del verso libre" (*OC I* 699) while finding nothing in the content of his paeans to the glories of war and of the Machine Age that is particularly original. Marinetti's doctrine, for all of its revolutionary spirit and *egolatría*, in actual fact relegates the role of the individual poet to that of a skilful flatterer of the heroes of his own epoch and of current technological trends without imparting anything truly original. Gabriel Alomar, on the other hand he argues:

...encerró la idea futurista más bien en la personalización, en la individualidad que no teme manifestarse tal como es, en una palabra, en el *yo* inconfundible. Por lo tanto la doctrina de Alomar viene a negar toda escuela.

No así Marinetti que ha instituido el Futurismo en una verdadera escuela y que, por lo tanto, no da su debida importancia al *yo*. Es lamentable. (*OC I* 700)

In support of this alternative Futurist aesthetic Huidobro also cites the writings of the Uruguayan poet and journalist Álvaro Armando Vasseur, the self-proclaimed founder of *auguralismo* (named for his *Cantos augurales*, published in the same year as Alomar's "El Futurisme"):

"Para el poeta augural [dice Vasseur]...lo esencial no es el pasado estratificado en hechos, sino el *devenir*, y de éste, el acto de creación, de renovación, más que el de cristalización, lo que va siendo, lo que ya no es." (*OC I* 700)

To reiterate, what is important to Huidobro (and to Alomar and Vasseur also) is not the superficial content of poetry but the originality of the work, which can only come from a deep-seated yearning for self-differentiation – this is what is meant when he writes approvingly that Alomar “...adivina el futurista en el hombre que siente un gran impulso de más allá, de suprasensible, de ultraespiritual que le insufla chispazos de vida nueva” (ibid). Marinetti merely wishes to praise the agonistic impulse in its empirical manifestations (war, sport, technology, etc.) whereas both Alomar and Huidobro locate poetry in the agonistic impulse itself. It is not enough to laud originality in its physical manifestations; rather the artistic process must bring forth something original in and of itself.

Rounding out the essays pertaining directly to the aesthetics of poetry in *Pasando y pasando* is an extended appreciation of the Mexican *modernista* Amado Nervo. However, in contrast perhaps to his appreciation of Darío, that which Huidobro admires in Nervo’s poetry is not the mastery of delicate rhyme and metre or ornate tropes with which *modernismo* is inevitably associated in the minds of most critics, but rather the fact that in his work “...se ve la percepción de los matices, de las cosas ocultas, del alma de las cosas, el afán de las líneas pocos visibles” – a variety of *panteísmo* which views poetry as a means to accessing hidden knowledge through an intuitive leap of the imagination, grasping that which analytical reason due to its obsession with empirical phenomena simply cannot (OC I 705). Describing Nervo as one of these “...pensadores de las problemas de la ultratumba” Huidobro declares: “Yo quisiera forcejear con ellos, yo quisiera ayudarlos en su combate contra el Argos que guarda ese misterio...” – an allusion once again to the idea of the poet as Orphic shaman who alone can bridge the gap between this world and the next (OC I 710).

In contrast to the discursive style of *Pasando y pasando*, the text of Huidobro’s address to the athenaeum in Santiago given that same year is clothed in an almost religious, prophetic tone. The title, “Non Serviam”, clearly recalls the words spoken (according to the apocryphal tradition) by the Archangel Lucifer at the outset of the war in Heaven that led eventually to his fall and banishment. However, a more immediate influence can be found in the work of Gabriel Alomar already mentioned above. Alomar’s version of *futurismo*, unlike that of Marinetti, defined itself not so much by an antipathy towards the past or a glorification of technological progress but rather an exaltation of the power of the human individual and his/her declaration of independence from Nature (Camurati 54-56). In particular, Alomar

identifies Lucifer (along with Adam) as the major archetype for this agonic impulse, as he explains in the following passage:

El afán de diversificación entre el hombre y la gran Madre es la más antigua de las tradiciones humanas. Es tan antiguo, que bien podría llamársele *adamización*. Ahí lo tenéis, según el más conocido de los símbolos, al primer hombre, rodeado de todos los esplendores de la Naturaleza, pero con ella confundido, incapaz de plena conciencia...la palabra inepta para las grandes evocaciones. Y de pronto el impulso adormecido se pone a palpitar y le habla calladamente, ofreciéndole la luz, la noción, el conocimiento. Y ese impulso mismo se ha personalizado en la fantasía germinatriz de los pueblos y ha sido Lucifer, *Fosforos*, el que lleva la luz, el que ansía conocer, el que lanzó el dardo de la razón en el abismo volcánico de lo ignoto. Ha sido el Ángel de la Revuelta, el primer réprobo, el primer indómito, el primer protervo, que ha alzado el *Non Serviam* a costa del más grande de los sacrificios: el sacrificio de la gloria infinita. (Alomar 84)

What is meant in aesthetic terms by this gesture of defiance of Nature is spelled out by Huidobro in his 1914 lecture:

El poeta dice a sus hermanos: “Hasta ahora no hemos hecho otra cosa que imitar el mundo en sus aspectos, no hemos creado nada...Hemos aceptado, sin mayor reflexión, el hecho de que no puede haber otras realidades que las que nos rodean, y no hemos pensado que nosotros también podemos crear realidades en un mundo nuestro, en un mundo que espera su fauna y su flora propias.”...*Non serviam*. No he de ser tu esclavo, madre Natura, seré tu amo. Te servirás de mí; está bien. No quiero y no puedo evitarlo; pero yo también me serviré de ti. Yo tendré mis árboles que no serían como los tuyos, tendré mis montañas, tendré mis ríos y mis mares, tendré mi cielo y mis estrellas. (Huidobro, *OP* 1294-1295)

As yet Huidobro is still content to insist that the creations of the poet are merely equal (rather than ontologically superior) to those of Mother Nature, as evidenced by his declaration that “Lo único que deseo es no olvidar nunca tus lecciones, pero ya tengo edad para andar solo por estos mundos. Por los tuyos y por los míos” (*OP* 1295). The wonder of the natural world

– as too the power of language – has become through over-familiarity and the simple passage of time degraded, and it is thus the role of the poet to renew or recreate the world so that something of that sense of magic may again be experienced by the inhabitants of Earth in the inauguration of a second Eden. The revelation of the specific means by which this task will be accomplished is left, however, for the next chapter where we will recommence the investigation with an examination of the key work which is in many respects the logical continuation and elaboration of the ideas contained in this short address, namely the 1916 poem *Adán*.

¹ Much controversy has attended the date of publication of Huidobro's first definitive statement of his *creacionista* aesthetic, which is generally regarded as being represented by the poem "Arte poética" that appeared in the collection *El espejo de agua*. The earliest known surviving Spanish language edition of this collection was printed in Paris in 1918, although the poet himself insisted on the existence of an earlier edition published in Buenos Aires in 1916 *before* his departure for Europe and subsequent integration into the literary cubist circle of Guillaume Apollinaire and Pierre Reverdy around the review *Nord-Sud*. The epistolary survey of Goic however in his 2003 critical edition of Huidobro's *Obras poéticas* seems to prove beyond doubt that even as late as 1917 Huidobro was still working on draft versions of these poems (many of which were published during that year in French with the translation assistance of Huidobro's friend Juan Gris, first in *Nord-Sud* and then subsequently as a stand-alone collection entitled *Horizon Carre*) which are significantly at variance with the versions which appear in the 1918 edition of *El espejo de agua*. Tellingly, "Arte poética" was never translated into French for the 1917 collection *Horizon Carre*, from which we may reasonably conclude that it was still at that stage unfinished (a supposition that appears to be corroborated by a letter from Huidobro sent to his mother back in Chile that same year in which an alternate set of lines is proposed for the opening of the poem – see *OP* 391). Notwithstanding all of this however, what remains indisputable as Cecil Wood has pointed out in his important 1978 monograph is that the most of the key ideas underpinning *creacionismo* can be seen to be already present in Huidobro's 1916 work *Adán* – lacking only the final elevation of the poet from the status of "primer hombre" to that of "pequeño dios".

² Wherever possible when quoting from Huidobro's work I have used the 2003 critical edition of his *Obra poética* by Cedomil Goic, as it includes line numbers as well as alternate versions of the text where more than one manuscript version is known to exist. For those prose works not collected in this edition I have used the 1976 two-volume edition of Huidobro's *Obras completas* by Hugo Montes.

³ The latter poem in fact originally published in a special number of the Chilean literary magazine *Musa Joven* announcing a forthcoming visit by the Nicaraguan poet to the Chilean capital – a visit which however never materialised (Goic, *La Poesía* 120). In an essay dedicated to Darío published in the same review, Huidobro spelled out what he regarded as the central message of the author of *Prosas profanas* and of the *Cantos de vida y esperanza*:

La estética es sólo para la mediocridad, para los que necesitan ayuda: es el lazarillo del ciego. *Para los de larga vista*, la estética no existe o si existe no fija reglas, ni exige moldas de ninguna especie, Se resume en tres palabras: crear cosas bellas (*OC I* 858).

⁴ Huidobro would later re-work this same motif into his poem "A la hermana buena" from the second part of *La gruta del silencio*, which concludes with the following lines:

Ponme en los labios el sabor de tu pena,
El consuelo ideal de una quimera
Tú que te mueras de anemia
Yo que me muero de estrellas

⁵ "I am haunted. The Sky! The sky! The sky! The sky!"

⁶ “Let your verse be a flighted thing / Which one feels as though a soul fleeing / Towards other skies and other loves”

⁷ “I know skies bursting with lightning / ...I know the evening / And I have sometimes seen that which man thought he saw”

⁸ Luisa Marina Perdigó, in her invaluable study of the literary and philosophical influences on the evolution of Huidobro’s *creacionismo*, notes the following with regard to the influence of Rodenbach on the Chilean poet:

Rodenbach’s book *Le règne du silence* begins with a section entitled “La vie des chambres”...Rodenbach’s rooms have a fantastic, dream-like atmosphere of their own, full of remembrances...As in Mallarmé, and later in Huidobro, these rooms have mirrors: in them the dreams of the poet lie dormant...” (Perdigó 133-4)

⁹ Perhaps the most notable of these comic exaggerations occurs in “El amigo doloroso”, where the eponymous speaker is heard to declare that “...mi espíritu es superior al de los demás hombres porque ha sufrido más” and “...yo amo sólo a las mujeres hermosas que se han muerto”, while also exhorting his hearers to “Mirad ahora mi belleza interna”.

Chapter 3: The Epoch of *creacionismo*, 1916-1926

As has been suggested in the previous chapter, if Huidobro's 1914 lecture "Non Serviam" represented in many respects the first (as yet non-systematised) expression of his doctrine of *creacionismo*, it is the 1916 poem *Adán* (Huidobro's first in free verse) that marks the first attempt to put this emerging aesthetic into practice. Accordingly, we will begin this section by examining this latter work before proceeding to the 1918 collection *El espejo de agua*, whose opening poem "Arte poética" provides the most well-known and succinct statement of Huidobro's distinctive artistic philosophy. Following on from this will be a consideration of Huidobro's attempts to defend his *creacionista* principles in a more rigorous polemical-programmatic form, including three important lectures and articles from the early 1920s ("La poesía", "La littérature de la langue espagnole d'aujourd'hui", "La création pure") and the 1925 collection *Manifestes*. Finally the chapter will conclude with the book of aphorisms, essays and autobiographical reminiscences *Vientos contrarios* (published not long after Huidobro's return to his native Chile from his lengthy sojourn among the ranks of the Parisian avant-garde) in which is presaged the effective abandonment of any attempt at an internally consistent and coherent doctrine of aesthetics.

In the course of this literary perambulation it will be shown that there is a steady move away from the Neo-Platonist idea of the poet as the interpreter of the hidden language of the universe to an increasing insistence on the idea of poetic creation as an act which brings forth something fundamentally *new* and distinct from anything that has previously existed. As already indicated in Chapter 1 the ideas of the New England poet-philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson provide the crucial 'Orphic bridge' by means of which this transition can be made, however once this bridge has been crossed (in *Adán*, *Espejo de agua* and the earlier manifestos) we will see a growing tendency in subsequent works to present the poetic act not as a simple renewal of the original Divine Creation (as Emerson would have it) but rather as something totally independent, an entirely separate man-made order of Creation. Parallel to this process we can discern the increasing influence of Nietzsche and the alternative current of Romanticism that (in contrast with the Neo-Platonist transcendentalism of Schelling and his successors) has been described by one percipient critic – borrowing a term first coined by the German philologist Hugo Friedrich – as "la trascendencia vacua," in which all that remains is the artist and the great abyss (Yúdice 131).

Adán

In the opening lines of his preface to *Adán*, Huidobro makes it clear that for him the Biblical figure of Adam represents not a literal historical personage but rather “el primer de los seres que comprende la Naturaleza”, that is to say a mythological representation of the scientific, actually existing individual(s) in whom the faculties of consciousness and language first dawned. Yet, despite this fact, the extensive quotations taken from Emerson’s essay “The Poet” make it clear that the underlying ontology remains fundamentally Idealist – the true poet (like Adam) is first and foremost a “contemplador de ideas” and it is from these ideas that both poetry and the world take their form.¹ The act of naming – of perceiving the interior essence or reality of a thing rather than its mere surface appearance, and then encapsulating that essence in language – is seen to be identical with the act of poetic creation and it is from this that that the mythological figure of Adam acquires his philosophical significance. It is in this sense that Emerson’s famous remark that “language is fossil poetry” must be understood – for, as he says, “...though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it *symbolised the world* to the first speaker and to the hearer” (*CW III* 13 – emphasis added).

The first three cantos of *Adán* underscore the importance of this act of naming by showing the universe before the arrival of the first of the “seres que comprende” to have been a lonely and incomplete creation. In “El Caos” Huidobro begins by describing the cosmos prior to the formation of the first physical matter, timeless and without sound or light. This is followed by “El Himno del Sol”, in which the first rays of our galaxy’s star (prefiguring Altazor with its “rebaño de astros”) cross the silent void to reach the newly-formed Earth, still “inútil y deserta” (line 58) and there for the first time awaken life. Then in the third canto we are introduced to the vision of “La tierra solitaria, / que aún no era por cerebro comprendida” welcoming these first rays and bringing forth the first plants and trees, which still however await the crucial arrival of human admiration and understanding:

Los trigos ondulaban al viento
para nadie, para ningún
contemplador maravillado
llenos de ojos de milagro.
Los árboles cantaban,

ebrias de luz se erguían las montañas,
los horizontes luminosos
parecían buscar unos ojos
que los miraran y gritaran locos. (lines 146-154)

This key missing element is, however, supplied when Adam/Adán emerges in the next canto:

Adán enorme y solo todo lo miraba...
Era el Hombre que ante el mundo se alzaba.
El primer hombre que su mente despertaba
y por entero a contemplar se daba.
Comprendía de las cosas el único designio,
veía en todo el verdadero sentido
y todo lo que miraban sus pupilas
su cerebro adquiriría. (lines 247-254)

Recalling the earlier discussion of Plotinus' *Enneads*, we can see that the vision of Beauty is in this passage reflected inwards into the mind of the first poet/name-giver, who in turn through the exercise of contemplation is able to truly apprehend its essence. This non-discursive mode of vision – so fundamental to Neo-Platonist aesthetics – can perhaps best be understood by reference to William Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey" in which the famed author of the *Lyrical Ballads* writes concerning the poetic imagination that "...with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things." In just the same way Adán, all the while standing still and silent, allows his eyes to wander through the landscape, internalising through the five senses all that he sees to the point that his soul becomes a veritable micro-cosmos. At the same time, we are told, the natural world itself sees in the figure of Adán the possibility of its own completion/perfection and for this reason "...todo se disputaba el camino de sus ojos / para llegar a su alma. / Todo quería ser claro en su cerebro / y reposar en él sin nada de misterio" (lines 264-269). The relationship between Adán and Nature that is presented here is strikingly similar to that already seen in Lugones' *Las montañas del oro* (see Chapter 1), although it should be added that unlike Lugones' nameless poet-protagonist (and also unlike some of Huidobro's later poetic incarnations) Adán himself is seen to be entirely free of egocentrism, simply occupying his place as of right in the great Chain of Being.

Having contemplated and understood the essence (or as Plotinus and the Romantics would say “the Intellectual Beauty”) of all the components of the natural world, Adán now regards even the wild beasts not with fear but love (lines 331-334) – fitting neatly with Emerson’s dictum that the poet makes even the most disagreeable phenomena beautiful by re-attaching them to Nature and to the Whole (*CW III* 11).

The process of passive meditation and contemplation now completed, Adán feels for the first time the desire to have speech:

porque todas las cosas en el alma
le formaban palabras.
Y así fue que la primera
palabra humana que sonó en la tierra
fue impedida por la divina fuerza
que da al cerebro la Belleza. (lines 388-394)

And so he speaks to Nature, imploring it to enter into his soul so that the two become consubstantial: “Todo esto que nace en el suelo / quiero sentirlo adentro” (lines 401-402). Meanwhile the earth “...santa de paz y de calma / oyó en éxtasis la primera palabra”, welcoming the sacred *verbum* by means of which it will be made eternal.

Strangely though neither in this passage nor later on in the work (and notwithstanding the frequent allusions to the act of *poésis* or verbal creation) do we encounter many explicit acts of name-giving.² Instead it is as though by the simple act of Adán seeing and *understanding* the Natural World around him that creation is enacted – as Emerson would say it is through him that Beauty becomes Beautiful and that the universe acquires *knowledge* of itself. In this continual emphasis on the creative properties of his gaze Huidobro’s Adán is perhaps then less like the figure of Biblical Genesis (the nomothete) and more closely akin to the Adam Kadmon of the Lurianic Kabbalah, the primordial heavenly man who walks the earth with rays of light projecting from his eyes.³ However, the fact that the actual act of naming is not depicted in *Adán* need not necessarily lead us to conclude that it was for Huidobro unimportant (given his extensive citations from Emerson in the preface and also in some of his later manifestos), rather it seems that he wishes to emphasise (in what is essentially one long extended allegory on the subject of artistic production) the essential *method* rather than the *content* of poetry.

A possible explanation for this state of affairs is that, like Emerson, Huidobro is already beginning to move beyond Neo-Platonism to a point where the poet not only sees “all things in their right series and procession” but also “adorns nature with a new thing” (citing again the words of Emerson already referenced in Chapter 1). That is to say, the true poet is the one who endeavours to look upon the world in a fresh way (as Adam did), so that they will then also describe it in a manner that is fundamentally *new*. Viewed in this context, the original names given by Adam in Genesis, even were we to recover and faithfully transcribe them, would no longer be poetry. To be sure, there is a strong element of ambiguity or tension in this intersection of Neo-Platonist and vitalist aesthetics, which is why *Adán* – like the philosophy of Emerson – forms such a crucial bridging point between the two souls of Romanticism.

After the conclusion of his short speech at the end of the fourth canto, Adán next embarks upon a more active exploration of his surroundings and strides out into the undiscovered wilderness. Through his progressive encounters with the rivers, pools, forests, seascapes and mountains of this landscape never before apprehended by human intelligence he is moved to a series of metaphysical reflections on his own evolutionary origins, inevitable death and the descendants who will follow after him. In the sixth canto, “Adán ante los árboles” we see that he is impelled forever onward by the vision of so many things in the earth “...que aún no eran nombradas” (line 486) while feeling within himself “un vago placer de ser guía / de los que aún no eran” (lines 499-500). Later in “Adán va a las montañas” he is seen (in another scene strongly reminiscent of Lugones’ poetic cycle and of the famous painting by the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich) standing atop a mountain peak while “...adormía en sus ojos a todo el universo” (line 569). Then in the ninth canto the narrative is temporarily suspended as Huidobro addresses himself directly to the reader, in order to make absolutely explicit the meaning of the preceding allegory:

Hombre, para llegar a todo
ten más reposo,
sé más poeta,
deja a un lado tu ansiedad inquieta,
cierra los ojos ante el sol
- pon en el acto una serena unción -
y después de mirar un largo rato,

verás bajo tus párpados
un continuo girar de átomos.
Eso son todas las cosas en el Tiempo,
eso es todo,
eso es el Universo:
un eterno girar contradictorio
a un punto fijo. (lines 607-620)

Resuming the narrative, the next five cantos see Adán ascend once more into the mountains as dusk is falling and experience the terror of the first night, before sunrise dispels the darkness as well as ushering in (coincidentally) Adán's first encounter with another human being (Eva).

An interesting digression is then offered in the following penultimate canto, in which Huidobro conflates two Biblical stories – that of Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel, and of the Tower of Babel (from Chapters 4 and 11 of Genesis) – for the sole apparent purpose of furthering his philosophical and artistic parable. Taking his cue perhaps from an analogous poem in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, he inverts the moral status of the two brothers so that Cain (the murderer of Abel) is cast as the hero and all mention of his homicidal deed elided. While Abel is shown as a devout mystic entirely fixated on the mysteries of the next world, Cain, we are told, represents "...la ciencia, / el puro panteísmo / que no busca las cosas hacía afuera / sino en nosotros mismos" (lines 925-929). So then it is the descendants of Cain (not, as in the Biblical account, the children of his as yet unborn brother Seth) who in their Promethean pride raise the Tower of Babel to the heavens – "un escalamiento gigantesco / de los hombres / a derrocar los dioses" (lines 960-962). The failure of the enterprise is shown in this retelling of the Babel myth to be due not to the wrath of God but rather the overwhelming pride of the sons of Cain, as "todos quisieron ser primeros / en atribuirse el mérito" (lines 967-968) and it is from this consequent "división de almas" that arises the tragic sundering of "lenguas y palabras" (lines 969-972). The Tower itself however remains:

...ante toda la Tierra
y ante todos los siglos,
el triunfal monumento de la ciencia
como un gran árbol con sus raíces fijo
aferrado en las entrañas del vacío. (lines 977-981)

Discarding the literal content of the story, the most obvious philosophical and thematic element (which it has in common with the story of Adam) is the celebration of anthropocentrism – the dominion of Man over Nature. While Nature is still treated as an object of veneration, only in Man does it find meaning and purpose. This is made even more explicit in the concluding “Epílogo”, which takes the form of an ode to Adam/Adán the “Supremo manantial” (line 1004) and possessor of various other glorious epithets. As the “primera / palabra, que hirió el silencio de la Tierra / y se clavó en el horizonte” (lines 1015-1017) he is the Cosmic Man, in whom is contained all of the essence of Creation and so logically the ideal archetype for the poet:

¡Oh, Padre Adán! Primera
mirada comprensora sobre la amada Tierra.

Única comprensión verdadera,
porque todo miraba por vez primera
libre de adquisiciones anteriores,
libre de herencias.

Who better than Adán the Cosmic Man to usher in the epoch of *creacionismo* – the re-
visioning of the world by the select priesthood of authentic poets (led, naturally, by
Huidobro), the inauguration of a second order of Creation?

El espejo de agua

Written not long after *Adán*, the small *plaquette* of poems *El espejo de agua* reveals the continuing marked influence of Emerson during this early period of *creacionismo*. The opening poem “Arte poética” in particular (probably the most widely known of all of Huidobro’s *oeuvre*) touches on many of the same points discussed in the preface to the earlier work, only this time referencing not only Emerson’s essay “The Poet” but also the longer and more systematic work *Nature* (Camurati 21-23).

In this same poem – again as in *Adán* – we encounter the insistence on the generative abilities of the poet’s gaze, exemplified in the opening stanza:

Que el verso sea como una llave

Que abra mil puertas.
Una hoja cae; algo pasa volando;
Cuanto miren los ojos creado sea,
Y el alma del oyente quede temblando.

The fourth line's open entreaty "Let all that the eyes see be created" implies that not only must the poet's readers find on the printed page something never before glimpsed, but also that the poet him or herself must look at the world in a new and distinct way. Without this "new-ness" of vision, no true poetry can be created.

The following couplet, with its injunction to "inventa mundos nuevos" (a loose translation of one of the aphorisms uttered by Emerson's nameless "Orphic poet" at the end of his essay *Nature*⁴) makes this idea still more explicit: the poet (again in the words of Emerson) "...unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew. Possessed himself by a heroic passion, he uses matter as symbols of it. The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; *the poet conforms things to his thoughts*" (CWI 31 – emphasis added). This is possible because, Emerson says, (in a passage remarkably similar to Huidobro's description of the Tower of Babel in *Adán*, already reproduced above) the spirit of the Creator flows into Nature *through* Man "as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old" (CWI 38). It then follows that not only does Nature occupy a subordinate rung on the great Chain of Being (a relatively uncontroversial contention for a philosopher-poet working in the Neo-Platonist tradition) but also, rather more controversially, that the individual who is conscious of their proximity to the infinite mind of the Creator can themselves become a "creator in the finite" (ibid).

It is in this context of Emerson's modified version of philosophical Idealism (as earlier suggested, a somewhat contradictory blend of Neo-Platonist and vitalist aesthetics) that supremely optimistic, affirmative statements by Huidobro such as the following must be understood:

Estamos en el ciclo de los nervios.
El músculo cuelga,
Como recuerdo, en los museos;
Mas no por eso tenemos menos fuerza:

El vigor verdadero
Reside en la cabeza. (“Arte poética” lines 8-13)

and:

Sólo para nosotros
Viven todas las cosas bajo el Sol.
El poeta es un pequeño Dios. (lines 16-18)

It is no longer enough (as it was for Schelling, Hölderlin and the Jena School) for the poet merely to behold the essence of already-existing Nature, they must also be able to reach back before the moment of the world’s creation and remould it anew. Or as Huidobro frames it rhetorically “Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh, poetas! / Hacedla florecer en el poema” (“Arte poética”, lines 14-15). In thus enacting their own order of creation parallel to that of the divine they become then, like Adán, “un pequeño Dios”.

These aesthetic principles once outlined, in the rest of the poems in this collection Huidobro attempts to put them into practice. The elements with which he works – mirrors, water, nightingales, the rooms of houses – are all manifestly drawn from the world of empirical reality. And yet by suppressing the conventional word associations and yoking together other words or entities normally considered antithetical (in other words, as he himself had already described it in *Pasando y pasando* by perceiving “las relaciones más lejanas de las cosas”) Huidobro arrives at images which are in the truest sense of the term entirely “created” – that is, ontologically distinct from the sum of their constituent parts – a new reality. Thus in the title poem of the collection, “El espejo de agua”, the mirror on the wall of the poet’s bedroom becomes first a river valley and then a green pool on whose waves, below somnambulant skies, the self-same poet’s dreams draw away like ships. On board the dream-ship the poet himself stands on the deck singing with a “secret rose” swelling in his chest and a drunk nightingale flapping upon his finger.

In yet another poem even the fundamental laws of time and space are inverted, as we discover in the following lines:

En la alcoba,
Detrás de la ventana donde el jardín se muere,
Las hojas lloran.

En la chimenea languidece el mundo.

.....

El horizonte habla,

Detrás todo agonizaba.

La madre que murió sin decir nada,

Trabaja en la garganta.

(“El hombre triste” lines 6-9, 15-18)

To be sure, other poems in the collection are less consistent in their embodiment of the *creacionista* aesthetic – in “El hombre alegre” for example, the overall effect is less of outright novelty than of a kaleidoscope of fragmented reality – a succession of disjointed images which, taken purely on their own, could be viewed as empirically plausible (with the possible exception of the lines “Un hombre salta en el sol / sus ojos llenos de todos los caminos” – a possible recrudescence of Huidobro’s Cosmic Man? – and “Sobre los árboles, / Más altos que el cielo, / Se oye las campanas”). Heightening this sense of fragmentation is the presence in the poem of a certain amount of synaesthesia (“El vuelo de los pájaros y el gritar de los niños / Es del mismo color / Verde”).

A similar unevenness applies to the following three poems, “Nocturno”, “Otoño” and “Nocturno II” in which the tone is predominantly lyrical and the images of lesser complexity. “Año nuevo” however presents a more thorough-going reordering of standard word associations and patterns, with a cinematic depiction of the First World War ironically juxtaposed with the biblical motif of Jacob’s dream (in which the son of Abraham saw a ladder stretching up to Heaven and angels ascending and descending upon it). Thus the entire scene is de-familiarised and made poetic rather than descriptive: the gunner who lines up the target in his sights becomes a cinema projectionist aligning the film reel, while the soldiers who are mowed-down by the resulting hail of bullets become “...las gentes que bajan a la tela” while casually discarding their mortal flesh “...como un abrigo viejo” (like pious souls on the Day of Judgement). The key element here obviously is the suppression of all literal description and its replacement by metaphor, that quintessentially Romantic device by which an analogical view of the world is obtained.

The final poem, “Alguien iba a nacer”, sees a return to the sort of mystical lyricism already encountered in Huidobro’s pre-1916 phase: the poet here is a prophet or *vidente* with access

to hidden knowledge of the *spiritus mundi* along the same lines as that claimed by Yeats in his almost exactly contemporaneous work “The Second Coming”. Nothing is ever actually depicted – the “alguien” of the title never in fact arrives, but is alluded to in ambiguous and imprecise terms suggesting the ineffability of language to make an adequate representation. Such a stance is of course radically at odds with the affirmative and optimistic position vis à vis the capabilities of poetic language sketched out in “Arte poética”, however these kinds of inconsistencies as we will see continue to remain a constant feature of Huidobro’s poetry – notwithstanding his increasingly programmatic and prescriptive writings on aesthetics which we now turn to address.

Literary Reviews and Polemics

One of the earliest written references by Huidobro to the term *creacionismo* occurs in an article published in the Parisian avant-garde literary review *L’Esprit Nouveau* in October of 1920. The article, entitled “La littérature de la langue espagnole d’aujourd’hui”, purports to explain for the benefit of its Francophone audience the emerging aesthetic tendencies among young poets in the Hispanic world. In actual fact the two main schools it claims to identify – those of “les créationnistes et les imagistes” – bear little or no relation to the major movements existing at that time in the ranks of the emerging Hispanic *vanguardia*.⁵ What is of more interest to us though is that in this article Huidobro publicly stakes his claim to have pioneered the use of the term “créationnisme” or *creacionismo* in a lecture he gave at the Ateneo Hispano-Americano in Buenos Aires in July 1916, shortly before his departure for Europe. Nevertheless, he is at pains to point out that “...aujourd’hui je ne suis plus d’accord avec tous les adeptes de cette école, car la plupart sont tombés dans la pure fantaisie”⁶ (*OP* 1300).

In essaying a brief outline of the main tenets of *creacionismo*, Huidobro says that “Pour le créationnisme, la vérité extérieure qui existe *a priori* est méprisable au point de vue de l’art. Il cherche seulement la vérité intérieure, celle à laquelle le créateur donne forme et vie et qui n’existerait pas sans lui”⁷ (*OP* 1299). He then goes on to provide an analogy for these two different types of ‘truth’ (of life and of art) strongly reminiscent of Plotinus’s distinction between the plastic and intellectual arts the *Enneads*: the former is likened to the statue of the Venus de Milo, which derives its ‘truth’ from its ability to recall to our minds really-existing examples of feminine beauty. The latter, meanwhile, is compared to a table which derives its

beauty, not from any similarity with another physical object, but rather from the fact that it adds to nature something that it did not previously possess and because it is entirely *invented*.

The question as to why Huidobro delayed so long in raising the banner of *creacionismo*, despite already having established most of its major tenets in the period from 1916-18, is best answered I think by René de Costa who points out that up until the death of Guillaume Apollinaire in 1918 those poets (such as Huidobro) who militated in the Parisian avant-garde were content to accept the leadership of the great founder of literary Cubism. It was only in the leadership vacuum created *after* Apollinaire's death that rivalries began to emerge, with poets such as Pierre Reverdy, Max Jacob and Tristan Tzara all promising candidates for the succession. It is surely no coincidence that it was only following his falling-out with Reverdy that Huidobro produced the lengthy polemical missive that would later be published (albeit in heavily edited form and translated from Spanish into French) as the manifesto "Le Créacionnisme" (*The Careers of a Poet* 73-5).⁸ All of these factors may go some way towards explaining why, in July 1920 when Huidobro wrote his short article for *L'Esprit Nouveau*, he was still somewhat tentative in his identification with the label of "créacionnisme" or *creacionismo*. The white-hot polemical atmosphere of Paris and Madrid in the early 1920s would soon change this however, pushing Huidobro's naturally contrarian spirit to an increasingly violent insistence on his own total independence from and opposition to all of the other various artistic movements (Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, *Ultraísmo*) led and promoted by his one-time collaborators. As such it seems appropriate to recall here the distinction made by Renato Poggioli (already mentioned in Chapter 1) between polemical and theoretical consciousness, which so often leads intellectuals (whether in the sphere of art, philosophy or politics) to deny kinship most vociferously with those schools or movements they are in fact closest to.

The next step in Huidobro's elaboration of his aesthetic principles is to be found in a lecture entitled "La poesía" delivered (at the invitation of Gerardo Diego, one of the few Spanish converts to *creacionismo*) at the Athenaeum in Madrid in 1921. As in the article published the previous year in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, the presentation is decidedly tinged with Neo-Platonism: however there is also an unmistakable current of mysticism running through the text which bears remarkable affinities with the writings of the French Symbolist Saint-Pol-Roux. We know that at some point during his time in Paris Huidobro had conceived an ardent admiration for this poet, thanks to the testimony provided in the concluding section of his

1925 “Manifeste Manifestes.”⁹ These affinities with Saint-Pol-Roux can be readily discerned in statements such as following from Saint-Pol-Roux’s preface to the first volume of his cycle of prose-poems *Les Reposeurs de la procession* (1893): “Le poète continue Dieu, et la poésie n’est que le renouveau de l’archaïque pensée divine”¹⁰ (*La Rose* 222) – as well as a passage from the third volume of *Les Reposeurs* where Saint-Pol-Roux writes that: “L’office de l’art est d’offrir *une première fois*, de ce fait l’humanité s’enrichit vraiment. Pourquoi redire, non dire? pourquoi refaire, non faire? pourquoi copier, non créer?” (*Les Féeries Intérieures* 146-7)¹¹

Still more remarkable in its parallels with the aesthetic credo propounded by Huidobro in “La poesía” though is Saint-Pol-Roux’s meta-poetic disquisition *La Répoétique*, which although unpublished until after the latter’s death during the Nazi occupation in World War II (and thus of course unknown to Huidobro) nevertheless serves to synthesise many of the ideas concerning artistic creation already contained in the poems of *Les Reposeurs*. *La Répoétique* takes the form of an extended cosmic allegory: at the beginning of the world, the divine Word brought forth light and then descended from the heavens to enter into the world-poem and all of its inhabitants. Exiled from the heavens, the original divine Word is now dispersed throughout the multitude of beings and objects found in the physical world. There it must languish, until humanity learns to recombine and reconstitute the fragments of the original *Verbe* or *Logos* and so arrive at “le son initial et le pensée génératrice”¹² (*Répoétique* 29). This, Saint-Pol-Roux informs us, is the task of the true poet. Once it is accomplished, the divine *Verbe* will be transported back to the sun by the same rays of light on which it first arrived, and the entire world be transfigured to the extent that “Dieu se fera physique et l’homme deviendra métaphysique”¹³ (*Répoétique* 39, 47). Thus will be inaugurated “l’Age du Soleil”.

In remarkably similar fashion, Huidobro begins his 1921 Madrid lecture with the observation that:

En todas las cosas hay una palabra interna, una palabra latente y que es debajo de la palabra que las designa. Ésa es la palabra que debe descubrir el poeta.

La Poesía es el vocablo virgen de todo prejuicio; el verbo creado y creador, la palabra recién nacida. Ella se desarrolla en el alba primera del mundo. Su

precisión no consiste en denomina las cosas, sino en no alejarse del alba. (*OP* 1296).

Further on, he makes the link between poetry and the remaking of the world still more explicit:

La Poesía es el lenguaje del Creación. Por ello sólo los que llevan el recuerdo de aquel tiempo, sólo los que no han olvidado los vagidos del parto universal ni los acentos del mundo en su formación, son poetas. Las células del poeta están amasadas en el primer dolor y guardan el ritmo del primer espasmo. En la garganta del poeta el universo busca su voz, una voz inmortal. (*OP* 1297)

All of the ideas and motifs already elaborated by Huidobro in his earlier works seem here to be drawn together: the poet stands in a privileged relationship to the divine, they alone have access to a secret or hidden body of knowledge by means of which they may not only apprehend the essence (as did the earlier generation of Romantics) but also remake or *renovate* the tired fabric of language and the world, to allow us once again to enjoy as Saint-Pol-Roux suggests “une première fois”. As Huidobro expresses it:

El poeta conoce el eco de los llamados de las cosas a las palabras, ve los lazos sutiles que se tienden las cosas entre sí, oye las voces secretas que se lanzan las unas a otras palabras separadas por distancias inconmensurables, hace darse la mano a vocablos enemigos desde el principio del mundo, los agrupa y los obliga a marchar en su rebaño por rebeldes que sean, descubre las alusiones más misteriosas del verbo y las condensa en un plano superior, *las entreteje en su discurso, en donde lo arbitrario pasa a tomar un rol encantatorio.* (ibid – emphasis added)

The last phrase I have chosen to highlight because I believe it points to a fundamental component of Huidobro’s *creacionista* aesthetic at this point in its development; namely that that which the poet creates, though it is a product of their own conscious intellectual *will* rather than a simple transcription of divine or Platonic essences, still possesses (contra Nietzsche) ontological *truth*. This is possible because the poet still occupies a position within a theological hierarchy – the divine Creator is no longer visible or accessible but nevertheless continues to exist in a sufficient sense to legitimate the poet’s status as a demigod (or rather, as the Gnostics would say, *demiurge* – in the sense of providing – like Adam – the second

great impulse of creation in the universe). Accordingly, their discourse *is not arbitrary*, their vocation not merely an aesthetic one but instead the natural re-founding of philosophy in Art. Such then is the “middle way” – already sketched out by Emerson and Saint-Pol-Roux – between the twin polarities of transcendentalism and nihilism. The final paragraphs of Huidobro’s address provide what is surely one of the most moving restatements of this mystical-Orphic position:

...la Poesía no es otra cosa que el último horizonte, que es, a su vez, la arista en donde los extremos se tocan, en donde no hay contradicción ni duda. Al llegar a ese lindero final el encadenamiento habitual de los fenómenos rompe su lógica, y al otro lado, en donde empiezan las tierras del poeta, la cadena se rehace en una lógica nueva.

El poeta os tiende la mano para conducirnos más allá del último horizonte, más arriba de la punta de la pirámide, en ese campo que se extiende más allá de lo verdadero y lo falso, más allá de la razón y de la fantasía, más allá del espíritu y la materia.

Allí ha plantado el árbol de sus ojos y desde allí contempla el mundo, desde allí os habla y os descubre los secretos del mundo.

Hay en su garganta un incendio inextinguible.

Hay además ese balanceo de mar entre dos estrellas.

Y hay ese *Fiat lux* que lleva clavado en su lengua. (*OP* 1298)

With these famous words echoing the first chapter of the Latin Bible (not to mention Saint-Pol-Roux’s *Répoétique*) still resounding in our ears, we turn next to another article published in *L’Esprit Nouveau* (April 1921) entitled “La Création Pure”. In this essay Huidobro seeks to defend his Orphic aesthetic in a more discursive and analytical manner (perhaps out of deference to the philosophical sensibilities of his French audience, those prodigious children of Racine and Voltaire), declaiming that “...devons-nous éloigner le plus possible de la métaphysique et nous approcher de plus en plus la philosophie scientifique”¹⁴ (*OP* 1302). Nevertheless, while deprecating in this text much of the vocabulary of German Idealism Huidobro openly praises Schelling for having rescued in the name of “scientific” philosophy the concept of intuition or knowledge *a priori* from the limited domain of sensibility to which

it had previously been consigned (1303-4). Intuition, says Huidobro, is fundamental to the ability of humanity to transcend its former condition of “l’Homme miroir” – a mere prisoner of the physical senses – and become instead “l’Homme-Dieu”, able to perceive the many sides of reality that go unseen and unheard. It then follows that art must also follow this process of detaching itself progressively from pre-existing (empirical) reality in order to seek out its own truth, in support of which Huidobro cites the words of an Aymara shaman with whom he claims to have once conversed: “Le poète est un Dieu, ne chante pas la pluie, poète, fais pleuvoir”¹⁵ (1304).

These words, which also formed possibly the key inspiration for the poem “Arte poética” in *Espejo de agua*, are interpreted here to mean that the poet must create his or her own world parallel to yet independent of Nature. Thus although the poet cannot like a magician literally “troubler les lois du monde”, their created “vérité de l’Art” is judged to be of equal value with “la vérité de la vie”. Huidobro then goes on to emphasise that:

Il faut bien faire ressortir cette différence entre la vérité de la vie et la vérité de l’Art : l’une qui existe antérieurement à l’artiste et l’autre qui lui est postérieure, qui est produite par lui.

La confusion de ces deux vérités est la principale cause d’erreur dans le jugement esthétique. (*OP* 1304)

[It is necessary then to highlight this difference between the truth in life and truth in Art: one which exists before the artist and the other which is posterior, which is produced by him. The confusion of these two truths is the principal cause of error in aesthetic judgement]

However, Huidobro is again being somewhat disingenuous here as revealed by his invocation of Schleiermacher, who famously counterposed philosophical “speculation” and “praxis” based on the finite universe with the “higher realism” of (true) religion – which relies, like poetic creation, only on intuition (*On Religion* 23-24). Read also alongside the subsequent avowal that a work of art “est une nouvelle réalité cosmique que l’artiste ajoute a la Nature et qui doit avoir comme les astres une atmosphère à elle”¹⁶ (not to mention his later description of himself in *Altazor* as “antipoeta y mago”) it seems clear that while in Huidobro’s opinion Nature or “la vérité de la vie” remains worthy of respect, those intellectual disciplines which merely attempt to study and describe it do not (*OP* 1307). Such also is the implication of

Huidobro's proposed periodisation of the history of art into a neat narrative of linear progress, beginning with the era of imitative art before moving on to that of adaptation and finally culminating in the "l'époque de création" (a convenient formula that recalls some of the most supremely optimistic predictions of Marxist dialectics).

Extrapolating on the argument already proposed in his 1914 manifesto "Non Serviam", Huidobro summarises his position thus:

L'Homme secoue son esclavage, se révolte contre le Nature comme jadis Lucifer se révolta contre Dieu, bien que cette rébellion ne soit qu'apparente, *car jamais l'homme n'a été plus près de la Nature que maintenant qu'il ne cherche plus à l'imiter dans ses apparences, mais à faire comme elle en l'imitant dans le fond de ses lois constructives*, dans la réalisation d'un tout, dans le mécanisme de la production de formes nouvelles.

.....

Il ne s'agit pas d'imiter la Nature, mais de faire comme elle, de ne pas imiter ses extériorisations mais son pouvoir extériorisateur. (OP 1304-5, emphasis in original)

[Man shakes off his enslavement, rebels against Nature as long ago Lucifer rebelled against God, yet this rebellion is but an apparent one, *for man has never been closer to Nature than now that he no longer looks to imitate her in appearances, but rather to proceed like her in the deeper imitation of her laws of construction*, in the realisation of a whole, in the mechanism of production of new forms...It is no longer a question of imitating Nature, but of proceeding like her, not imitating her exteriorisations but rather her exteriorising power]

Though Nature and the poet-shaman are thus equal in the order of their generative powers, they are not however equal in the order of time. That which in the dawn of Creation was fresh and wondrous is now in urgent need of renewal, *and it is only through the power of art that this task can be accomplished*. Hence life must assume secondary importance to Art.

Manifestes manifeste

The continual insistence on the status of artistic creation as a *consciously willed act* meanwhile forms the basis of the title essay from Huidobro's 1925 book *Manifestes Manifeste*. Essentially a polemic against Dada and the Surrealists, it continues to defend a clear "middle position" between the alternative polarities of Neo-Platonism and vitalism, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Huidobro's (re)interpretation of a passage from Plato's *Ion* which runs as follows:

Platon disait du poète: « Il ne chantera jamais sans un transport divin, sans une douce fureur. Loin de lui la *froide raison*: dès qu'il veut lui obéir, il n'y a pas de vers, il n'y a plus d'oracles ».

Je crois que cela est évident, loin du poète la *froide raison*, mais il y a une autre raison qui n'est pas froide, qui au moment du travail du poète est au diapason avec la chaleur de son âme... (*OP* 1317)

[Plato said of the poet: "He will never sing except when he is in a state of divine transport, a gentle madness. Far from him lies *cold reason*: since for he who wishes to obey it, there is no verse, there are no more oracles." I believe that all of this is obvious, far from the poet lies *cold reason*, but there is another reason which is not cold, which at the moment of the poet's production is in tune with the warmth of his soul...]

Huidobro then goes on to suggest that all poetic production depends upon a moment of "délire poétique" in which the poet feels himself possessed of both "superconscience" and "clairvoyance" (*OP* 1318, 1319). What is meant by this term "poetic delirium" is manifestly however not the same as the meaning encountered the writings of André Breton, who sought in the name of the Surrealists to liberate the Unconscious from the shackles of the intellectual ego through the power of dreams and automatic writing. On the contrary, Huidobro insists time and time again on the fact that in the moment of delirium – unlike in a state of dreaming – the poet retains consciousness, reason and control. They assume an active – not a passive – role in the organisation and assemblage of words on the page, for which task reason (albeit in a subordinate capacity) is indispensable. Moreover, claims Huidobro, unlike dreams which belong to everyone and cannot be controlled, the state of poetic delirium is something which

can be consciously willed and entered into; “la faculté qu’ont certaines gens de s’exciter naturellement jusqu’au transport, d’avoir un appareil cérébral si sensible que les phénomènes du monde peuvent mettre en cet état de fièvre et de haute fréquence pneumonique”¹⁷ (*OP* 1320). Delirium belongs to no-one but poets – the sacred priesthood is thereby saved from the intrusion of the unruly *demos*.

Much of the remainder of “Manifeste” is dedicated to a demonstration of the importance of consciousness and reason in yoking together the disparate elements that make up a poem. Since the power of poetry to move and transport the reader depends upon its disruption of conventional word and image associations, Huidobro argues, a degree of premeditation is necessary to ensure that the finished verse does not simply fall back on conventional tropes and clichés. Passive surrender in the act of writing – whether to the divine Muse or to its modern-day secularised representative, the Unconscious, simply will not do.

Perhaps a touch ironically (in view of Breton’s later fondness for precisely the same metaphor) Huidobro cites another passage from Plato’s *Ion* (so radically different in tenor to the anti-poetic prejudices that predominate in most of Plato’s writings) in which the poet is compared to an iron ring caught in the field of a magnet, which is in turn able to communicate some of the magnetic power that entraps it to still other rings (1325-6). In just the same manner, Huidobro implies, the poet must combine both passive and active elements within their personality – the ability to be open to the unseen forces of the universe while at the same time weaving from them a new song for those souls who sit beyond the radius of firelight cast by the celestial flame.

There then follows by way of an epilogue a short disquisition on the genius of Saint-Pol-Roux, who has already been discussed in connection with Huidobro’s 1921 lecture “La poesía” above.

The second essay to appear in *Manifestes*, “Le Créationisme”, aside from re-emphasising the importance of Huidobro’s 1916 lecture in the Athenaeum in Buenos Aires as the true starting point for *creacionismo*, is primarily concerned with establishing the key characteristics of the “created” poem. In doing so it shows the extent to which Huidobro, his occasional Neo-Platonist regression such as in the previous essay notwithstanding, is steadily drawing away from that philosophical tradition. Thus we read that:

Ce poème est une chose qui ne peut pas exister ailleurs que dans la tête du poète, il n'est pas beau par souvenir, il n'est pas beau parce qu'il décrit de belles choses que nous avons la possibilité de voir. Il est beau en soi et il n'admet pas de termes de comparaison. Il ne peut pas se concevoir ailleurs que dans le livre. (*OP* 1329)

[This poem is a thing that cannot exist anywhere else except in the head of the poet, it is not beautiful through nostalgia, nor because it describes beautiful things that we have the possibility of seeing. It is beautiful in itself and does not admit terms of comparison. It cannot be conceived of anywhere else except in a book]

We are then given a lengthy series of poetic images (from a variety of poets in a number of different languages) which in Huidobro's subjective opinion conform to the aesthetic criteria just outlined. Because the most important element is "la présentation du fait nouveau" and hence the supremacy of the image over the constituent words, rhyme or metre, Huidobro insists that a *creacionista* poem will be easily translated into any language. Later on in the essay he also speculates concerning the possibility that the poetic sense of a work may indeed be *heightened* by the unfamiliarity of encountering it in a second language, although of course in this case the poet can hardly claim credit: "Avez-vous remarqué la force spéciale, l'ambiance presque créative qui entoure les poésies dans une langue que vous commencez à balbutier? Vous trouvez merveilleux des poèmes qui vous feront sourire un an après."¹⁸ (1334-5)

Meanwhile, in a further interesting aside reminiscent of Schleiermacher, Huidobro claims to identify a fundamental binary tension within humanity between a centrifugal (expansive) and centripetal (concentrating) force.¹⁹ The former constitutes the imagination, that wave-projector of our interior subjective world, while the latter represents "la simple sensibilité", the conduit by which we absorb the content of the universe. Only in the true poet, Huidobro maintains, are these two forces combined in equal balance to form "la personnalité totale" (*OP* 1333). This is so because both elements – receptive sensibility and imaginative projection – are necessary for the creation of a work of art.

Unsurprisingly then it is only a select few will attain this level of spiritual development: as Huidobro notes sarcastically concerning the circle around Guillaume Apollinaire with which

he became involved after arriving in Paris in late 1916, despite the presence of “...quelques chercheurs sérieux, malheureusement la plupart très peu doués du feu sacré, car rien de plus faux que de croire que les dons courent les rues. Les véritables dons de poète sont la chose la plus rare qui existe”²⁰ (1335). But it is not only the “feu sacré” that is lacking in some of these poets according to Huidobro, for equally as important as the connection to the divine Muse is the ability to impose one’s human subjectivity upon the physical universe: so Huidobro criticises his one-time collaborator Pierre Reverdy for entitling one of his collections of poems *La lucarne ovale* [“The Oval Skylight”] when there is nothing in the slightest bit remarkable about an oval skylight – contrasting this with the squared horizons of his own *Horizon carré*.

This insistence on “humanising” the universe is undoubtedly the key element of Huidobro’s aesthetic philosophy separating his work during this period from both the Neo-Platonist wing of Romanticism as well as Breton and the Surrealists (while simultaneously joining him to the Orphic tradition of Emerson). The remainder of his core *creacionista* principles he summarises in the form of the epigraph originally affixed to the 1917 collection *Horizon carré*:

« Créer un poème en empruntant à la vie ses motifs et en les transformant pour leur donner une vie nouvelle et indépendante. »

« Rien d’anecdotique ni de descriptif. L’émotion doit naître de la seule vertu créatrice. »

« Faire un poème comme la nature fait un arbre. » (*OP* 1336)

[“Create a poem borrowing images from life and transforming them by giving them a new and independent life.” “Nothing of the anecdotal nor of the descriptive. Emotion must be born from the creative faculty alone.” “Make a poem like nature makes a tree.”]

The third and fifth essays in *Manifestes*, “Je trouve” and “La poésie des fous” continue Huidobro’s polemic with the Surrealists which has already been well described in “Manifeste”, adding only a few memorable turns of phrase such as the remark that Surrealism “...abaisse la poésie en voulant la mettre à la portée de tout le monde, comme un simple jeu de famille après dîner”²¹ (*OP* 1343). The fourth essay, “Futurisme et machinisme”,

repostulates on the other hand many of the arguments already made in *Pasando y pasando* (see Chapter 2). The sixth essay, “Besoin d’une esthétique poétique faite par les poètes”, is essentially little more than a plea for literary critics to leave off writing about subjects about which they know nothing. Meanwhile “Époque de création” restates the same principles already advanced in both “Manifeste manifestes” and “Le créationnisme”.

The cryptic short text “Avis aux touristes” is notable chiefly for the way it appears to echo the history of Huidobro’s involvement with the Parisian avant-garde: a man catches a train just as it is leaving the station, leaping into the last wagon and signalling the conductor the adjustments to make each time it starts to jump the tracks. Meanwhile “commercial salesmen from headquarters” prowl the corridors and upon arrival at the next station the narrator perceives that the itinerary and route have been completely changed. He gets off and embarks instead upon the “route of polar dreams”. Continuing the polar travel theme (and with more than a nod also to Huidobro’s 1918 literary cubist works *Poemas Árticos* and *Ecuatorial*²²) is “Manifeste peut-être”, a poetic/aphoristic rendering of the key ideas already elaborated in earlier essays such as “La création pure” and (again) “Le créationnisme”.

Rounding out *Manifestes* is the prose-poem “Les sept paroles du poète”, which appears to be constructed of an entirely different aesthetic vision to all of the works preceding it.

Interspersed between seven extracts of Christ’s agonised discourse upon the cross, a proto-Altazor figure looks down from high among the clouds and voices his Nietzschean disdain for humanity. Far from wishing to redeem or renew the world he desires on the contrary nothing more than to abandon it, exclaiming “J’ai soif de me sentir enlevé par le moteur de ma poésie, chargée pour six mille ans vers les vitesses du chaos”²³ (*OP* 1367). Amidst the landscape of manufactured, artificial images the poet-protagonist has somehow lost his sense of their possessing any objective truth or value, and so in the concluding lines he positively welcomes the disintegration of the planetary system “en cataclysme de vagues vertes”. The Apollonian illusion of order is finally discarded and the Orphic poet-shaman surrenders to the abyss, to the tragic knowledge that the entire world is but a projection of the *principium individuationis*.

Vientos contrarios

Having returned shortly after the publication of *Manifestes* to his native Chile and looking back over the first 33 years of his existence (a not insignificant milestone in light of the

increasingly strong analogies drawn between his poetic alter-ego and the figure of the crucified Christ) Huidobro opens this collection of autobiographical essays and aphorisms in the essay “La confesión inconfesable” with a highly stylised (one might almost say clichéd) description of himself as a quintessentially Romantic poet. At the age of thirteen he was tormented by love not, he says, for any attainable woman of his own native Chile but rather for the famed Parisian actress and courtesan Ginette de Lantelme, for the *doyenne* of Belle-Époque literary circles Anna, Comtesse de Noailles and for the tragic Romanov Princess Tatiana (OC 791-2). Subsequently he then claims, equally quixotically, to have developed a strong affiliation with the cause of the Irish national liberation struggle – as however in the case of his adolescent literary *amours* there is little surviving evidence of this entanglement – unless one includes Huidobro’s 1923 tract *Finis Britannia*.²⁴ Regarding his views on poetry and art he has the following to say:

Lo que se ha llamado poesía hasta hoy es un mezquino comentario de las cosas de la vida y no una creación de nuestro espíritu. Son vanos floreos puestos en torno de las cosas, pero no es la creación de un hecho nuevo inventado por nosotros.

El poeta es un pequeño dios. Se trata, pues, de condensar el caos en diminutos planetas de emoción. (OC I 795)

This emphasis on what we might call ‘greatness of soul’ as the primary generative source of poetry is symptomatic of vitalist strand of Romanticism towards which Huidobro is at this time increasingly moving. This idea is further reinforced in “El héroe”, in which Huidobro describes a meditative chain of thought experienced while sitting in the park opposite Napoleon’s former palace of Fontainebleau. According to Huidobro, the true hero is no wind-harp over which the gods play their indecipherable melody, nor is he a prisoner of his Unconscious. On the contrary he is (like Napoleon) all ego, assertiveness and willed volition:

El fondo de su alma está en constante ebullición, en perpetuo movimiento, y es una ambición de subir, pero no la ambición vulgar hecha de ladrillos de arribismo. Él quiere subir para superarse a sí mismo, para probar sus fuerzas, por necesidad de exaltar su vida.

El héroe es un dios irrealizado, más bien es el concepto de dios, nuestro anhelo de dios, nuestro deseo de absoluto hecho carne. (OC I 797)

Huidobro continues in this vein with two more essays dedicated respectively to Napoleon and to Tirso de Molina's Don Juan, underscoring all the while the greatness of spirit with which both of these men were possessed and which allowed them to exercise great power over those who surrounded them seemingly without effort.

The second section of *Vientos contrarios* begins with an epigraph by Huidobro in which the conflation of the crucified Christ and the poet himself (already begun in "Les sept paroles du poète") is made still more explicit:

¡Cuidado!
No os acerquéis a mí, estoy cargado de dinamita.
Pero tú no te alejes. Vuelve, vuelve a mí.
Yo soy la verdad y la vida, porque sólo hay amor en mi espíritu.
Vuelve. Te estaré aguardando en mi calvario de nubes...
Con los brazos abiertos. ¿Te acuerdas? (*OC I* 802)

This supplanting of the divine by the poet is further underlined in the following pages by fragmented images and aphorisms such as "La beata cose los dioses con su rosario" (807) and "Los dioses caen de puro maduros" (808). The relationship between heaven and earth has been completely inverted. Unlike that of Christ though the gospel of Huidobro's poet-messiah is essentially one of playful nihilism, as can be seen in his somewhat ironic injunction to the reader to "Arroja al mar tus prejuicios, arroja al mar los principios, arroja al mar el deber, arroja a las olas la moral, arroja a las olas las conveniencias y tu seguridad. Abandona tu familia, tu hogar, tu patria y no me sigas" (809). Huidobro also inveighs against the theories of those critics, like José Ortega y Gasset, who characterised the "nuevo arte" of the *vanguardia* as aiming at total *deshumanización* or objectivity: on the contrary, he argues, it is only through the artist that the art work obtains its validity and "El mayor enemigo de la poesía es el poema" (814-5). Subjectivity is all.²⁵

In the third section of the book Huidobro references for the first time directly (rather than merely obliquely) to the philosopher Nietzsche, as he describes walking the shores of Lake Silvaplana in the Swiss Canton of Grisons (rendered incorrectly here however as "Silvana Plana") where Nietzsche first put into the mouth of his existentialist prophet Zarathustra the famous phrase: "God is dead". Here, Huidobro tells us "he escrito el capítulo V de mi *Altazor*" (819). Continuing also his theme of rescuing the priesthood of poetry from

profanation by the masses, Huidobro writes (in terms entirely befitting one who claimed descent from Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar) that “Mi mayor orgullo es haber arrancado la poesía de manos de los vecinos de la ciudad y haberla encerrado en la fortaleza de los caballeros ungidos” (822).

Echoing Lautréamont and the French Decadents, Huidobro closes out the section with an extensive essay in praise of the seventeenth-century murderess (and mistress of Louis XIV) the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

The fourth and final section of *Vientos contrarios* sees a further intensification of the ludic impulse, with many passages that seem again to anticipate the spirit of *Altazor* such as “Nada amo tanto como lo imprevisto. Una gitana en Budapest me leyó el porvenir en las líneas de la mano. Yo me eché vitriolo y las borré” and “Huir del hombre, huir de la naturaleza y sentarse encima del arco iris con una pluma en la mano” (840, 841). That these parallels can be so readily drawn is not altogether surprising, however, since as Cedomil Goic points out the preface to the later work had already been published in 1925 in the Chilean periodical *La Nación* – six years before the appearance of the actual body of the poem (*OP* 718).

In the concluding fragment of *Vientos* Huidobro sets out an imaginary dialogue in which an unnamed poet asks to be given either a cell in a Carthusian monastery or a fast aeroplane, that he may flee from his own human condition, only to be told by his Nietzschean interlocutor that there is no possibility of escape: “Eres humano, terriblemente humano” (855).

Thus the curtain begins to fall upon the epoch of *creacionismo* and its utopian promise that poetry can somehow save or redeem the world. By exalting the power of language over the physical universe the poet has undercut his own privileged position in the Great Chain of Being and with it the possibility of his own verbal creations possessing any objective ontological truth-status. Octavio Paz sums up the dilemma well in his discussion of the fate of Mallarmé, who with his *Un coup de dés* had already anticipated the problem of total poetic subjectivity: “Para Blake la realidad primordial es el mundo, que contiene todos los símbolos y arquetipos; para Mallarmé, la palabra” (*El arco y la lira* 275). Since to all intents and purposes the world has been abolished (or as Paz says the coherent and unified “imagen del mundo” based on the Neo-Platonist doctrine that makes a symbolic vision of the universe at least conceivable), the poet cannot – unlike the early Romantics – claim to represent anything beyond what exists within his own consciousness (*El arco* 261-2). The way is now set for the

flight of the poet-god (already projected in “Les sept paroles du poète”) down from the heavens towards the Dionysiac abyss.

¹ Mireya Camurati in her book *Poesía y poética de Vicente Huidobro* demonstrates that Huidobro almost certainly first read Emerson in French translation rather than the original English, before himself re-translating the selected passages under discussion here into Spanish to be included in the Preface to *Adán* (see Camurati 16-20).

² The sole possible exception can perhaps be found in the canto “Primer Amor” where Adán speaks for the first time to Eva:

Y cuando dijo Adán esta sola palabra
sencilla y clara:
“Amor” dijo más, algo más grande,
algo más pleno de alma,
más sublime e inefable
que todos los poemas
sobre el amor escritos en la Tierra (lines 866-872)

³ Concerning the figure of Adam Kadmon see Gershom Scholem’s excellent introduction to the world of the Lurianic Kabbalah in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, in particular pages 265-284.

⁴ “Build, therefore, your own world” (*CW I* 45)

⁵ See Guillermo de Torre’s *Historia de las literaturas de vanguardias* (particularly Chapter 7) for an outline of the situation in the Hispanic literary world during this period.

⁶ “...today I am no longer in agreement with all of the followers of this school, for the greater part have fallen into pure fantasy”

⁷ “for *creacionismo*, the exterior truth that exists *a priori* is from the artistic point of view contemptible. It searches only for the interior truth, that to which the creator gives form and life and which would not have existed without him”

⁸ Interestingly enough, this falling out was originally instigated not by Reverdy or Huidobro but rather by a third party, the Guatemalan-born poet and essayist Enrique Gómez Carillo, who wrote an article in the Madrid periodical *Cosmópolis* in June 1920 accusing Huidobro of having plagiarised the author of *La lucarne ovale* – an accusation which, while untrue, nevertheless acquired a certain currency due to Huidobro’s unfortunate habit of retrospectively altering his own publication history (see note 1 to Chapter 2).

⁹ See *OP* 1326

¹⁰ “The poet continues God, and poetry is nothing more than the renewal of the archaic divine thought.”

¹¹ “The role of art is to offer a *first time*, to make humanity truly enrich itself. Why retell, not tell? Why redo, not do? Why copy, not create?”

¹² “the initial sound and the germinating thought”

¹³ “God will be made physical and man will become metaphysical”

¹⁴ “...we must distance ourselves as much as possible from metaphysics and draw ever closer to scientific philosophy”

¹⁵ “The poet is a god, don’t sing the rain, poet, make it rain”

¹⁶ “is a new cosmic reality that the artist adds to Nature and which must have like the stars its own atmosphere”

¹⁷ “the faculty which certain people possess of naturally stimulating themselves to the point of transport, having a cerebral apparatus so sensitive that the phenomena of the natural world can project them into this state of fever and pneumatic high frequency”

¹⁸ “Have you noticed the special power, the almost creative atmosphere that surrounds poems written in a language which you are only beginning to stammer?” You find marvellous poems which later will make you laugh”

¹⁹ Concerning Schleiermacher’s notion of human duality see *Soliloquies* p.34

²⁰ “...a few serious searchers; the majority unfortunately very little endowed with the sacred fire, for there is nothing more erroneous than believing that such gifts run through the streets. True poetic gifts are the rarest thing that exists”

²¹ “...degrades poetry in wishing to place it at the disposition of everyone, like a simple family after-dinner game”

²² For a more detailed exposition of these works see my own essay “Negative Dialectic or Fatal Paradox?” in the inaugural 2010 issue of *Experimental Poetics and Aesthetics*.

²³ “I thirst to feel myself raised up on the motor of my poetry, charging for six thousand years approaching speeds of chaos”

²⁴ The story of *Finis Britannia* and Huidobro’s claimed abduction for three days in March 1924 by “English fascists” acting in defence of British Imperialism is dismissed by René de Costa as an elaborate Dada-esque spectacle (see *The Careers of a Poet* 104-106)

²⁵ Hence also Huidobro’s defence of his so-called “egolatría” against the *ultraísta* Guillermo de Torre at p. 803

Chapter 4: From Poet-God to Citizen of Oblivion (1931-1948)

By the time of the publication of *Manifestes manifeste* in 1925 Huidobro had already begun to realise that his fundamental *creacionista* premise that “el poeta es un pequeño dios” creating “mundos nuevos” *ex-nihilo* could only be in the end self-defeating. Through his insistence that the verbal creations of the poet were entirely independent of both the physical universe as well as of any divine pre-existing order of things he had, in some sense, abolished objectivity and along with it the privileged status of the poet as gatekeeper to the secrets of the cosmos. Indeed, while this tragic realisation is only partially reflected in the text of the *Manifestes* themselves (principally in the final section, “Les sept paroles du poète”), two small collections of French-language poetry published by Huidobro in the same year, *Automne regulier* and *Tout a coup* (which unfortunately we lack the space to properly analyse here), had already mapped out the key themes of “la vacuidad del cielo” and a Baudelairean descent into the abyss that would come to dominate the next stage of Huidobro’s poetic production (Yúdice 132-3). Coupled with the ironic treatment of the Christ-figure and frequent allusions to the writings of Nietzsche that characterise the 1926 book of essays and aphorisms *Vientos contrarios*, the scene was now well and truly set for mythologised Fall of the poet-god from his celestial station in *Altazor*.¹

The purpose of this next chapter is to chart the manifold ways in which Huidobro attempted, during the period spanning from the publication of *Altazor* in 1931 until his untimely death in 1948, to come to terms with his new-found condition of total subjectivity arising from the embrace of what I have termed the “vitalist” current of Romanticism and its associated paradox of simultaneous self-assertion and self-negation. In the course of this analysis, I will argue (drawing on the writings of both Octavio Paz and Martin Heidegger) that the principal means by which the poet seeks to re-establish a relationship with the Primal Unity or Absolute is though, first of all, a fracturing of the poetic self into the “yo” and the “otro yo” and, secondly, though a deliberate distortion of not only the conventions but also the basic building blocks of language – calling our attention to the existence of an unknowable, inexpressible Infinite somewhere among the fragments of both the poet’s own consciousness as well as his own verbal creations.

Discussing Stéphane Mallarmé’s work *Un coup de dés* (which he regards as initiating a whole new phase in the development of poetry in the “modern” period and which Huidobro

would later pay explicit homage to in *El ciudadano del olvido*) Octavio Paz describes how the multiple readings or possible combinations of words contained within this hyper-textual poem in which “las frases tienden a configurarse en centros más o menos independientes, a la manera de sistemas solares dentro de un universo” allow it to remain “abierto hacia el infinito”:

Esos dardos lanzados por el poeta, ideograma del azar, son una constelación que rueda sobre el espacio y que en cada una de sus momentáneas combinaciones dice, sin decirlo jamás enteramente, el número absoluto: *compte total en formation. (El arco 272)*

The idea of an infinite book or poem (or at least one “open towards the infinite”) expounded here is strikingly reminiscent of the attitude of the Kabbalists towards the Talmud. For them (as opposed to orthodox Jewish scriptural scholars) the Hebrew holy book was not a settled and final text at all, containing instead (as Gershom Scholem notes in his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*) an endless number of possible configurations of letters which, whether they make sense in human speech or not, represent some aspect of the active, creative power of God at work in the universe (14). The possibility of a poem containing words or sentences that may indeed be *completely devoid of semantic meaning* should therefore be just as significant to us as the model used by Mallarmé, which merely contents itself with engendering a multiplicity of possible readings (“signos en rotación”, as Paz has it).

This focus on what is hidden/what is concealed (as opposed to revealed) in a text can also be seen as finding a thematic correlation in the fascination which many of the poets working in this vitalist tradition exhibit for the void, the abyss or essential *nothingness*. For while clearly linked to the standpoint of philosophical nihilism the void can also be for the mystic (as Gershom Scholem once again reminds us) the *Nothing* from which all things take their origin; “no mere negation” but rather the hidden face of God – the infinite Deity who (unlike the Biblical Creator-God) is Unknowable and therefore cannot be killed off by the exercise of Reason (Scholem 25).

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger makes a similar point in his study of some of the later poems of Friedrich Hölderlin (composed during the period of his final madness and seemingly indecipherable to most readers and critics). Where others regard the lack of syntactical and narrative coherency as a problem however, Heidegger sees something else:

namely "...visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar. The poetic saying of images gathers the brightness and sound of the heavenly appearances into one with the darkness and silence of what is alien. By such sights the god surprises us." (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 226). By "god" Heidegger does not of course have in mind primarily (or at least not solely) the Judeo-Christian figure of Biblical Scripture, but rather something analogous to what Paz refers to as "el otro", the undefinable mysterious quantity within us that makes us *more than just ourselves*. For, as Paz says, "Ser uno mismo es condenarse a la mutilación pues el hombre es apetito perpetuo de ser otro" (*El arco* 268). The rebellion of the Romantics and their successors is therefore not so much a protest at the banishment of the Christian God as a search for

....la mitad perdida, descenso a esa región que nos comunica con lo *otro*. Por esto no encontraron lugar en ninguna ortodoxia y su conversión a esta o aquella creencia nunca fue total. Detrás de Cristo o de Orfeo, de Luzbel o María, buscaban esa realidad de realidades que llamamos lo divino o lo *otro*.
(ibid)

This search for the missing "other" can be seen in the famous remark by Rimbaud (in a letter to Paul Demeny dated 15 May 1871) that "Je est un autre" ("I is another") and in the 1909 collection of poems by Álvaro Armando Vasseur (already discussed in relation to Huidobro's *Pasando y pasando* in Chapter 2) *Cantos del otro yo*, to name but two prominent examples. In point of fact, in his extended essay entitled "Vicente Huidobro en vanguardia" Huidobro's former close friend and artistic collaborator Juan Larrea suggests that the writings of Rimbaud (including specifically the letter to Demeny) exerted a strong influence over the Chilean poet in the composition of *Altazor* (Larrea 239-240).

In the case of Huidobro, I contend that this search for "el otro" is dramatised through the fragmentation of the poet-god Altazor's own consciousness in the course of his Luciferic plunge from the stars towards his inevitable appointment with the primordial abyss – an appointment that is necessary in order for the poet to escape the impasse caused by his own conversion from Neo-Platonist transcendentalism to aesthetic nihilism, from Nature's priest to Fisher King ruling alone over a darkened and desolate waste. This process of fragmentation and descent is then continued in *Sátiro o el poder de las palabras* (1939) and *Ver y palpar* (1941). Only when both consciousness and language have been completely dearticulated in a kind of metaphorical "Noche oscura del alma" does it then become possible

(in *El ciudadano del olvido* and *Últimos poemas*) for the poet to begin to reconcile his two warring souls (of artistic self-projection and self-dissolution) in a new state of consubstantiation with Nature: in other words, through a recognition that self and non-self or being and non-being are in fact one and the same.

Altazor

The opening lines of the Preface to *Altazor* immediately recall the ironic rendering of the poet as a Christ-like Messianic figure in “Les sept paroles du poète”: “Nací a los treinta y tres años; el día de la muerte de Cristo; nací en el Equinoccio, bajo las hortensias y los aeroplanos de calor” the protagonist tells us. His father (the Creator) is blind and without name – “...un simple hueco en el vacío, hermoso como un ombligo” – who after undertaking his labour of Creation pauses to drink “...un poco de cognac (a causa de la hidrografía)” (*OP* 731-2).

Such is the irresistible attraction however “...de la muerte y del sepulcro abierto” that Altazor rejects his divine heritage and determines upon a course of self-banishment from his Edenic home. Accordingly one afternoon – after putting on his parachute – he steps out into space, falling through the non-Newtonian void until the parachute catches upon the edge of a darkened star. There he pauses to elaborate (for motivations that seem entirely capricious or whimsical) his “profundos pensamientos” on life and art. Improving slightly on his nameless precursor in “Les sept paroles”, Altazor has not seven but eight (contradictory) commandments which he particularly wishes to enjoin upon us:

- « Los verdaderos poemas son incendios. La poesía se propaga por todas partes, iluminando sus consumaciones con estremecimientos de placer o de agonía.
- « Se debe escribir en una lengua que no sea materna.
- « Los cuatro puntos cardinales son tres: el Sur y el Norte.
- « Un poema es una cosa que será.
- « Un poema es una cosa que nunca es, pero que debiera ser.
- « Un poema es una cosa que nunca ha sido, que nunca podría ser.
- « Huye del sublime externo, si no quieres morir aplastado por el viento.
- « Si yo no hiciera al menos una locura por año, me volvería loco. » (732)

These commandments set the tone for the rest of the Preface, in which the poet-protagonist continues to define himself in terms of a series of negations and ludic comparisons:

...soy Altazor, el gran poeta, sin caballo que coma alpiste, ni caliente su garganta como claro de luna, sino con mi pequeño paracaídas como un quitasol sobre los planetas.

De cada gota del sudor di mi frente hice nacer astros, que os dejo la tarea de bautizar como a botellas de vino.

Lo veo todo, tengo mi cerebro forjado en lenguas de profeta. (*OP* 733-4)

Here we have not the Cosmic Man of *Adán*, confident of his place in the cosmic Chain of Being, but rather a self-mocking version of the same who affirms his creative power only to then immediately undercut it in the next sentence: “Aquél que todo ha visto, que conoce todos los secretos sin ser Walt Whitman, pues jamás he tenido una barba blanca como las bellas enfermeras y los arroyos helados” (734). He is “el pastor de aeroplanos” and – like Lugones’ poet-visionary – a microcosm containing all of the elements of the universe (“El día se levanta en su corazón y él baja los párpados para hacer la noche del reposo agrícola”) but in spite of all these supreme gifts he must still fall, warns the voice of the “other” Altazor who for the first time makes his appearance:

La vida es un viaje en paracaídas y no lo que tú quieres creer...Adentro de ti mismo, fuera de ti mismo, caerás del zenit al nadir porque ese es tu destino, tu miserable destino. Y mientras de más alto caigas, más alto será el rebote, más larga tu duración en la memoria de la piedra. (734-5)

This fracturing (or as George Yúdice has termed it “desdoblamiento”²) of the poet’s consciousness is continued into Canto I, where the voice of the “other” Nietzschean Altazor declares:

Estás perdido Altazor
Solo en medio del universo
Solo como una nota que florece en las alturas del vacío
No hay bien no hay mal ni verdad ni orden ni belleza (736)

The rest of the poem sees a continual alternating dialogue between the two (self-affirming and self-negating) Altazors, at times even becoming conflated with each other in statements such as “Soy yo Altazor el doble de mí mismo / El que se mira obra y se ríe del otro frente a frente” (740). The poet feels a growing sense of alienation from his own body and asks rhetorically (in an anticipation of the fate which would later befall Bernardo Saguen, the

principal protagonist of *Sátiro*) “¿Qué has hecho de mi voz cargada de pájaros en el atardecer / La voz que me dolía como sangre?” and “¿Qué has hecho de mis pies? / ¿Qué has hecho de esta bestia universal / De este animal errante?” (743, 744).

Altazor begins to long for the liberation that comes with total oblivion and immersion in the Unconscious, asking for the key to “los sueños cerrados” in which the poet may continue to create freed from the need to vindicate claims to total independence or originality “Como el barco que se hunde sin apagar sus luces” (745). This image of the sinking ship going down into the submarine depths without putting out its lights represents the first iteration of what will become a frequently recurring sequence in the poem. Meanwhile however he continues to suffer from the “Angustia cósmica” that comes from the knowledge that his song and his voice alone preserves “...eternamente el ritmo primero / El ritmo que hace nacer los mundos” (746, 747). Yet how can the poet carry on singing, burdened by the realisation that the existence of the universe depends on nothing more substantial than his own consciousness?

In what should be the moment of his greatest triumph (the displacement of the divine Creator by the poet) he is overcome by an overwhelming sense of indifference. Although (as in *Adán*) the poet-protagonist is greeted and acclaimed wherever he walks by all of the planet’s flora and fauna (and while also the stars and the waves, whenever they chose to speak, do so through him) he is left essentially unmoved and wishes now for nothing more than to fall through the universe at breakneck speed, pitilessly hurled between “planetas y castástrofes” (749). Altazor’s own internal interlocutor mocks his predicament, conjuring up once again the spectre of Lautréamont’s Maldoror as he jeers sarcastically “Hombre perro que aúllas a tu propia noche” (752). “El hombre de mañana se burlará de tí”, he continues, “Y de tus gritos petrificados goteando estalactitas. / ¿Quién eres tú habitante de este diminuto cadáver estelar? / ¿Qué son tus náuseas de infinito y tu ambición de eternidad?” (ibid)

Despite having apparently embraced his “miserable destino”, Altazor still attempts to defend against his own internal nemesis the singularity and significance of his vision with the by-now familiar *creacionista* refrain “Todo es nuevo cuando se mira con ojos nuevos” (753). However rather than advocating that the creative powers of the poet be proven through the production of “Tierras irrealizables más allá de los cielos” he now suggests that we return “Al silencio de las palabras que vienen del silencio” – calling our attention to the mystical *nothing* out of which the world-poem is created and prefiguring perhaps the de-articulation of language which will occur in the final Cantos as a means of bringing us near to the Absolute.

For the present though, Altazor is content to simply assert that the poetic word "...viene de más lejos de mi pecho" and therefore should not be traduced to an arbitrary significance (754).

Nevertheless, even while Altazor exalts the generative power of words, his self-negating inner voice urges him not to trust poetry or language "Trampas de luz y cascadas lujosas / Trampas de perla y lámpara acuática" (755) – yet none of these exhortations succeed in dissuading the poet from his vocation. Instead he continues to defend the idea of "la personnalité totale" of the poet, combining both centripetal and centrifugal (or receptive and projective) force:³ "Los veleros que parten a distribuir mi alma por el mundo / Volverán convertidos en pájaros" he confidently declaims in the following stanza, before going on to assert that

El mundo se me entra por los ojos
Se me entra por los manos se me entra por los pies
Me entra por la boca y se me sale
En insectos celestes o nubes de palabras por los poros (756)

Meanwhile over and above the sound of Altazor's internal dialogue can be heard the growing refrain "Silencio la tierra va a dar a luz un árbol", the effect of which is to once again undercut or undermine all of these grandiose statements regarding the poet's own cosmic significance. In the concluding lines of the canto silence finally prevails and a tree (perhaps the world-tree of Norse mythology that links together the heavens and the terrestrial worlds, or alternatively the same tree previously encountered in the poem "El poeta dijo una tarde los salmos del árbol" from *Las pagodas ocultas*) is born.

In Canto II the focus of the dialogue shifts from the interior of the poet's own consciousness to an unnamed woman, who seems however to be a proxy or extension of his god-like (or at least demiurgic) powers. She is the "Dadora de infinito" whose gaze furnishes the world (758). In the event of her death, the poet assures us, "Las estrellas a pesar de su lámpara encendida / Perderían el camino" before adding the rhetorical question "¿Qué sería del universo?" (763) The overall effect is to return us almost to the Edenic state of existence obtaining before the poet's mythologised Fall in the introductory Preface – however this transcendental interlude is of but brief duration.

As the third canto commences the poet once again gives free rein to his ludic/aesthetic-nihilist impulse. “Manicura de la lengua es el poeta”, he declares, “Y todo lo que dice es por él inventado” (766). He has had enough of beautiful images however and now proposes instead “El simple sport de los vocablos / De la pura palabra y nada más”, an exercise in the negation of poetry which will only be completed, he foresees, when we have reduced language to “nada / Rumor aliento de frase sin palabra” (769). This journey to the abyss is then continued in Canto IV, where even the sanctity of the word – that most basic semantic unit – is violated so that we are confronted with passages such as the following:

Al horitaña de la montazonte
La violondrina y el goloncelo
Descolgada esta mañana de la lunala
Se acerca a todo galope (775)

In addition to this descent into *jitanjáfora* or nonsense-language, the poet makes increasing use of anaphor or word-patterning to offset the lack of coherent syntax and imagery. Thus when talking of the allegorised version of the poet as Cosmic Man, “El vizir con lengauje de pájaro”, he writes:

De su boca brota una selva
De su selva brota un astro
Del astro cae una montaña sobre la noche
De la noche cae otra noche
Sobre la noche del vacío (777-778)

The result is to preserve for a while longer the illusion of Apollonian order amidst chaos, however the centre cannot hold indefinitely and presentiments of death and destruction crowd thick and fast upon the printed page. The frequent refrain throughout this canto “Darse prisa darse prisa” and “No hay tiempo que perder” gives way at length to a vision of the poet-protagonist’s own imminent demise (“Aquí yace Altazor azor fulminado por la altura / Aquí yace Vicente antipoeta y mago”) (779). Moreover, bookending either end of the canto is the spectacle of eternity (here as also in many of Huidobro’s other poems allegorised as the sea) which waits to vanquish all. In the concluding lines a bird sings in the branches of the poet’s own brain (perhaps suggesting a link between the poet and the world-tree born at the end of

Canto I), but again language breaks down and we are left only with a set of unintelligible syllables (Tralalí tralalí / Aia ai ai aiia i i) (780-781).

At the opening of the fifth canto the meta-poetical tone intensifies: “Hay un espacio despoblado / Que es preciso poblar” the poet urges (782), but all is in vain as once again “...el mar está preparando un naufragio” (785) and so the ship carrying his lyrical ‘song of himself’ out into the world will inevitably drown beneath the waves.⁴ As in Canto IV the spectres of the sea and of death are present throughout, most notably in the refrain (which would later inspire the epitaph engraved upon Huidobro’s own tombstone overlooking the sea in his native Cartagena) “Se abre la tumba y el fondo se ve el mar” (786, 788). And yet paradoxically, despite the undeniably threatening dimension of this submarine imagery, it is also possible to discern a *positive desire* on the part of the poet – admittedly ironic given his past polemics against the Surrealists – for complete dissolution of the self in the Unconscious.

No longer believing in the possibility of capturing in his words the inexpressible Absolute, the poet now projects instead his own submersion into it: “Y he aquí que ahora me diluyo en múltiples cosas” he narrates almost casually, embarking on a series of transubstantiations in which see him successively incarnated as a firefly, the air, a tree, a volcano, the sea and so on almost *ad infinitum* until finally he can proclaim “Mío mío es todo el infinito” (797, 798). From the notion of the poet as a kind of centripetal force drawing down into himself all of the elements of physical creation we have moved to the idea of the poet as a centrifuge spinning outward into the universe, embracing both of the dialectical alternatives which Huidobro would later summarise (in the concluding poem from *El ciudadano del olvido*) thus:

Te haces árbol y das tus hojas a los vientos
Te haces piedra y das tu dureza a los ríos
Te haces mundo y te disuelves en el mundo
Oh voluntad contraria en todo instante (“Sino y signo” lines 20-23)

At the same time (also continuing the process already begun in Canto IV) the very words of the poet become periodically de-articulated into a kind of infinite language of non-sense which perhaps one day will stumble – through the workings of blind chance and the exhaustion of untold numbers of previous combinations – upon the secret name of God:

Empiece ya

La farandolina en la lejantaña de la montaña
El horimento bajo el firmazonte
Se embarca en la luna
Para dar la vuelta al mundo
La faranmandó mandó liná
Con su musiquí con su musicá (796)

Towards the end of Canto V the poet imagines himself returning as a volcano pushed up by gigantic tectonic forces from beneath the sea of death and oblivion to a post-apocalyptic world that has forgotten even its own identity. Recalling the microcosm-macrocosm relationship already established between poet and world in the preceding cantos, it is not difficult to see in lines such as the following a reflection of the poet's own fractured consciousness:

Dime ¿eres hijo de Martín Pescador
O eres nieto de aquella jirafa que vi en medio del desierto
Pastando ensimismada las yerbas de la luna
O eres hijo del ahorcado que tenía ojos de pirámide? (799)

Finally, in the sixth and seventh cantos all pretence at coherent narrative is abandoned so that the characteristic images and motifs of the Huidobrean universe are dissolved firstly (in Canto VI) into mere strings of words recurring without meaningful syntax between blank spaces on the page, and then (in Canto VII) into combinations of letters that are devoid of any semantic meaning altogether.

Sátiro o el poder de las palabras

While obviously falling outside the poetic genre, Huidobro's 1939 novella *Sátiro o el poder de las palabras* forms a crucial adjunct or continuation of the meta-poetical discourse already begun in *Altazor*. This is due not only to the high number of direct textual references (for instance the main protagonist is described at one point as shaking like "el paracaídas entre dos estrellas" and later on in the narrative as "perdido en medio del universo, como el profeta que sintiera de repente que Dios se ha retirado de sus labios") but also to the fact that the very subject of the work is none other than the process of artistic creation itself.

The principal protagonist, Bernardo Saguen, is a writer who is unable to create due to an overwhelming apprehension that his own existence has become fundamentally *unreal*. Such is his detachment from reality that after being verbally abused by a shop-porter for his impulsive gift of chocolates to a street urchin while out walking about the town one morning (hence the “Sátiro” of the title) his entire mental balance is upset to the point where he develops a terminal case of persecution-mania. The apparent inference would seem to be that for an individual who lives entirely in the kingdom of language it is no longer possible to disprove the validity of even the most baseless accusation by an appeal to objective facts. This is especially so since Saguen (like Huidobro) has declared the total independence of language and of poetic creation from the hum-drum everyday world:

¿Cuál es la realidad? El poeta es el único que la conoce y todos creen, al revés, que es el único que la ignora. El poeta suscita la realidad, no aceptar cualquier realidad, sino aquella que resuena en el plano de su espíritu. Va por el mundo creando realidades, porque las cosas más apartadas, más grandes, más pequeñas, más escondidas, se dan la mano ante sus ojos. (*OC II* 471)

In unslipping the knot that ties together words and the objective reality they purport to represent (or as we might say the link between the signifier and the signified) Saguen has actually made himself a prisoner of language, for now all of his utterances have only a purely subjective meaning – of no more validity than the cutting remark of a domestic servant. Saguen’s plight therefore seems a perfect (if admittedly somewhat bathetic) illustration of Heidegger’s dictum: “Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man” (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 225).

Increasingly Saguen is possessed of the idea that he has become a phantom, a creation of fiction rather than a real living-and-breathing human being. Thus he is moved to frequent declarations such as “Hay un río que me separa de mí mismo” and “Es evidente que me estoy convirtiendo en otro ser” (*OC II* 535, 544). At times while out walking the streets he is convinced that he sees his eyes, hands and feet attached to the body of another – while when he looks in the mirror he perceives only a diabolical and grotesque monster. He feels that the only possible means of escape from his predicament is through transubstantiation (as in one particularly notable passage, in which he imagines himself becoming a tree and leading his arboreal brethren “...al asalto de las ciudades), or through submersion into the Unconscious (see for instance his identification with the protagonist of Gérard de Nerval’s *Aurélia* who,

possessed of a similar madness, famously declared that “Le rêve est une seconde vie”) (*OC II* 498-500, 537).

Despite his earlier bold affirmation that “La poesía es un *a priori* que se prueba por sí mismo...por estallar como una estrella al fondo de nuestro pecho” (468), Saguen feels that he now lacks the sense of the Infinite, the complete identification between subject and object or mind and world (as Novalis would say) which would enable him to continue writing (or at least make that activity theoretically meaningful). Like the accursed “prince d’Aquitaine” of Nerval’s famous poem “El desdichado” he has lost his celestial station in the great cosmic Chain of Being and so now doubts the authenticity of his own existence. In a moment of *nivolesque* epiphany he ponders aloud:

Acaso no existo... No soy una realidad, estoy viviendo una novela, una novela monótona, exasperante de monotonía, una espantosa novela. ¿Qué autor desesperado me está haciendo cruzar su mundo de horrores, me está haciendo vivir su desesperación, se está librando de sus angustias y sus monstruosidades por medio de mi persona? (*OC II* 559)

Shortly after this moment of epiphany he encounters a nameless *femme fatale* who is subsequently revealed as Death, come to his apartment to convince him of the necessity of his own suicide. Unlike the protagonist of *Aurélia*, however, he resists the temptation and in a last bid to overcome his creative impasse sets himself to the task of translating four poems by Hölderlin from the period of his final madness. Why does Saguen settle upon these poems in particular? Other than the obvious parallel between his own mental state and that of Hölderlin, perhaps the best explanation is offered once again by Martin Heidegger in his commentary on one of the poems in question:

The poem bears the title “Greece” and the signature Scardanelli; a foreign name, just as if the poet had to reconcile himself and his ownmost self, that is, had to submit and resign himself, to something foreign. The date names a “May day” and a year in which Hölderlin had not yet been born. (*Elucidations* 205)

While Saguen (like Altazor) is not ultimately able to recuperate this foreign, mysterious quotient within himself and so arrive at the kind of synthetic poetic knowledge characteristic

of the Neo-Platonist strand of Romanticism, the intuition of its existence is at least the first step towards the resolution of the impasse created by nihilist aestheticism.

Ver y palpar

Like the later cantos of *Altazor*, Huidobro's 1941 collection of poems *Ver y palpar* sets itself the task of teasing out the full philosophical implications of the vitalist strategy of decoupling language from objective reality. Indeed the opening poem, a work in eight parts entitled "Hasta luego" forms (along with *Temblor de cielo* and the fragment "Anuncio", from an uncompleted longer work entitled *La gran visión* which was later included in Huidobro's 1945 *Antología*) a part of a much larger "ur-text" whose central idea is the link between the death of the poet and the final world apocalypse. Thus we read in "Hasta luego I":

Os traigo recuerdos de Altazor
Que jugaba con las golondrinas y los cementerios
Los molinos las tardes y las tumbas como bolsillos de mar
Os traigo un saludo de Altazor
Que se fue de su carne al viento estupefacto
Hasta luego señores
Hasta luego árboles y piedras (lines 13-19)

Essentially a self-eulogy for Altazor the poet-god or Cosmic Man, the poem recycles the now-familiar motifs of the lyric voyage and the inevitable shipwreck while at the same time counselling the reader not to be afraid, for:

Pronto uno se acostumbra y hasta se siente cierta ebriedad
Y se pasa el tiempo
Mostrando sus dientes de leche a las perlas de juicio
Que preparan el Juicio Final ("Hasta luego V" lines 16-19)

As token of the poet's willingness to embrace his own destruction we are then presented in the final two sections of the poem with the spectacle of Altazor enraptured (like the boatman in the famous poem by Heinrich Heine) in the fatal siren-song of Loreley as he sinks beneath the waters of the Rhine, dissolving himself into *Das Ur-Eine* or the Primal Nothingness.

The poems which make up the rest of the collection can be divided into two main categories: on the one hand those in which the ludic tone predominates, and on the other a number of more lyrical-existential pieces in which the theme of the fracturing of the poet's consciousness (begun in the Preface and opening canto of *Altazor*) is further developed. Both of these poetic modalities can however be seen as responses to the same essential dilemma, namely the lack of an objective basis for artistic creation once deprived of the possibility of an appeal to the world of Ideal Forms. Thus the destabilisation of the relationship between text and meaning which frequently occurs through the operation of the ludic mode is a way of liberating words from their subordination to the physical world – just as the fragmentation of the poetic “yo” which occurs in those poems characterised by the lyrical-existential mode is a means of evading the problem of the poet's own tenuous relationship with ontological truth.

With regard to the first category of poems, “Año nuevo” which follows immediately after “Hasta luego” shows the ludic poet at work delighting in various kinds of word-play (“Te veo venir reina Ana sobre el asno de tus años / Con el anillo del año en el dedo”) and anaphoric patterning (see for instance the repetitive references to “El árbol” in the first stanza).

Meanwhile although a number of striking poetic images are also present (such as the dervish who speaks “con una elocuente piedad de tierras largas”) it is as though all of the connecting or linking elements between the images have been deliberately suppressed, generating a text that in its appearance (if not in the method of its creation) approximates those poems written by André Breton and his Surrealist *confrères* in a state of pure psychic automatism:

(Entonces
Entonces y entonces
El párpado maravilloso la lámpara de los ojos
El ladrón de auroras el marino de nácar
La caverna del corazón con vientos de mil años
El laberinto imantado
El rey y el astrólogo con los ojos de luto y de destinos
El caballo blanco como una paloma
De tanto pensar en las montañas
La estrella polar con una flor en el dedo
Entonces entonces)
 (“Año nuevo” lines 25-35)

This deliberate strategy of textual evasion has much in common not only with the poetry of the Surrealists but also with religious mysticism, with its emphasis on the Unknowable/Hidden face of God. Writing about the hymns of the Merkabah or pre-Kabbalistic period in Jewish mysticism, Geshom Scholem notes that these texts do not actually attempt to provide an intelligible description of the attributes of God, but rather seek to encapsulate something of the *mysterium tremendum* or numinous aura that surrounds the throne of the deity through the use of repetitive litany and often non-sensical phrases and word combinations (Scholem 57-63). Thus the mystic, far from desiring to reveal or impart a clear or obvious textual meaning, wishes instead to draw our attention to *that which remains concealed* in the text while at the same time (in Heidegger's phrase) "...guarding the concealed in its self-concealment" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 223).

Moving on to consider the remainder of the poems in the collection, the ludic tone already detected in "Año nuevo" becomes especially pronounced in the second of the two sections into which *Ver y palpar* is divided ("Poemas giratorios y otros") in which we find examples of lines from one poem ("El paladin sin esperanza") mixed and recombined to form another ("La suerte echada"), together with poems which consist entirely of paranomastic shunting (Canción de Marcelo Cielomar") and still others which play not so much with our notions of what the great semiotician Umberto Eco calls "expression-form" (i.e. language) as with the "content-form" or our conventional ideas about the organisation of the universe which language purports to represent (see for instance "Fuerzas naturales").⁵

While certain familiar motifs (the eye, the ship, the world-tree, the sea/death) recur throughout these "ludic" texts, their significance is only able to be comprehended when the poems are read in a hermeneutic sense, due to what George Yúdice refers to as "la ruptura de la verosimilitud." This phenomenon manifests itself both in terms of the lack of an overall framing narrative or imagistic-conceit for the collection (such as those evinced in *Altazor*, *Ecuatorial* and *Poemas árticos*) and in the lack of *internal* textual consistency within many of the poems running from one stanza to the next (Yúdice 218). That is to say, the poems lack obvious *textual meaning* when read in a linear fashion, while only if we read across and *between* the lines on the page can the various fragments be recombined and some attempt at their interpretation be essayed. The only precedent for this kind of textual instability in Huidobro's earlier work is perhaps to be found in the French-language collections *Tout a coup* and *Automne regulier* (both published in 1925), however in those poems (unlike in *Ver*

y *palpar*) a certain measure of rhyme is employed to create at least the formal appearance or illusion of coherence and unity.

One of the best examples of this kind of “unstable” text in *Ver y palpar* is perhaps to be found in “Ronda de la vida riendo”, in which the subordination of language to a series of arbitrary anaphoric word patterns and binary oppositions serves – along with the continual repetition of the number “trescientos sesenta y cinco” – to create a poem that seems to collapse in upon itself, as though it were being spun through a giant centrifuge:

Trescientos sesenta y cinco árboles tiene la selva
Trescientos sesenta y cinco selvas tiene el año
¿Cuántas se necesitan para formar un siglo?
Un niño se perdería en ellas hasta el fin del siglo
Y aprendería el canto de todos los pájaros

Los árboles doblan la cabeza cuando los niños lanzan piedras
Las piedras en el aire saludan a los pájaros y piden una canción
Una canción con los ojos azules
Una canción con los cabellos largos
Una canción dividida como una naranja
Con una historia adentro llena de sonrisas o si usted prefiere llena de lágrimas
Las lágrimas agitan las manos antes de ahogarse
Y las sonrisas saludan a las gentes desde lejos como las piedras
Buenas días y Hasta luego son los hijos de la boca que va a enamorarse pronto
El sol también dice buenas días cuando los árboles aletean
Y dice hasta luego cuando la montaña cierra los ojos
Hasta luego entre las olas aceitadas del mar
Hasta luego diría yo también porque ahora el cielo trae una bandera llena de flores

(“Ronda de la vida riendo” lines 1-18)

Eduardo Mitre, in his commentary on the poem, points out that this whirling together of organic beings and inanimate objects in the “velocidad aterradora” (line 27) of the “song of life” appears to dissolve both time and the world of corporeal forms in a kind of “confraternidad univesal” similar to that envisioned by Saint-Pol-Roux in his collection of

aphorisms *Vitesse* (Mitre 56-58).⁶ Another (perhaps more direct and immediate) precedent for this poetics of high-speed creative destruction can be found in Huidobro's declaration in the concluding section of *Manifestes manifeste*: "J'ai soif de me sentir enlevé par le moteur de ma poésie, chargée pour six mille ans vers les vitesses du chaos". Thus while the words and images of "Ronda" (like those of "Ella", another of the "poemas giratorios" with which it bears many similarities) seem to negate each other and resist attempts to infer direct meaning, the resultant chaos can (like the automatic writing of the Surrealists) be seen as a kind of ersatz approximation of the (inaccessible) Absolute.

The idea of investing in a seemingly arbitrary word or collection of words the representation of the inexpressible Absolute also provides the key motivation of another poem from this same collection, "Sin por qué". Here, the frequent repetition of a manufactured word lacking in any semantic meaning ("arum") seems to hint at the imminence of some mystical, numinous reality that is above and *beyond* language:

Arum arum
Por qué he dicho arum
Por qué ha venido a mí sin timonel
Y al azar de los vientos
Qué significa esta palabra sin ojos
Ni manos de estrella
Tú la has puesto en mi cabeza (lines 1-7)

Meanwhile in "Poema para hacer crecer los árboles" (already referenced by the protagonist of *Sátiro* Bernardo Saguen during a lengthy disquisition in the novella on his desire for transubstantiation⁷) we are confronted with yet another example of an "unstable" text which makes extensive use of both anaphor and paronomasia to suggest the disintegration of language and consciousness and a return to the unindividuated Primal Unity:

Ama la rama ama
Hora que llora y ora deplora
Hoja la coja hoja
Ojalá coja la hoja
Rema la savia rema rema
Rema la rama

Rema la vida por sus dolientes
Hay que coger la hoja
Hay que reír al cielo en la punta libre (lines 27-35)

This process of de-articulation (strongly reminiscent of the final cantos of *Altazor*) is however no mere negative act but rather, as already suggested in the introduction to this chapter, a first necessary step in the creation of a poem that is “open towards the infinite”. In this respect (and despite departing from dialectically opposed philosophical premises) the approach adopted by Huidobro in these ludic texts seems to accord well with the anonymous inscription later used by José Ángel Valente as the epigraph to his volume of collected poetical works: “La palabra ha de llevar el lenguaje al punto cero, al punto de la indeterminación infinita, de la infinita libertad”.

Turning now from these “poemas giratorios” to consider the remainder of the poems which make up *Ver y palpar* we find a number of more straightforward, lyrical compositions that have much in common stylistically with the companion volume *El ciudadano del olvido* (published in the same year, 1941). Indeed, as Cedomil Goic notes two exemplars of this second type of poem (“Tenemos un cataclismo adentro” and “Apagado en síntesis”) were in fact originally announced in the 1935 *Antología de Poesía Chilena Nueva* (edited by Eduardo Anguita and Volodia Teitelboim) as advance excerpts of that collection rather than of *Ver y palpar* (OP 905).

“Tenemos un cataclismo adentro” is a good example of the profound shift in tone which Huidobro’s “yo lírico” undergoes in this final stage of his poetic evolution, as he searches for a means of moving beyond the binary poles of transcendentalism and vitalism and towards some kind of resolution or synthesis. The overwhelming sense conveyed to the reader is one of sadness, regret and resignation – largely absent now are the exultant Huidoborean paeans to the creative powers of the poet (whether of divine origin or self-generated) and in their place we find passages such as the following:

Sé muy bien que si hubiera comido ciertas hierbas
Sería paloma mensajera
Y podría encontrarte a la sombra de esa flor que es la tarde
Pero el murmullo nada indica
Los barcos han partido hacia los pájaros

Ya no es tiempo

Esto es lo único seguro entre los huracanes dados vuelta

Ya no es tiempo (“Tenemos un cataclismo adentro” lines 24-31)

This feeling of nostalgia for the loss of the Infinite is further heightened in “Apagado en síntesis”, in which the poet countenances the explosion of his “ser interno” in “Un llanto y una risa de carne” (lines 12-14) as the only means of ending his condition of spiritual exile – recalling Octavio Paz’s judgement already quoted at the beginning of this chapter that “Ser *uno mismo* es condenarse a la mutilación pues el hombre es apetito perpetuo de ser otro”.

To be sure, from time to time the earlier optimistic affirmations celebrating the generative powers of the poet’s gaze (which as we saw in Chapter 3 formed such a crucial adjunct to the *creacionista* works *Adán* and “Arte poética”) resurface. One such example can be found in the poem “Ser y estar” where we encounter the lines: “Esos árboles que aún no he mirado están crudos / Como las estrellas antes de oír tu voz”. However the effect of these positive statements is invariably negated by the spectre of physical decomposition that runs as a constant undercurrent through the latter sections of *Ver y palpar*. Thus in the lines immediately preceding those quoted above we read: “Mi mirada está cocida / Porque el ojo antes de ser ojo era un pequeño huevo de paloma / ¿Qué puede pasar entonces en las páginas del paisaje?”

This theme of death and decomposition is further expanded in “Canción a la muervida”, in which the poet seeks once again seeking to slip the knot of his corporeal existence so that (like the author of *Un coup de dés*) he can encompass both being and non-being, the act and its own negation:

Mi mano derecha es una golondrina

Mi mano izquierda es un ciprés

Mi cabeza por delante es un señor vivo

Y por detrás es un señor muerto (lines 1-4)

Meanwhile in “En las esferas” the emphasis is placed on the disaggregated condition of the poet and former Cosmic Man whose chest, he laments, is full of “ceniza de muertos” and whose voice is as fragile as leaves that are blown every-which-way on the wind or, falling to earth, are borne along by the river’s current towards “los mares fatales y carnívoros”.

“Volemos a la nada”, urges the poet addressing the flowers and plants in whose life cycle he

projects his own future death and rebirth, “El mar está hecho de vuestras hojas y de vuestro aroma” (lines 24-25).

This impulse to physical disintegration then reaches perhaps its fullest expression in “Las voces preciosas” which unfolds itself a dialogue of three separate and competing lyrical voices, in all of whom the division between self and non-self has become hopelessly blurred and confused – leaving only “...ese gran caos de palabras ciegas buscando una garganta” (line 50).

El ciudadano del olvido and Últimos poemas

The already well-established theme of the poet’s self-dissolution or transubstantiation becomes still more dominant in the poems making up Huidobro’s final two published collections, *El ciudadano de olvido* (1941) and *Últimos poemas* (1948).

In “Preludio de esperanza”, the opening poem to the first of these collections, Huidobro presents his lyrical alter-ego (the Cosmic Man) as one who has grown terminally weary of his labours. Unlike the Orphic figure who in *Adán* “...adormía en sus ojos a todo el universo” he now wishes for nothing more than to forget both himself and the world and so attain a state of total oblivion:

Cantas y cantas hablas y hablas
Y te olvidas de todo para que todo te olvide
Hablas y hablas cantas y cantas
Lloras y lloras miras y miras ríes y ríes
Y te vas en silueta de aire (“Preludio de esperanza” lines 73-77)

The following poem, “En secreto de flor”, then sees Huidobro once again counterposing the cycle of death and rebirth found in Nature with humanity’s fixation with its own (finite) individuated existence:

Amapola amapola
Qué locura nos ha hecho nacer
De dónde viene esta sustancia de amargura
Y esta atmósfera dolorida y sangrienta que siembra flores después de la tarde
Y nos une a raíces de malhadados sortilegios

Amapola Amapola
Libértanos de la demencia humana
Abre las puertas derrumba las murallas
Rompe los límites del alma (lines 22-30)

The rebellion of the poet against Nature (begun by Huidobro in his 1914 address *Non serviam*) is now, it would appear, coming to an end. Yet at the same time this reversal does not entail a simple return to the Neo-Platonist doctrine which sees in the beauty of the natural world the possibility of re-ascending (by means of internal contemplation) to the divine Intellectual Principle by which both poetry and the physical world can ultimately be justified. Rather it is seen by Huidobro as a means of escaping from the existential implications of his earlier *creacionista* aesthetic, according to which poetry must be a process of consciously willed creation depending only on the fragile element of human subjectivity for its validation. Thus somewhat belatedly (and ironically) Huidobro has arrived at the same theoretical standpoint as the Surrealists, whose essential strategy Anna Balakian described (in a passage already quoted in the discussion of *La gruta del silencio* in Chapter 2) as seeking to “...revitalize matter, to resuscitate the object in relation to themselves so that they would no longer be absorbed in their own subjectivity” (Balakian 46).

Further evidence for this move on the part of Huidobro towards a transubstantiation into (and consequent revivification of) Nature can be seen in poems such as “Balada de lo que no vuelve”, “Soledad inaccesible”, “En vida” and “Transfiguración”. The first of these poems is a particularly notable example of this shift from the *creacionista* conquest of the universe by human subjectivity to the dissolution of human subjectivity into the universe. The result (as in the later cantos of *Altazor*) is a strange Boschean reality where “todo es otra cosa” and through which one half of the poet’s bifurcated self wanders endlessly in search of the other:

Van andando los días a lo largo del año
¿En dónde estás?
Me crece la mirada
Se me alargan las manos
En vano la soledad abre sus puertas
Y el silencio se llena de tus pasos de antaño
Me crece el corazón

Se me alargan los ojos
Y quisiera pedir otros ojos
Para ponerlos allí donde terminaron los míos
(“Balada de lo que no vuelve” lines 8-19)

Like Mallarmé’s *Igitur*, Huidobro’s poet-protagonist has discovered that only by snuffing out the candle of his own limited, individuated existence can he feel in himself the existence of the Absolute – and yet at the same time (also like *Igitur*) he is incapable of admitting to the possibility of a truly *final* end, since (in a post-Nietzschean world) it is only in the uncertainty of the act’s final outcome that the Absolute remains in play. Accordingly we find in a poem such as “Irreparable, nada es irreparable” intimations that the poet-protagonist’s demise is not as final as first thought and that perhaps one day he will return to give “...el adíos definitivo” (line 45) – until such time it is only “hasta luego”.

This Mallarméan search for traces of the Absolute within the roll of a (real or metaphorical) dice also provides the key underpinning for a number of other poems from *El ciudadano del olvido*, among them “Comaruru” and (unsurprisingly enough) “Tríptico a Mallarmé”. In “Comaruru” Huidobro speculates on the multiple possible meanings of the sound received by terrestrial radio stations in response to a message purportedly transmitted by scientists in the year 1927 to the planet Mars.⁸ Does the mysterious word referred to in the title represent the cosmogonic *verbum* that first gave life to the universe, an answering message from the inhabitants of Mars or perhaps nothing more than “...una semilla de locura / Que soltó de sus manos un sembrador celeste” (lines 35-6)? While none of these alternative theories can be demonstrably proven, the fact that all remain in play as *possibilities* keeps alive the prospect that language (and consequently the poetic vocation as well) may in fact have meaning:

Así iréis muriendo con la boca abierta
Esperando con la boca abierta la palabra que cae del cielo
La palabra que viene cayendo para que la descifréis
Con el sentido oculto debajo de una piedra
Y el ritmo de la sangre de un poeta remoto (“Comaruru” lines 47-53)

In much the same way the poet then resolves to construct his own “castillo de voces”, in order that he may through self-multiplicity deny his own human (all too human!) finitude. Accordingly he dwells at some length on a description of his fictional aeronautical “double”

who, like Roberto Bolaño's fascist aviator-poet Carlos Wieder, "se rapta mujeres y se pierde en la noche" (line 69) before finally discarding even this alter-ego in favour of his own complete sublimation into language:

Voy a unirte a mis palabras
Y entonces me perderé de vista a vuestros ojos
Nadie sabrá de mí
Yo estaré adentro de mis palabras
Y el nacimiento de un grito que va haciendo olas
Y no tiene límite porque vosotros no conocéis sus límites
Ni el nombre de la estrella que se irá inflando con mi voz
(“Comaruru” lines 77-83)

This conflation of being and non-being (reminiscent also of “Canción a la muervida” in *Ver y palpar*) in order to hint at some kind of mystical unity or totality above and beyond the limits of human comprehension is also deployed in “Tríptico a Mallarmé”, a direct homage by Huidobro to *Un coup de dés*. In “Tríptico” we see the poet attempting to read himself into his own work, so that it becomes a song “...de ausencia de mí mismo” and a memory “...de ser hombre en el no ser” (lines 53, 86). Although (unlike *Un coup de dés*) Tríptico is not a visually experimental poem admitting of multiple possible readings, it deals with the same fundamental thematic concerns (the uncertainty of the relationship between signifier and signified, the operation of blind chance as an approximation for the unobtainable Absolute). Thus the poet is heard to wonder aloud whether (like the mysterious sound emanating from the planet Mars in “Comaruru”) he will be allowed to live on in “una vaga ondulación” (line 59) floating between the stars, or whether his words will simply fall away into Nothingness. Neither outcome can be predicted with certainty, since as Huidobro has already declared (following Mallarmé) “Toda idea lleva un azar” (line 14) – and yet it is precisely in this very element of chance and uncertainty that the dream of poetry as a road to the Infinite is able to be (at least partially) “saved”.

In keeping with Huidobro's aversion to theoretical consistency, there are admittedly a small number of poems in *El ciudadano* in which the old conception of the poet as divine vessel or Cosmic Man reasserts itself. Thus in “Pequeño drama” the poet conceptualises himself as “Verbo recóndito de siglos y más siglos” now made incarnate in human flesh:

Oh cuántos ojos produciendo estrellas
Los horizontes vienen a mi pecho
Buscando palabras en mí sangre
Realízanse en mi carne transitoria
.....
Tan vasto es el mundo
Tanto me agranda y se agranda en mis adentros
Tanto me hace hacia afuera
Salir de mí en una luz temblorosa (“Pequeño drama” lines 5-8, 11-14)

Another such example can be found in the poem “Aliento”, which begins with the following lines:

El hálito del poema apaga todas las bujías del mundo
No hay más fósforos en el cielo ni en los bolsillos del viento
Hay el poeta y algo grande en torno suyo
Los astros del destino nadan sin ruido
Su aliento propulsor cambia la vida
Arrastra témpanos y borrascas encima del tiempo
Sus ojos leen la eternidad
Sus manos abren la puerta de las estrellas desconocidas
Y él espera arriba de la escala
El solo ante el absoluto (“Aliento” lines 1-10)

However even here the idea of the poet’s vaunted celestial station is subsequently undermined by the intrusion of blind Mallarméan chance, which now reveals itself as the governing principle of the universe:

Un astro gira
Una campana suena
Una campana lanza sus dados sobre los destinos
Entre los hombres
Descienden pasos al fondo del alma
El azar cae sin emoción de los dedos celestes (“Aliento” lines 11-16)

More typical of the poems in this collection though is the elegaic tone adopted towards the figure of the poet-as-Cosmic-Man in “Miedo del antaño”, where after an extended six-stanza disquisition on the creative potency of the “fatal luminoso” Huidobro interjects with “No confundamos los destinos / Ni el cielo con sus estrellas arropadas y sus cabellos blancos / Éste es el mío éste es el tuyo / Estregue cada cual su vida abierta” (lines 30-34). Clearly differentiating himself from his Orphic “double” he now contents himself with the modest claim “Soy vuestro ciego amargo...La única cosa que me ha dado es una estrella a vigilar” (lines 50, 53).

In the final poem of the collection, “Sino y signo”, Huidobro then returns to strike the same pose of cosmic world-weariness that characterised its beginning in “Preludio de esperanza”:

Has hablado bastante y estás triste
Quisieras un país de sueño
Donde las lunas broten de la tierra
Donde los árboles tengan luz propia
Y te saluden con su voz afectuosa que tu espalda tiemble
Donde el agua te haga señas
Y las montañas te llamen a grandes voces
Y luego quisieras confundirte en todo
Y tenderte en un descanso de pájaros extáticos
En un bello país de olvido
Entre ramajes sin viento y sin memoria
Olvidarte de todo y que todo te olvide. (lines 28-39)

This final conversion of the poet-god into citizen of oblivion marks the obvious end-point of Huidobro’s literary evolution, with the assemblage of previously-uncollected or late works published posthumously in *Últimos poemas* (1948) providing essentially only a coda or epilogue.⁹ Without wishing to encumber these pages with further extensive quotations and commentary that can add little more to the central line of investigation and argument, it may be noted that especially worthy of the reader’s attention in this regard are the poems “Monumento al mar”, “El paso del retorno” and “La poesía es un atentado celeste”. Indeed, one is left with the distinct impression that, having effectively negated his own subjectivity, Huidobro is left with little to say. In this regard it would seem that the final words uttered by the Altazor-like figure who in “El paso del retorno” comes back from “el viaje al fin del

mundo” with “...un sabor de eternidad en la garganta” (lines 89, 121) are perhaps laden with a certain autobiographical significance: “Oh hermano nada voy a decirte / Cuando hayas tocado lo que nadie puede tocar / Más que el árbol te gustará callar”.

¹ The Preface to this latter work had in fact, as Cedomil Goic notes, already been written (in French) before April 1925, when a version translated into Spanish by the writer Jean Emar was published in the Chilean newspaper *La Nación* (OP 720)

² See Yúdice 162-4

³ See the discussion of Huidobro’s essay “Le Créationisme” in the previous chapter.

⁴ This link in Huidobro’s work between the poet’s lyrical impulse to project his own self outward upon the world and the image of the boat or ship can be traced at least as far back as the title poem of *El espejo de agua* (discussed in Chapter 3) in which the poet compares himself to Espronceda’s pirate captain:

De pie en la popa siempre me veréis cantando.
Una rosa secreta se hincha en mi pecho
Y un ruiseñor ebrio aletea en mi dedo

⁵ See *The Search for the Perfect Language* 20-24

⁶ As with *La Répoétique* (see our earlier discussion in Chapter 3), this work by Saint-Pol-Roux remained unpublished until after the poet’s death and so the affinity with Huidobro’s work while remarkable cannot be said to be a case of direct literary influence. Huidobro’s knowledge of Saint-Pol-Roux was limited to those works (such as *Les Reposoirs*) already circulating in Paris during the period of his residency there in the early-mid 1920s.

⁷ See *OC II* 498

⁸ This episode is however an entirely fictional one of Huidobro’s own invention.

⁹ I exclude from this judgement of course those “political” pieces (such as the “Elegía a la muerte de Lenin”) included by Huidobro’s literary executors in *Últimos poemas*, most of which are of little or no artistic value whatsoever and serve only as an historical record of his changing ideological commitments (from erstwhile Bolshevik to left-liberal) over the years.

Conclusion

“The passion for the absolute in the soul of a skeptic,” observed the philosopher E.M. Cioran “is like an angel grafted on a leper” (*Tears and Saints* 92). In this one statement is encapsulated the essential paradox of not only Vicente Huidobro but also a succession of poets and poetic movements from Hölderlin and Novalis to Mallarmé and the early 20th century avant-garde. No longer assured of their place in the great cosmic Chain of Being, these individuals could not share in the naïve conviction of the 17th century English metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan when he casually declared that “I saw eternity the other night, / like a great ring of pure and endless light”. And yet, at the same time, these *hijos del limo* had a passionate need to believe (like Lautréamont’s Maldoror) that they were more than just mortal men, and that their words represented more than just empty ciphers.

It is this common paradox, I have suggested, that justifies the grouping together of all these poets under the label of “Romanticism”. Furthermore, I have argued that within this broader Romantic movement there existed two main strategies by which these artists attempted to resolve their shared predicament: on the one hand, the invocation of the Neo-Platonist notion of art as an analogical representation or intuition of the inexpressible Infinite and, on the other, the replacement of God with the figure of the artist creating new worlds *ex-nihilo*. These seemingly contradictory strategies (which I have termed the ‘two souls’ of Romanticism) both take as their starting point the need to validate the individual artist or poet in relation to some objective Absolute, recalling Heidegger’s observations on the dialectical connection between Plato and the French Existentialists:

...Sartre expresses the basic tenet of existentialism in this way: Existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which from Plato’s time on has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. (*Pathmarks* 250)

In the course of the preceding investigation it has been shown how Huidobro moves from one side of this metaphysical ledger to the other: from the poet’s attempts through *anamnesis* to rediscover “el alma de todas las cosas” in *Las pagodas ocultas* and *Pasando y pasando* (Chapter 2) to an insistence on the need for the world to be completely re-created (or rather

“humanised”) in his poems and manifestos of the 1920s (Chapter 3). Yet ultimately Huidobro is unable to sustain his belief in either of these two endeavours and instead, like Mallarmé before him, seeks through the de-articulation of artistic self-consciousness and language (as well as the deliberate conflation of being and non-being, sense and non-sense) to create a new poetics – a poetics in which the existence of a relationship between art and the Absolute is no longer dependent on a belief in the poet as a creature endowed with either priestly or divine powers (Chapter 4). Thus, in a strange and ironic twist, the mythologised death of the poet in *Altazor* (and in Huidobro’s later works) becomes the essential pre-condition for the survival of poetry itself.

The chief value, it would seem, of placing Huidobro’s work within this larger context is that his many inconsistencies and contradictions – so readily seized upon by successive waves of critics – can be seen as something altogether much more interesting and significant than just a kind of individual artistic schizophrenia: rather, they are the distillation of a dialectical struggle that had been taking place in Western schools of poetry and philosophy since the late 18th century. At the same time, by focussing the present study on a particular set of key “unit-ideas” and the way in which they are expressed in Huidobro’s poetry and writings on aesthetics it has been possible to uncover links not only to those writers whose influence on the Chilean poet has already been well-documented (Emerson, Nietzsche, Mallarmé) but also to those previously passed over or accorded only limited treatment (Saint-Pol-Roux, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher). In so doing, it is my hope that I may have helped to challenge the conventional classification of both Huidobro and the rest of the early 20th century avant-garde as a more-or-less discrete literary phenomenon, suggesting instead a fundamental continuity in terms of their primary philosophical preoccupations and concerns with earlier generations such as the German Romantics and French Symbolists. Far from representing a radical rupture with the past, the poetry of Huidobro and his fellow *vanguardistas* can therefore be seen as a final heroic rear-guard action mounted in defence of the idea of poetry as a possible road to the Absolute and against the tremendous disenchantment wrought upon the world by the onrushing tide of capitalist modernity.

Appendix

LA CAPILLA ALDEANA

A v e
canta
suave
que tu canto encanta
sobre el campo inerte
sones
vierte
y ora-
ciones
llora.
Desde
la cruz santa
el triunfo del sol canta
y bajo el palio azul del cielo
deshoja tus cantares sobre el suelo.
Une tus notas a las de la campana
Que ya se despereza ebria de mañana
Evangelizando la gran quietud aldeana.
Es un amanecer en que una bondad brilla
La capilla está ante la paz de la montaña
Como una limosnera está ante una capilla.
Se esparce en el paisaje el aire de una extraña
Santidad, algo bíblico, algo de piel de oveja
Algo como un rocío lleno de bendiciones
Cual si el campo rezara una idílica queja
Llena de sus caricias y de sus emociones.
La capilla es como una viejita acurrucada
Y al pie de la montaña parece un cuento de hada.
Junto a ella como una bandada de mendigos
Se agrupan y se acercan unos cuantos castaños
Que se asoman curiosos por todos los postigos
Con la malevolencia de los viejos huraños.
Y en el cuadrado lleno de ambiente y de frescura
En el paisaje alegre con castidad de lino
Pinta un brochazo negro la sotana del cura.
Cuando ya la tarde alarga su sombra sobre el camino
Parece que se metiera al fondo de la capilla
Y la luz de la gran lámpara con su brillo mortecino
Pinta en la muralla blanca, como una raya amarilla.
Las tablas viejas roncan, crujen, cuando entra el viento oliendo a rosas
Regonza triste en un murmullo el eco santo del rosario
La oscuridad va amalgamando y confundiendo así las cosas
Y vuela un "Angelus" lloroso con lentitud del campanario.

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