



Hipertexto 17
Invierno 2013
pp. 16-31

**From Hegel to Paz: Re-reading
Orientalism
in Latin American Writing**

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[Hipertexto](#)

Over the past few decades, the presence of Asia in the history of Latin American literature has received considerable scholarly attention. An increasing number of studies on Asia in relation to Latin American politics and economy has been accompanied by a growing interest in cultural relations between these geographically distant regions. While the trans-Atlantic ties between Europe and Latin America have been scrutinized by critics for many years, the analysis of a trans-Pacific connection is still considered to be a relatively new subject. In general, previous research can be divided into two main branches. On the one hand are the scholars who have explored the ways in which the “exotic” Orient has attracted generations of Latin American writers since the nineteenth century. On the other hand are the studies that focus on more contemporary issues, such as the influence of Asian immigrants in different Latin American countries, most notably Cuba, Peru, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. These studies look at both the contributions of the Asian Diaspora in the making of a modern Latin America and the ways in which this cultural encounter manifests itself in diverse forms, including literature, art, music, cuisine and fashion.

In this essay, I intend to expand upon the first area of research by re-examining the Oriental representation in Latin American writing through Hegel’s discourse on the relationship between Europe, Latin America, and Asia. By focusing on the works of José Martí, Enrique Gómez Carrillo, and Octavio Paz, I explore how these writers move beyond the traditional Eurocentric perspective by delineating a trans-Pacific network between the two non-Western “others” (i.e., Latin America and Asia). In terms of its historical trajectory, this study begins with the period represented by *modernismo*. Concerned about the lack of spirituality behind the frenzied force of modernization, many *modernista* writers turned to the East in search of alternative aesthetics and religious values. In *Orientalismo en el modernism hispanoamericano*, Araceli Tinajero makes it clear that *modernismo* played a crucial role in establishing cultural links between Asia and Latin America. As she points out, “[t]anto en la prosa como en la poesía, modernistas figuran múltiples temas orientales que fundan una relación

específica entre el valor estético de artefactos orientales y el lugar de su estimación en discursos sobre las artes plásticas, la literatura, la religión y la historia del Oriente en aquel fin del siglo” (6). Therefore, *modernismo* marks a critical moment in which Latin American literature came into contact with the Orient in a meaningful and systematic way.

Moreover, Tinajero maintains that her understanding of the Asian representation in *modernismo* is different from the classic theory of Orientalism proposed by Edward Said. One of Said’s primary concerns is the critique of the Western system of knowledge about the Orient, which underlines how the “idea” of the Orient is fabricated by the West and integrated into the formation of the European Self. Said famously states that “[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). While Said’s Orientalism describes the power structure in which the “colonial discourse” serves to maintain the Western superiority over the Orient, Tinajero suggests that *modernistas* engage in a productive “dialogue” with Asia. My understanding of the term “orientalism” owes an important debt to Tinajero’s study in which she insists that “el Oriente no constituyó parte de una hegemonía imperialista desde América Latina sino al contrario, éste fue influyendo poco a poco, formando un imaginario oriental a través de una literatura sincrética, ecléctica y propia” (18). Rather than establishing a hegemonic power relationship with the Oriental “other”, the three Latin American writers discussed in this essay seek to incorporate various Asian elements into their literature and to discover commonality between the two regions.

Hegel’s View on Europe, Latin America, and Asia

My discussion begins with Hegel’s classic view on Europe, Latin America and Asia in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, published in 1837. His theory defined a conceptual map of world history for the Western readership, providing a foundation for such thinkers as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre. In particular, Hegel’s idealism concerning the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world became extremely influential in the West and contributed to the formation of Eurocentrism. In his *Lectures*, Hegel describes the unequal nature of the relationship between the Old World and the New World. He characterizes Europe as the site for “the setting” and “the center” of world history (171). On the contrary, he defines America through its impotence. According to Hegel, “America has always shown itself physically and spiritually impotent, and it does so to this day. For after the Europeans had landed there, the natives were gradually destroyed by the breath of European activity” (163). For him, the difference between Europe and America is not conditional but absolute, for the latter is invariably inferior, weaker, and more primitive than the former. The German author not only calls the native Indians in the Americas “unenlightened children” (165), but also claims that even the animals are larger and more powerful in the Old World than in the New World (163). This Eurocentric perspective is further emphasized when he attributes the cause of slavery to the “weakness” of the slaves themselves (165).

On the other hand, Hegel's vision of Asia seems more sympathetic, though the superiority of the European "spirit" is never put into question. According to him, Asia is a continent of "antithesis," which is identified as "the home of light and darkness, of outward splendor and the abstraction of pure contemplation" (192). He recognizes that world history began in Asia when "the ethical world of political consciousness" emerged in the region (190). Nevertheless, the real development of world history took place in Europe, characterized as "the absolute end of history" (197). While the East is "where the external and physical sun rises," the West is the place in which "the inner sun of self-consciousness, which emits a higher radiance, makes its further ascent" (197). Whereas Asia represents "antithesis" and "conflict," Europe symbolizes "unity" and "harmony." He thus underlines the idea of the universal "spirit" in the West: "Europe is the land of spiritual unity, of retreat from this boundless freedom into the particular, of control of the immoderate and elevation of the particular to the universal, and of the descent of the spirit into itself" (173). It is clear that Hegel takes different approaches to the New World and Asia, but his understanding of the two territories' relation to Europe remains indisputable: they equally constitute the inferior "Other" (Slave) as opposed to the superior "Self" (Master).

Over the past decades, Hegel's worldview has led many critics across the disciplines to examine his Master-Slave dialectic. In the field of Latin American literary and cultural studies, Enrique Dussel presents an important analysis of the power relationship between Europe and its colonies. As he points out, "[f]or Hegel, the Spirit of Europe (the German spirit) is the absolute Truth that determines or realizes itself through itself without owing anything to anyone" (3). Dussel calls this thesis "the Eurocentric paradigm" through which modernity is defined as Europe's independent, self-referential system. He then proposes the idea of "the world paradigm" or "the planetary paradigm," which conceives modernity as "the culture of the *center* of the 'world-system,' of the first world-system, through the incorporation of Amerindia, and as a result of the *management* of this 'centrality'"(3-4). According to this view, the centrality of Europe is essentially "the fundamental effect of the simple fact of the discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (submission) of Amerindia" (5).

For his part, Fernando Coronil studies the way in which the Hegelian dialectic represents a particular kind of modality, which he refers to as "the Dissolution of the Other by the Self" (58). Echoing Dussel's post-colonial critique, Coronil argues that "[a]lthough Hegel's dialectic engages Master and Slave in intimate reciprocity, one of the consequences of Hegel's Eurocentric view of history is that the unfolding of the dialectic is confined to the West; the non-West remains fundamentally external to it" (59). Based on these studies that have contributed enormously to the deconstruction of the Western epistemology and to the fundamental understanding of the Self-Other polarity from a Latin American perspective, I wish to focus on the Other-Other relationship involving Latin America and Asia. As Tinajero puts in her study, "¿cómo son las formas de representación que surgen de un discurso creado desde un 'margen' de la modernidad occidental en torno a otro 'margen' (el Oriente)? [...] ¿cuál es la dinámica que surge del acercamiento de un 'sujeto exótico' hacia otro 'exótico'; y, a partir de la mirada modernista qué y quién es exótico?" (3). In Hegel's Eurocentric

discourse, there is no interaction between the two marginalized subjects because any cultural and historical ties are defined in terms of their relation to Europe. What interests me is an analysis of the relationship between these two “others” without Western intervention. In order to pay close attention to this non-European, trans-pacific paradigm, I will now turn to the Asian presence in the literary works of *modernismo* at the end of the nineteenth century.

Martí, *modernismo* and China

The literary movement of *modernismo* represents one of the first moments in which Asia had a presence in Latin American literature. In *Breve historia del modernismo*, Max Henríquez Ureña highlights that an important aspect of this movement resides in its search for “motivos de inspiración en el extremo Oriente” (18-19). The “dialogue” between Latin America and Asia during the *modernista* period differs from the hierarchical relationship between Europe and Latin America. Rather than depending on the politics of power relationships, Latin America’s interaction with Asia at that time shows a more respectful attitude as well as a desire to discover a new form of art and spirituality, one of the central premises of *modernismo*.

José Martí was among the first *modernistas* to turn to the Orient. With his knowledge on Asian philosophy and history, he explores multiple themes related to the Far East through his texts. For example, Martí creates a story about a Chinese Emperor and his two nightingales, based on Hans Christian Andersen’s classic narrative on the same subject. “Los dos ruiseñores” was published in 1889 in the children’s magazine that Martí edited, known as *La edad de oro*. The plot revolves around the life of an Emperor who one day learns that the most beautiful thing in his kingdom is the song of a nightingale owned by a fisherman. He orders the bird to be captured in the nearby forest, and when he hears its singing for the first time, “el ruiseñor cantó tan dulcemente que le corrían en hilo las lágrimas al emperador” (*Obras completas*: vol. 18, 494).¹ The Emperor is so captivated by its voice that he decides to keep it in the palace. Later he receives a package containing an artificial bird made of metal and jewelry: “un pájaro de metal que parecía vivo en su caja de oro, y por plumas tenía zafiros, diamantes y rubíes, y cantaba como el ruiseñor de verdad en cuanto le daban cuerda, moviendo la cola de oro y plata” (495). Seeing the Emperor entertained by this mechanical toy, the real nightingale leaves the palace and returns to the forest. The Emperor listens to the artificial bird all day until it breaks into pieces. Later he becomes deathly ill, but nobody is able to cure his disease. It is only when the nightingale flies from the forest to sing for him that the Emperor finally recovers his health. At the end of the story, the bird promises to return anytime she is needed in the palace.

First of all, it is easy to recognize elements of *modernismo* in this story, including the description of details, the celebration of nature, the use of multiple colors, and the importance of art. For example, the depiction of the palace shows the author’s careful

¹ The article can be found in *Obras Completas de José Martí* [O.C.], vol. 18, 491-499. For the subsequent citations from this text, I will only indicate the page number.

attention to detail. The Emperor lives in the “palacio de porcelana blanca y azul” where one finds such appealing images as “una porcelana que parece luz, y suena como la música, y hacer pensar en la aurora”, “naranjos enanos,” “peceras con peces de amarillo y carmín, con cinto de oro”, “rosales con rosas rojas y negras, que tenían cada una su campanilla de plata, y daban a la vez música y olor”, and “un bosque muy grande y hermoso, que daba al mar azul” (492). Another important aspect is the story’s emphasis on nature and music. The fact that the real nightingale ends up saving the Emperor’s life, instead of the mechanic one, can be interpreted as the triumphant of nature over technology and modernity.

The story also makes reference to Oriental customs and traditions. Martí mentions that Chinese books “empiezan por la última página” and describes the local hairstyle as “la cola del pelo bailándoles por la espalda” (491), evoking the stereotypical image of a Chinaman with a queue. The Asian culture of respect for the elderly is shown through the Emperor who “a los viejecitos los saludaba siempre como si fuesen padres suyos” (491). There is also a brief reference to Confucius whose teaching includes that “los perezosos [...] eran peor que el veneno de las culebras” and that “los que aprenden de memoria sin preguntar por qué [...] no son leones con alas de paloma [...] sino lechones flacos, con la cola de tirabuzón y las orejas caídas, que van donde el porquero les dice que vayan, comiendo y gruñendo” (491). Given that Martí wrote “Los dos ruseñores” for a children’s magazine, his didactic purpose is palpable in these passages. He not only emphasizes the ethic of hard work through the wisdom of Confucius, but also points out the importance of cultivating a critical mind instead of being “lechones flacos.” Martí thus seeks to incorporate Chinese philosophy into his own project of educational reform in Cuba and Latin America. From this perspective, China is not a mere source of literary inspiration for Martí: his purpose of presenting the Asian country is as much political as artistic.

Moreover, Martí’s political interest extends to the depiction of social hierarchy. In the story, China has a definite hierarchical system under the monarchy. Below the Emperor, his servants (“los mandarines”) occupy the second highest position, followed by chefs and fishermen who constitute the lowest class. Interestingly, the Emperor shows his ignorance when everyone else is aware of the existence of the famous nightingale. The blindness of his assistant also becomes evident when he cannot identify the voice of the bird: “Bramó una vaca, y dijo un mandarincito joven: —¡Oh, qué robusta voz! ¡qué pájaro magnífico!—‘Es una vaca que brama’, —dijo la cocinerita. Graznó una rana, y dijo el mandarincito:—‘¡Oh, qué hermosa canción, que suena con las campanillas!’—‘Es una rana que grazna’, dijo la cocinerita” (494). Unlike the Emperor and his servant, it is the poor female chef who knows the whereabouts of the nightingale and who is able to bring her to the palace. Martí describes how “una cocinerita, de color de aceituna y de ojos de almendra, [...] conocía el pájaro muy bien, porque de noche iba por el camino del bosque a llevar las sobras de la mesa a su madre que vivía junto al mar” (493). Through these scenes, the author seems to reverse the typical hierarchical relationship, at once giving emphasis to the poor and mocking the upper class. In this way, China provides a productive setting through which Martí delivers a socio-political critique against inequality and authoritarianism.

At the end of the story, the nightingale tells the Emperor that “[y]o vendré al árbol que cae a tu ventana, y te cantaré en la noche, para que tengas sueños felices. Te cantaré de los malos y de los buenos, y de los que gozan y de los que sufren” (498). Here, the bird is turned into a maternal figure who is willing to take care of the male character and sing lullabies to him. This image suggests that the nightingale serves not only as a symbol of nature and art, but also as the embodiment of a protective force. Since the female figure is described as an important Asian element in the story, perhaps Martí portrays the image of a “maternal Asia” that would rescue Latin America at the turn of the century. As I show later, the representation of femininity is a recurring theme among Latin American writers looking towards Asia.

We can also see the influence of China in Martí’s chronicle, “Un funeral chino,” written in 1888. Published by the Argentinean journal, *La Nación*, the article narrates the funeral of the Chinese General named Li-In-Du in New York. Given that Martí almost never discusses the importance of the Chinese population in Cuban history throughout his oeuvre, his particular interest in the Chinese immigrants in the United States is notable.² Upon his arrival in the U.S. in 1881, the Cuban writer learns about the negative portrayal of Asian immigrants in America. He observes that “[y]a son californianos avarientos, que tienen celos de los chinos sobrios, y exigen en el calor de los motines, que se ponga coto a la venida de los chinos” (O.C.: vol. 9, 278). Toward the beginning of the 1880s, American society began to implement strict measures against the admission of Asian immigrants. Consequently, there were all kinds of racism and discrimination against the Chinese, most notably in California. Two of the most infamous phenomena related to this history are the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited Chinese immigrants from entering into the American territory, and the massacre of twenty Chinese immigrants in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885.

In “Un funeral chino,” Martí describes how “abrió paso Nueva York a los chinos vestidos de colores que con magnas honras, a usanza asiática, seguían el féretro del general ilustre de los Pabellones Negros, de Li-In-Du que les ha muerto en los brazos” (77).³ Like his story on the nightingales, this article shows some aspects of *modernismo*. For example, Martí emphasizes minuscule elements when describing the dead man in his coffin:

Y el muerto está en su ataúd de paño rico y mucha argentería, descubierto de la cintura a la cabeza de hombre firme, ojos hondos y metidos hacia la nariz, nariz de fosas anchas, boca fina apretada, la trenza de atrás traída como corona por la frente; y una mano al pecho, cubierto de papel moneda de Asia, para pagar el portazgo del cielo. (78)

² There is a virtual silence about the Chinese in Cuba in Martí’s voluminous writings. As Ignacio López-Calvo points out, Martí “neglects the significant presence of the Chinese community in Cuba, which at the time consisted of approximately 150,000 members” (136).

³ The article can be found in O.C.: vol. 12, 77-83. For the subsequent citations from this text, I will only indicate the page number.

In this passage, the focus on Li-In-Du's face gives the feeling that the reader is watching a cinematographic scene. Martí's function as a "film director" is further highlighted when he tells us, "[h]oy hay música extraña, la música de los funerales de Li-In-Du. Vamos, con Nueva York curiosa, a oírla" (77). Moreover, the poetic language combined with the frequent use of color is another characteristic of this *modernista* text: "[l]a muerte es azul, es blanca, es color de perla, es la vuelta al gozo perdido, es un viaje" (79). The procession presents colorful images, including "estandarte amarillo", "túnica azul y casquete de seda negra", "mando de vueltas negras", and "cada uno lleva bandera de un color y presidiéndolas va el palio redondo del mandarín, naranja y morado" (81-82). Similar to "Los dos ruseñores," "Un funeral chino" illustrates multi-colored sceneries, and these abundant images transform the Chinese funeral into a magnificent celebration of death.

However, what inspires Martí most about Li-In-Du is the heroism associated with his life. According to the Cuban writer, the Chinese General is known for defeating the French troops in Vietnam. Praising the achievement of Li-In-Du, Martí insists that "¡vencer al francés fue más que hacer trescientas obras buenas, que es lo que se necesita para ser como teniente de la inmortalidad, o inmortal en la tierra" (79). Martí's exaltation of heroic deeds also becomes apparent when he writes, "[p]or todas partes hierve el mundo y padece el hombre, por asegurar la libertad de su albedrío. ¡De eso tenía Li-In-Du la frente chata y los pómulos aplastados, de dar topetazos, cara a cara, al imperio despótico!" (81). Considering Martí's involvement in his own country's struggle for freedom at the time, it is easy to discern a comparison between Vietnam's history of resistance against French imperialism and Cuba's independence movement against Spain. Perhaps he saw a reflection of his own life in the Chinese General. Following the previous theory regarding Martí's political intention to incorporate China into his literature, we can argue that Li-In-Du's life serves as a model for Cuba's fight for freedom. In this sense, Martí's China is not only a symbol of the harmonious, multi-colored world that Martí envisions, but it also represents a national space in which a sense of patriotism and anti-colonialism could emerge.

Gómez Carrillo and Japan

While Martí never actually crossed the Pacific, there were other *modernistas* who traveled to Asia and witnessed the "realities" of life on the other side of the ocean. One of the pioneers of this movement was the Guatemalan Enrique Gómez Carrillo who visited Japan in 1905 as a correspondent for two newspapers, *La Nación* (Argentina) and *El Liberal* (Spain). The collection of his chronicles, known as *El Japón heroico y galante* (1912), demonstrates his analysis of the Asian country at the beginning of the twentieth century. His trip took place immediately after Japan's triumph over Russia during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), which had repercussions both abroad and at home. Internationally, it marked a critical moment when the West was defeated by a rising Oriental power for the first time in contemporary history. As a result, the conventional discourse on the superiority of the European race was seriously challenged. Domestically, the end of the war also led to Japan's rapid economic growth and a start to the process of modernization. Many of Gómez Carrillo's writings on Japan

contain symbols of modern technology, including railroad, highway, car, train, and telegraph.

In his chronicles, Gómez Carrillo establishes numerous comparisons between Japan and Europe. For instance, “El alma heroica” juxtaposes the figure of a Japanese samurai with that of a Spanish knight. He notes that “[l]a feudalidad del Japón se parecía mucho a lo que fue la nuestra; el samurai era un caballero” (49). This comparison goes further as one of the samurais in Japanese history, Minamoto no Yoritomo, is placed alongside Don Quijote: “Lo mismo que Don Quijote, el terrorífico Yoritomo se lanza contra enemigos ocultos o que no existen. [...] Como el caballero manchego, ataca a unos molinos que desde lejos le parecen terribles enemigos” (49). Here the author’s knowledge on the samurai allows him to establish a unique connection with the concept of Spanish cavalry. In fact, he calls Yoritomo “el Don Quijote amarillo” (48).

Similarly, Gómez Carrillo takes a comparative approach in order to paint a picture of a local train in Tokyo. He begins the article “Tokio” by describing his first impressions of the city’s metropolitan area: “Tokio... La estación de Shimbashi... Los primeros árboles metropolitanos... Y en el tren minúsculo, más pequeño, más ligero que un tranvía madrileño, el movimiento peculiar de toda llegada se inicia, *pero no como en Europa, no con febriles impacencias y curiosidades infantiles, no con ruido ni con alegría, sino grave y pausadamente*” (my emphasis, 17). These analogies reveal the type of readership the Guatemalan author had in mind when he wrote the chronicles. It is clear that he was thinking about the educated bourgeoisie in both Spain and Latin America who identified themselves with Western culture. The expected task for Gómez Carrillo as both a reporter and a translator of Japanese society is thus deeply complicated. As Joan Torres-Pou explains,

Gómez Carrillo conocía muy bien lo que quería leer su público y sabía que debía hablar de aquello que pudiera interesar a un lector occidental, o más explícitamente, a aquellos interesados en viajar desde la comodidad de su rutina burguesa. Por lo tanto, tenía que hacer énfasis en aquello que por un lado fuera reconocible y, por otro, resultara distinto o sorprendente. (157)

In order to keep entertaining the reader, he must maintain a feasible balance between the familiar and the exotic, the recognizable and the unknown. However, it is important to recognize that what Gómez Carrillo presents in his text is not a Hegelian celebration of European superiority. Instead, the symbol of Spain that he gives in the quote above, the “tranvía madrileño,” is described in negative terms, using such expressions as “febriles impacencias” and “curiosidades infantiles.” In the same way, he compares European coachmen to Japanese drivers. He insists that Europeans would not be able to bear the idea of driving in long, muddy streets in Tokyo: “Los cocheros de Europa pondrían mala cara ante la perspectiva de estas *courses*. Los kurumayas [cocheros] japoneses se contentan con sonreír, satisfechos en apariencia, en el fondo resignados, y echan a trotar por las interminables, por las increíbles vías de su ciudad” (20). In these passages, the authority of the Occident is put into question, for it no longer stands

as the absolute center of the world. Rather than basing his narrative on a Eurocentric discourse, Gómez Carrillo offers an alternative reading of Asian society.

Furthermore, his depiction of Japan in the chronicles differs significantly from Martí's exaltation of China that we examined earlier. Although *modernista* aesthetics also appear in Gómez Carrillo's writings, his first-hand experience in the country informs his view and the result is a more complex representation of Japan. In "Tokio," for example, he offers an analysis of streets in the city:

Sólo las calles continúan siempre feas, de una fealdad miserable, feas de lodo, feas de pobreza, feas de humildad. Ninguna gracia las redime. Son sórdidas con resignación, casi con gusto. Los vecinos se sirven de ellas como de dependencias de sus casas. Lo que no cabe en la cocina, o en el patio, o en el corral, se pone fuera. Las cajas viejas, las carretas rotas, los cestos de la basura, los trapos mojados, fuera, fuera. (22-23)

The description of filthy streets and a sense of fetishism ("casi con gusto") expose the darker side of Asia. While Martí's China is an imaginary place where everything is beautiful and harmonious, Gómez Carrillo creates a more realistic picture of Japan that involves the presence of urban poverty and pollution. The muddy image of the neighborhood is contrasted with the luminous sky, in which "que va limpiándose poco a poco, delicadísimos tonos verdes, de un verde transparente de esmeralda, aparecen a medida que las nubes huyen" (22). In this way, he is able to capture the duality of Japanese society, which is manifested as both serene and impure. His fascination with the Asian country stems from this gap between fantasy and reality, between what he describes as "mi Japón soñado" and "mi Japón real" (19).

While Gómez Carrillo's experience in Japan enables him to paint a more realistic picture of the paradoxes of Japanese life, the way he portrays women seems deeply rooted in imagination. Similar to Martí's cinematographic depiction of the General Li-In-Du's dead body, the Guatemalan writer pays close attention the figure of *musumé* (young woman):

De pie en la puerta de la estación, una musumé me sonríe, o mejor dicho, se sonríe a sí misma. Es delgada, pálida, de un color de ámbar claro y transparente, con las venas finísimas marcadas en el cuello desnudo. El óvalo de su rostro es perfecto. [...] Las manos, exangües, de dedos afiladísimos, son traslúcidas. Los labios, en fin, entreabiertos en esa sonrisa perpetua, sus labios húmedos, dejan ver una exquisita dentadura de granos de arroz. (19)

Here the woman appears in the witness's eyes as a symbol of natural beauty like the Venus de Milo. His depiction of her body, from her neck to lips, represents exotic eroticism, viewed from the masculine perspective. The female image is idealized by the "sonrisa perpetua," celebrated here as an example of the woman's submissiveness. This eroticism is also depicted by other *modernista* writers, including Rubén Darío and

José Juan Tablada, who show a profound interest in the Oriental beauty.⁴ On one hand, these writers eroticize Asian women by emphasizing their naked body. On the other hand, it is a dehumanization of female subject as her identity is defined exclusively in terms of men's sexual desire. From this perspective, it is ironic that Gómez Carrillo would later criticize the tradition of patriarchal society in Japan, calling it "la esclavitud femenina en el imperio del Sol Naciente" (109).⁵ In fact, the machismo that he perceives in Japanese society is precisely what he ends up exemplifying in his chronicles about Asian women.

Paz, India, and Mexico

Another notable figure from Latin America who traveled to Asia in the twentieth century was Octavio Paz, who served as Mexico's ambassador to India between 1962 and 1968. He lived in New Delhi during that time and studied the diverse cultures, aesthetics and religions of India. As a prolific writer and diplomat, he sought to discover cultural links between Latin America and Asia, in particular between Mexico and India. Consequently, the two worlds are often intertwined in Paz's writings. In *El arco y la lira* (1956), he characterizes the Oriental "other" as an agreeable entity, through which seemingly opposite elements are often unified. He argues that "[l]a experiencia de lo Otro culmina en la experiencia de la Unidad. Los dos movimientos contrarios se implican. En el echarse hacia atrás ya late el salto hacia delante (127)." Through his contemplation of Indian culture, he develops a unique theory of Orientalism that points to the fusion of conflicting realities. In a sense, Paz shares a different view on the relationship between Latin America and Asia from Martí and Gómez Carrillo: while the latter two still perceive a division between the Latin American "self" and the Asian "other," the Mexican writer sees no separation between them. This type of synthesis in Paz leads Manuel Durán to conclude that "la poesía de Paz será un gran puente tendido entre el Occidente y el Oriente" (99).

An example of fusion appears in his experimental poem "Blanco" written in 1966.⁶ In the poem, Paz describes India through the image of the *nim* tree, which is

⁴ For example, in "La mujer japonesa," Tablada writes that "(e)n todas partes la *musumé* es encantadora, flor de aire libre y de refinamiento palatino, vibrante cigarra o áureo faisán. Es buena, es infinitamente dulce, tranquila y delicada" (193).

⁵ In "La mujer," Gómez Carrillo points out the problem of gender inequality in Japan. He describes how "[l]a mujer habla a su marido de rodillas; la mujer no tiene derecho a quejarse; la mujer no debe ver lo que su marido hace; la mujer no es, en suma, sino la criada preferida" (111). He goes onto list some rules that must be followed by a "perfect" bride, lamenting that a woman must always be submissive and obedient in Japanese society.

⁶ I quote from *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz (1957-1987)*, p. 312-331.

The poet alludes not only to a single garden but also to a series of gardens, which keep moving around in the process of generating an alternative space and time. This expression shows Paz's philosophy of amalgamating the singular and the plural: a single garden is combined with other gardens, while a space and time are fused with the "other" space and time. The description of many gardens/spaces/times represents a world of synthesis for the poet. The opening passage thus suggests the possibility of transcending differences through the harmonizing force that Paz finds in the intercultural relationship between Mexico and India.

In fact, the idea of blending plays a critical role in Paz's vision of poetry. In another part of "Cuentos de dos jardines," he writes:

Un todo es cada uno
en otro todo,
en otro uno.
El otro está en el uno,
el uno es otro:
somos constelaciones. (296, 298)

In abstract terms, the "uno" is juxtaposed with the "todo," and the "otro" is integrated into the "uno." Any opposition is transfigured into synthesis, creating a collection of "constelaciones." Therefore, the two worlds that appear in the poem essentially represent a single reality. As Kushigian puts it, what Paz describes is "the river that stretches indefinitely, its body being in constant communication with both shores" (44). From this perspective, the division between Mexico and India ceases to exist in the eyes of the poet. For him, the self is essentially indivisible from the other.

Although the first garden mentioned in the poem is that of Mexico, it is in the second garden of India where Paz recognizes what he calls "una claridad":

Un día,
como si regresara,
no a mi casa,
al comienzo del Comienzo,
llegué a una claridad. (294, 296)

This "claridad" in the Oriental garden, understood as a moment of enlightenment, reminds us of the *nim* tree that I discussed earlier. The sacred tree emerges from the darkness as the poet writes, "Oí rumor verdinegro/ brotar del centro de la noche: el *nim*" (296). The significance of the *nim* in Paz's Orientalism can be analyzed from multiple perspectives. First, it symbolizes an interpersonal unity because this is where he was married to his second wife, Marie-José Tramini, in 1964. As described in the poem, "Nosotros le pedimos al *nim* que nos casara" (300). At the same time, it also points to a sexual union between two bodies: "Nuestros cuerpos/ se hablaron, se juntaron y se fueron" (298). From a religious viewpoint, the *nim* is thought to be the place where Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, achieved his spiritual

enlightenment. Reflecting on this history, Paz depicts his own experience of awakening under the tree:

Aprendí,
en la fraternidad de los árboles
a reconciliarme,
no conmigo:
con lo que me levanta, me sostiene, me deja caer. (298)

Paz achieves enlightenment through the concept of reconciliation. It is not a mere reflection about himself, but instead he recognizes a harmonious relationship between the self and the other, which find themselves in constant communication. The tree thus epitomizes the positive force of the universe:

El árbol no cedía.
Grande como el monumento a la paciencia,
justo como la balanza que pesa
la gota de rocío
el grano de luz,
el instante.
Entre sus brazos cabían muchas lunas.
Casa de las ardillas,
mesón de los mirlos. (296)

On the one hand, the *nim* is celebrated for its ability to embrace both simplicity (“la gota de rocío”, “el grano de luz”, and “el instante”) and multiplicity (“muchas lunas”). On the other hand, it also serves as a refuge for animals, depicted as “casa de las ardillas” and “mesón de los mirlos.” In other words, the tree’s protective force is viewed as an embodiment of the “madre India” (300). Similar to the way in which Martí and Gómez Carrillo portray Asia through female imagery, Paz associates India with the idea of motherhood. For all three writers, Asia symbolizes femininity as opposed to Latin American masculinity.

However, if we analyze his conceptualization of the Asian garden in comparison to that of the Mexican garden, Paz’s Orientalism reveals a problematic aspect. Unlike the purifying, idealistic space in India, the garden in Mixcoac emerges as a place of destruction and abandonment:

Aquel de Mixcoac, abandonado,
cubierto de cicatrices,
era un cuerpo
a punto de desplomarse.
Yo era niño
y el jardín se parecía a mi abuelo. (292)

In this scene, the symbol of enlightenment that we witnessed in India has disappeared completely. The Mexican garden is abandoned and covered with scars. Paz characterizes Mexico as “un cuerpo/ a punto de desplomarse,” implying that what the

future holds for his native land is nothing but ruin. Only the images of violence are associated with Mixcoac, such as “condenado”, “destrucción”, “el sentenciado”, “la sangre”, “la muerte: la otra cara del ser, la vacía,” and “mi ruina” (292, 294).

The poet further draws a negative picture of Mexico by describing its people:

Ennegrecen,
son ya una masa cárdena,
una protuberancia enorme que se desgarra:
el golpe del aguacero cubre todo el llano.
Llueve sobre lavas:
 danza el agua
sobre la piedra ensangrentada. (294)

Paz defines the Mexican population as “una masa cárdena” and “la piedra ensangrentada,” in comparison to the sacred *nim* tree in India. Dispirited by the negative image he sees in Mexico, he decides to leave the place upon declaring, “Los pinos me enseñaron a hablar solo / En aquel jardín aprendí a despedirme” (294).

Paz’s departure demonstrates his decision to abandon his native land in search of enlightenment or what he calls “la claridad.” As a privileged member of the Mexican intelligentsia who experiences life on “la otra orilla” in Asia, he literally stands and speaks alone, away from the masses. He prefers the harmonious terrain of India to the abysmal condition in Mexico. Behind the celebration of cultural blending, the displaced Mexico looks less important than the glorious India. Consequently, in Paz’s orientalist vision, his country is compressed into a “un nombre sin substancia” (306). As he highlights the fusion between Mexico and India, the two bodies are absorbed into a single entity with their differences eliminated. The more emphasis Paz places on the idea of synthesis, the more Mexican self appears secondary to the Indian other. In this sense, we can claim that behind his Orientalism is the exaltation of cultural hybridism, which makes Mexico’s particular essence dissolved into homogenization.

Paz’s stance as an elite intellectual is not unique to himself, for Martí and Gómez Carrillo similarly gaze at Asia from a privileged position. Their writings were not meant for the illiterate masses but for the educated, upper-class members of society who enjoyed contemplating the art and culture of distant places. Furthermore, the fact that there were hardly any female Latin American writers examining the influence of Asia until the late twentieth century means that the cultural relationship between Latin America and Asia was almost always analyzed from the masculine viewpoint. Nevertheless, Martí, Gómez Carrillo and Paz stand out as some of the pioneers (though certainly not the only ones) of the making of a trans-Pacific dialogue between the two regions. Through different means, they integrated Oriental components into their literary works and thus made possible the interaction between the two “others” as they confronted against a Eurocentric view. In this sense, their writings mark a unique and important moment in the history of post-colonial literature in which both sides of the Pacific were united for a common cause.

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