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Yahwism and Mythological Pre-Consciousness in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*

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Hipertexto

One of the most intriguing aspects of the priest Don Manuel, in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, is that he is distinct. In important ways, he does not fit the customary portrait of a Catholic priest. The first and greatest departure from reader expectations is that Don Manuel does not believe in “la vida eterna.” We quickly discover, therefore, that the religion he preaches is in reality the gospel of living as happily and as peacefully as feasible on this earth, for as long as possible. Indeed, he dedicates his life to seeing that his parishioners achieve such an earthly peace and that they not get caught up in doctrinal quandaries or contemporary social remedies. The priest is unmistakably Christian in his actions, as Unamuno reminds us in the last pages of the novel: judge the tree by its fruits (59-60) ¹. But the author also hints, at the outset of the novel, that Don Manuel is a believer in Christ in this life only, and, as such, is among “los más miserables” (25). It is this metaphysical misery that needs to be studied more in depth, as regards to its roots and impact on the Christianity of Don Manuel. The priest is full of doubt and lacks faith in the most incredible tenets of his religion. By tracing this culture of doubt and agnosticism, we can understand the beloved priest better. In doing so, we will see that Don Manuel embodies and wrestles unknowingly with two great cultural traditions, still at philosophical odds today: the Hebrew and the Hellene.

We should not be surprised to learn that Unamuno has woven two formative dominant cultural impulses in his novel, given his interest in questions of faith and religions. Protestant creeds as well as Catholicism have been shown to have a significant impact on Unamuno’s philosophies and poetics, according to Nelson Orringer. What has been given less attention is what Paul Ilie terms the “Hebraistic” influence in the works of the famed author. This study

¹ The edition of the novel quoted in this essay is: Miguel de Unamuno, “*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*” y tres historias más. 9th ed. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, Colección Austral 254, 1974.

commences with Ilie's general observations about the importance of Judaism in the Unamunian oeuvre and then investigates the characteristics of the Yahwist-Prophetic tradition of the Hebrews to see how this specific latter impulse emerges in Unamuno's short novel, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*. What Ilie first mentions as a general source of ideas, Judaism, will be seen to be the culture from which the specific Yahwist cult emerged. It is by comparing the beliefs of the Yahwists with San Manuel's actions and thoughts that we can perceive a man caught between two worlds. He is trained as a classic Christian father, but his impulse, his intellect, or his very being hearken back to a much older tradition: the culture of Jehovah. Closely examined, after familiarizing ourselves with the characteristics of Yahwism, Don Manuel's comportment, although he is transparently a priest in the Christian tradition of the New Testament, can be traced, in some degree, to the Yahwist tradition of the Old Testament. The society to whom he preaches can be seen as 'cold' (Claude Levi-Strauss's term), mythological, resistant to change and introspection, and preferring stasis. Analyzing Don Manuel's intellect, motivation, and actions reveals a person representative of an opposite tradition: a 'hot' (changing, questing, doubting) society that is seen most completely in the Yahwist culture of Israel. A vestige of this tradition can be seen today manifested in Western society's questing for the new and constantly examining and revising the tried and true. Understanding these fundamentally divergent cultures will clear a path for interpreting some polysemic images and references in text, particularly the scene where the priest and Blasillo die together; and in appreciating the depth of the martyrdom of San Manuel.

Employing Matthew Arnold's definitions from *Culture and Anarchy*, Ilie categorizes Unamuno's philosophy as "what we might call markedly Hebraistic, as opposed to Hellenistic, in content" (266). Judaism, he states, played an important role in Unamuno's thought. Arnold defines Hebraism as strictness of conscience, an attitude toward culture in which duty, action, self-control, and obedience to God's will are what shape the conduct of (wo)man. He perceives this impulse as behavior and thought in opposition to the spontaneity of conscience that is Hellenism; an attitude wherein reason, flexibility, knowledge, and beauty are motivating forces. Herbert Schneidau, in *Sacred Discontent*, further defines this contrariety, stressing that, rather than Judaism per se, it is Yahwism--the cult of Yahweh--that stands as cultural opposite to Hellenism.

Yahwism is not traditional Judaism, and a Jew is rarely a Yahwist these days. The Yahwist is not even specifically represented in Jewish society. He or she is a figure of alienation, standing outside and condemning culture and all its constructed ideals and traditions. In order to conceptualize the Yahwist, who stands apart from culture, we need to remember that the very definition of culture is that which is produced by humans: our culture reflects our customs, implicitly glorifying our accomplishments. Yahwism is the worship of Jehovah in all his contradictory and enigmatic omnipresence, not the worship of what human beings have achieved. The substance of this tradition is best encapsulated in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which "insists on the functionality of things, alienating us from the world [culture], which it empties of meaning, reminding us constantly of the vanity of our wishes" (Atkins 31). Rather than representing an aberration in tone and style compared to the other books of the Old Testament, the writings of

the Preacher in Ecclesiastes are the most accurate delineation of the humbling, subverting moves of Yahweh; a theme that can be found in the all the books from Genesis to Malachi. For example, this unsettling God at the center of Yahwist philosophy can also be seen in the story of the Tower of Babel. This parable pointedly rejects the great old urban traditions of architectural and astronomical wisdom seen in other civilizations of the time. Such traditions are interpreted by Yahwists as “mere ramifications of self-deifying pride that is more important to man’s buildings than bricks or mortar” (Schneidau 5). When faced with his people’s effort to assert themselves and build the tower, rather than reinforcing such initiative by rewarding their faith and works, Jehovah destroys the structure and scatters the builders. The Yahwist perspective considers such human acts presumptuous, because the builders believe they know God’s will; and arrogant, since such efforts unmask the conviction that earthlings believe they can wrest their spiritual rewards or secure their mansions in heaven through sheer force of worldly knowledge, physical effort, and determined willpower. That is not how things work with the God of the Israel, who informed the Israelites, through Isaiah, that their ways were different from the ways of Jehovah (55:8).

Our first clue to the Yahwist impulse in Unamuno’s novel is presented at the outset, in the epigraph. Quoting 1 Corinthians, 15:19, “Si sólo en esta vida esperamos en Cristo, somos los más miserables de todos los hombres,” the text establishes the theme of existential misery. By the framing the text with a Christian scripture, the implication is that the metaphysical agony can only be alleviated by a faith in the resurrection of Christ, and, implicitly, the eventual resurrection of all believers. Absent this testimony that there is some point to this existence (which would be, life after death), anyone who considers the matter deeply (as Don Manuel does) will be miserable. In an earlier verse in the same chapter in First Corinthians, St. Paul gives a clue as to how we may see that the scripture Unamuno cites is related to the intertext and context of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes: The apostle states: “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain” (verse 17). We recall that the Preacher wrote: all is vanity under the sun. St. Paul adds one qualifier to this Yahwist position: all in vanity--if there is no life to come. The belief in the resurrection of the body as an ameliorating balm to the stark them of *vanitas vanitum* is the thematic focus of the Unamunian text, and we are alerted to it through this scripture at the opening of the novel. Don Manuel’s confessed inability to accept this tenet of Christianity figuratively places him in the Yahwist tradition of scarce hope (as expressed by the Preacher) more than the Christian tradition of faith (described by St. Paul). Like Unamuno, Don Manuel “rejected Christianity but, on the other hand, became a believer in Christlikeness or Christhood” (Falconieri 138).

Don Manuel, unconsciously and metaphorically, is a Yahwist prophet at heart who builds a life and ministry battling these cultural impulses established by the institution of the Catholic Church. The Yahwist-prophetic tradition evinces abhorrence to the works of humans and their civilizations. We recall Don Manuel’s dismissal of the idea of forming a union, and we see the remark as a point of congruence. Followers of Jehovah developed a persistent ambivalence toward cultured, settled societies, which we see allegorized in the priest’s ambiguous answer to the magistrate seeking to arrest a criminal. The Yahwists were nomadic, and Don Manuel is intellectually vibrant and physically restless,

always active. In the cult of Yahweh, there was an antipathy toward urbanism and the stasis of such cultures was clear. We are reminded of the low esteem of the larger, more urban, Renada, in comparison with the spiritually-rich Valverde de Lucerna. When the Israelites first entered Canaan, they destroyed Jericho, one of the oldest cities of the world. After making Jerusalem their home, they stressed how it was really a city of the Jebusites, refusing to admit that the city was a cultural artifact of their making. Even though the Chosen People eventually dwelled more and more in towns and villages, the argument has been made that they were still tribal, and that their ambivalence—their attitudes of acceptance and rejection—toward urban centers is seen in their persistent attraction to, and condemnation of, the actual and metaphorical Babylons as seen recorded in their scriptures.

This anti-urban characteristic of Hebrew culture is paralleled in the nature of their deity. Since the Israelites were ever-moving, their god was not to be identified with any special place, or a graven image, nor was he given knowable names for centuries. There were no fixed concepts about God. The spirit of the Lord was commonly metaphorized as the wind, smoke, or clouds; conveying the essence of fluidity and the ever-changing nature of Jehovah and his religion. This restlessness, ambiguity, and malleability are features that explain why the Hebrew culture became the foremost example of what Levi-Strauss defines as a “hot” society, where the beliefs and customs would not fossilize into mythologies and legends reinforcing a cosmic continuum. Of course, Hebrew culture did produce its own myths—the Creation, the Flood, as example—but these are relatively sparse and weak and are more a testament to borrowing from other cultures than evidence that they sprang from Yahwist believers. Indeed, the Israelite seers consistently demythologize even Hebrew culture, by showing the connectedness of all their belief systems and exposing them as vain desires for structure and meaning. The role of the prophets, and the Yahwist vision that they articulated, was one at variance with the function of myth. The role of Don Manuel also diverges from the dominant cultural belief of his era, traditional Christianity; as Eric Pennington has shown in “Reading, Writing, and Deconstruction in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*”.

Jesus (Emmanuel) himself, from whom Don Manuel takes his name, had Yahwist tendencies. He was a seer who stood very alienated from his culture and who, from the outside, decried the misguided attempts of humans to construct their own stairways to heaven through their myriad laws and paradigms for behavior. John Dominic Crossan shows that virtually all of the Nazarene’s parables and teachings were subversive to the established ecclesiastical culture, and he was “constantly engaging in freeplay, challenging, even deconstructing, the major traditions of Israel’s inheritance, as well as those of Christianity” (43). If we were to take but two of Jesus’ maxims—“the last shall be first and the first shall be last;” “my yoke is easy and my burden is light”—we have in a nutshell the reversing, de-centering nature of his message. His paradoxical gospel was the antithesis of the contemporary Judaic teachings of the time. Established religion, by its very definition, is mythological, static, and resistant to change. ²

² “Mythological,” as used here, reflects the definition of myth critics: The word, in this context, refers to the construction and codification of stories, parables, events, and sayings that

The carpenter from Nazareth was at odds with the status quo, reiterating the Old Testament's implicit criticism of culture. His voice, crying as one in the wilderness, emanated from outside the constructs of culture and attempted to demythologize it.

It was left to Christianity as a movement, after Christ's death, to establish a new mythology to replace the older Jewish system of beliefs and redefine the Yahwist tenets that Jesus extolled and perpetuated. It is by now redundant to state that the Christian Church that sprang from Jesus' teachings became different, in some ways, from what the Nazarene exemplified. The charge is as least as old as Nietzsche's era and continues today among theologians. The argument is that Christianity essentially became Hellenized, developing a pantheon of saints, beliefs, miracles, and apocryphal stories (Nietzsche 98). In short, a new mythology was established to explain, organize, and teach the ways of the Christian universe and every mortal's place in it.² According to secular Biblical scholars, the most obvious mythological creations are the stories surrounding Jesus' birth, the miracles not involving healing, and the tale of the resurrection. With its overarching view and self-contained set of teachings, stories, symbols, rites, and beliefs, Christianity metamorphosed from Yahwism, which was alienated from and attacked culture, to become the official Culture. In anthropological terms, it became a cold society, static, revering the status quo and scorning (later punishing) the idea of change. By the Middle Ages, the hierarchies, paradigms, and mythologies were fixed and the Christian culture was never colder.

With this admittedly reductive overview of the metaphorically hot and cold societies, we may perceive more distinctly how the two inimical traditions are represented and thematized in the novel. We begin by underscoring Lázaro's accurate description of Valverde de Lucerna as "feudal, medieval" (38). Before his conversion to Don Manuel's religion, Lázaro was resistant and even antagonistic toward what went on (or did not go on) in his native village. We see that the hamlet actually does compare in an anthropological sense to medieval times. The villagers are believers in ancient beliefs, not open to new ideas, because they are quite comfortable with what they have. To a large degree, to borrow again from Levi-Strauss, they have become "fossilized." Embracing the new would be to accept change, and such societies shun change in favor of the static, ordered, emotionally-safe universes they have inherited.

But Valverde is more than just a society of believers. Unamuno has idealized and 'primitized' them and their surroundings, subtly reinforcing the connection of these people with a time before consciousness was formed. One of the characteristics of such myth-believing societies is the concept of sacred space. Speaking of the pre-conscious being, Levi-Strauss explains:

Mountains and creeks and springs and waterholes are not merely interesting

found a creed. In archetypal criticism, "myth" signifies "ancient, religious belief". We have attributed the connotation of "lie" to the word in our own century. In this study, I hold to the word's original denotation. When I (or the secular critics I quote) refer to stories of Jesus' birth, miracles, and resurrection as myths, (or the religions as mythologies) it is merely to say they are age-old religious narratives, without implying any bias as to their authenticity or falsity.

or beautiful scenic features... They are the handiwork of ancestors from whom he descended. He sees recorded in the surrounding landscape the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings whom he reveres... The whole countryside is his living age-old tree. (68)

Knowing these characteristics of primitive, cold, cultures; we can understand why the villagers of Valverde and Don Manuel describe their surroundings with comparable rhetoric, particularly when speaking about the mountain and the lake. These two geographical icons are plainly as sacred to the village as its religion, and extensively linked in the text to Don Manuel, in Angela's narration (see Blanco Aguinaga, Franz, and Falconieri). The lake was believed to contain the spirits of the dead in a submerged, spiritual image of Valverde de Lucerna, and these spirits communicated with the village. As Angela reports:

Y yo oía las campanas de la villa que se dice aquí está sumergida en el lecho del lago --campanadas que se dice también se oyen la noche de San Juan—y eran las de la villa sumergida en el lago espiritual de nuestro pueblo; oía la voz de nuestros muertos que en nosotros resucitaban en la comunión de los santos. (30)

In the lake with all its mysteries, Angela and the other people of the town see "recorded in the surrounding landscape the ancient store of lives and deeds" of beings they revere. Don Manuel, the most revered person of the town, resembles the vulture-head shape of the peak of the mountain. The lake below is one of their foremost sacred places of Valverde, not only because of the belief that dead souls repose there, but because its waters heal the sick on the Night of Saint John, consistent with so many Spanish legends about the miracles performed on that sacred eve (28).

The connection between landscape and sacred place is a distinguishing characteristic of inert, cold, societies. In addition to the lake with its village of spirits, we need to look at the motif of the sacred mountain for an additional mythological or primitive parallel found in the Valverde. The high, holy place is a vestigial remnant of aboriginal times and beliefs. In those times, spiritual power was equated with and represented by gargantuan proportions. Prehistoric peoples would mark holy places by constructing megaliths—Stonehenge and the impressive structures of Egypt being two obvious cultural examples. Sacred mountains, however, predated megaliths and signaled the prominence and importance of a culture's faith through their sheer size and presence. The mountain of Valverde can be seen, symbolically, as a local version of the holy mountain, not dissimilar (in mythological terms) to the Mesopotamian Ziggurat, Mount Sinai, Mount Kilimanjaro, and Mount Horeb. There are ample allusions to this mountain that frames the village between itself and the lake; the allusions convey emotions as fervent, nostalgic, and reverent as can be associated with any holy mountain of worship. When Angela first characterizes the young priest, she refers to the twin spiritual symbols of the townsfolk, which will appear frequently in the text: "Era alto, delgado, erguido, llevaba la cabeza como nuestra Peña del Buitre lleva su cresta, y había en sus ojos toda la hondura azul de nuestro lago" (26). Don Manuel, the mountain, and the lake are the three constant spiritual presences in the lives of the villagers. All three are considered

virtually permanent features of their world. The priest is so often identified with both the mountain and the lake that to document all the references would be excessive.

The mountain of Peña del Buitre, apart from symbolizing the divine mount of primal mythology, also furnishes the scenario for another characteristic of cold societies: that of the suspension or abolishment of time. This is an important factor in the consciousness of the autoclothonous human, who is not cognizant of, or interested in, the passage of time. In fixed cultures there is the understanding or implication that things have been this way for so long that the thought of change is practically inconceivable. Things should (or will) stay this way forever, is the mindset. This concept—so foreign in our quickly changing world—was self-evident to the primitive. As an example, some tool-making traditions lasted hundreds of thousands of years (Schneidau 101). Change was so very long in coming that the ancients were virtually correct to believe that things had always been the same and would continue thus forever. Returning to our novel, we can now interpret references to the timeless nature of objects and actions as clues for discerning how this mythological topic is displaced into the literature in question. A telling section divulging this concept of time seemingly standing still is found in the novel. When Lázaro and Don Manuel look at their mountain on one occasion, they notice a goatherd there. Since she is a constant feature on the hill, planted in the mountain's permanent presence, Don Manuel is moved to reflect: "Mira, parece como si se hubiera acabado el tiempo, como si esa zagala hubiese estado allí para siempre, y como está, y cantando como está, y como si hubiera de seguir estando siempre" (47). This passage concretizes the existence, in the Unamunian text, of the primeval notion of time described by anthropologists: the ancient, mythological world was cyclical and was believed to continue in that manner forever. The villagers of Valverde, Spain, in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, harbor and embrace a similar belief. Life will continue as it is forever. Such a belief is credible for the townsfolk.³ But for Don Manuel, who is outside of their culture because of his probing, ever-ruminating Yahwist-like mind, the idea of permanent stasis, personified in the goatherd, can only be an unattainable desire, as he discloses in the sadness of his words describing the girl.

The *zagala* on the mountainside is also significant in relation to the village society, because her action of shepherding reinforces the function of the holy mountain in myth. Rachel Levy explains how the domestication of animals and instigation of cultivation on the holy mountain appear in myth. The domestication of animals and cultivation of plants—symbols of a settled culture—developed on the "hilly flanks of the lost ancestral mountain which allows civilization to emerge later in the river delta" (90). This quote would seem to apply so well to our novel that we need only substitute "lake" for "river delta" and we have point-for-point congruity between Valverde de Lucerna and emergent, ancient cultures. Thus the mountain in the novel, in addition to symbolizing a revered megalith, provides the figurative space from which civilization—foreshadowed by herding and agriculture—may evolve, providing the initial roots of the village. The mountain persists in the fictive space of the novel as a ubiquitous sign of permanence, the

suspension of time, and the perpetuity of the cosmic continuum, framing and protecting Valverde de Lucerna in its figurative pre-conscious innocence.³

Anthropologists document that another feature of frozen societies is the cult of the dead, which is often coupled with the primitive concept of the lost original world. Those who have died are always with them, always present, always honored. The offerings of cave people left in burial caves, as well as the provisions of the Egyptians placed in the pyramids for the pharaohs are leading illustrations of cults of the dead. (Consideration of such customs is particularly pertinent to our present study, because the topic reminds us of the overruling agony in Don Manuel's life: the nature of death.) Items left in caves and tombs were placed there because of a conviction in life after death. Primitive human beings, believed in a "monumental recycling ideology in which ancestors embodied in landscape (tombs, cemeteries, caves) return in the form of near relatives" (G.S. Kirk 137). Christian notions of resurrection are later, kindred concepts to this ancient concept of the dead remaining among us in some state. Both belief systems underscore the certitude that death is merely a passage, a step, to another state of existence. We can discern evidence of such a cult in the villagers' belief of the dead spirits reposing in the lake. But we should also accentuate the reference to the long destroyed abbey cited in the novel, "donde aun parecen reposar las almas de los piadosos cistercienses" (34). Cornelius Loews remarks that in such hallowed places of death or burial there are often objects and corpses stained with red ochre to "restimulate blood or life" (80). When we recall that on the walls of the abbey "quedan señales de gotas de sangre con que las salpicó al mortificarse el Padre Capitán" (34), we recognize another textual link between the mythological culture and the images from the novel. The ancients believed that the departed dead were always with them. Thus they would revisit their burial places. Valverde's inhabitants believe that the souls of deceased Catholic monks still hover in the ruins of the abbey and that the lake still harbors the souls of villagers who have died.

A cult of the dead kills as ritual. The present people of Valverde, seen through these beliefs that they embrace, embody a modern cultural equivalent of the ancient cults of the dead. Unmoving societies such as Valverde accept death because they see it as a natural phase in their eternal continuum, just as primitive societies viewed death. Active societies receive death as tragic and insufferable, in a metaphysical sense, since it reminds them of the mortality, brevity, and vanity of this life. Mythological cultures react to death (often enshrining it) as part of life and are generally less emotionally moved when it occurs, whether it is expected or sudden.

³ Thomas Franz's article on the poetics of space in this novel is seminal to understanding how the imagery reflects the life and concerns of Don Manuel and the inhabitants of Valverde de Lucerna. Some of his observations about spaces creating the impression of timelessness are similar to the interpretations in this present study. Our point of departure lies in how we classify the imagery. Franz views the perception of time standing still as consistent with the Christian ideas of the everlasting nature of life. I stress that the Christian identifications with the lake mountain are emblematic of what fossilized systems do in their attempts to encompass and systematize nature. They mythologize the natural world.

As we consider their attitudes toward death, we may observe a chasm between the believers (as mythological) and Don Manuel (as Yahwist), especially as regards the death of infants. It is understood that the acceptance of infanticide is a derivative characteristic in a cult of the dead. We have no killing of progeny in the novel, but we have a thematic equivalent. It is the rather nonchalant reaction of the villagers to the death of a newborn child, to which they respond, “teta y gloria” and “angelitos al cielo” (32), almost as if it were a ritual chant. The figurative distance between killing children as part of religious rites, and shrugging one’s shoulders on the occasion of their deaths because of a religious faith, is not great.⁴ This is to say, these staid Christians of Valverde are closer to the unfeeling, primitive societies who practiced infanticide than to the vibrant culture of the Yahwists, who considered death the permanent end. Accentuating his kinship with the ancient Hebrews, Don Manuel cannot stomach the villagers’ comments about children dying and just zipping up to heaven. His biographer, Angela, writes that he considered these sayings “como una de las mayores blasfemias,” and “le conmovía profundamente la muerte de los niños” (32). These words of the people were certainly blasphemous to the priest’s theology, which is inflected with Yahwism. His reactions unveil how Don Manuel, in belief and culture inclination, is as Hebraic as Hellene, figuratively rejecting the cult of the dead by the repugnance he shows toward the villagers’ Christian belief that babies who die unexpectedly will be saved in the Kingdom of Heaven. We recall with irony that the priest who resented this cult-like behavior of enshrining death had no impact on the beliefs and actions of his followers on this topic. When he died, “el pueblo todo” immediately ransacked his house in search of relics with which to keep his alive and honor him in death (54), thus promulgating the cult of the worship of the dead.

Delight in the humiliation of foreign kings is a conspicuous Yahwist motif thematized in the novel. Yahweh commanded his followers to have no other gods or idols before him. Neither were kings and worldly authorities, by extension, to be highly valued; rather, they were often despised. They were rivals for the attention one was obliged to give to Jehovah. We do not have Don Manuel despising or humiliating anyone in the text, but we have a formal similarity to this theme, different only in the degree of antipathy. We see it displaced in the story of the petty criminal before the judge, the secular authority, of a neighboring village. When asked for information that would be used as evidence against the accused, Don Manuel refuses to reveal “una verdad que le lleve acaso a la muerte” (29). The priest’s comment, “la justicia humana no me concierne,” (29) is offered in the same Yahwist tradition as seen in the defiance of Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, Elijah before Ahab, Moses before Pharaoh, Jesus before Pilate, and Paul before Agrippa. It is by this code that the followers of Jehovah are bound to answer to him only. Anything else—courts, trials, laws,

⁴ To give an idea of the clash of these attitudes on the death of infants, we need only remember that one of the aspects of Jewish culture that most baffled their Roman overseers was the Jewish opposition of infanticide. For the Jews it was child murder, symbol of the depraved superstition of the pagan. The Roman civilization, quite mythologized and cold, was not far removed from primitive tribes in this respect. The ancients killed offspring without compunction in proportion to how many newborns their food-producing systems could sustain. The Romans practiced infanticide up until their conversion to Christianity.

customs—are of temporal construction and are to be resisted if not ignored. What is important is a person's standing with his or her maker. For this reason, Don Manuel says to the accused, "Mira bien si Dios te ha perdonado, que es lo único que importa" (30).

There is another variation of the Yahwist enmity toward foreign kings in the symbolic battle between Jehovah and his rivals, or usurpers. It can be found in the episode of when Lázaro returns from his life in the New World. The young man represents worldly enlightenment and sophistication, garnered by studying, traveling, and exposure to different peoples and divergent philosophies. He thus epitomizes a way of interpreting the world that is radically distinct from the culture of Valverde de Lucerna, which we recall he characterizes as feudal and medieval. Lázaro is the metaphorical equivalent of an idol worshipper from Old Testament times, standing at odds with the Yahwist prophet. The villagers intuit a mythic conflict of ideologies in the initial tension between Don Manuel and Lázaro: "Y ya en el pueblo se fue formando, no sé cómo, una expectativa, la de una especie de duelo entre mi hermano Lázaro y Don Manuel" (39). Though the duel is carried out with kid gloves, it has thematic and formal parallels with the competition between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. In the Old Testament story, Elijah did not defeat Baal; in a similar manner, neither does Don Manuel conquer and destroy Lázaro. But the Hebrew prophet was able to put a temporary end to the veneration of Baal by destroying the priests. Don Manuel accomplishes the figurative equivalent by replacing Lázaro's new-found philosophy—"me curó de mi progresismo," (54)—so that the culture-defining myth of the resurrection of the dead and heaven may persevere.

A complement to the topic of contempt for kings, false gods, and idols is seen in the Bible's ceaselessly anti-urban theme, as mentioned briefly before. Sodom, Gomorra, Babylon, and Nineveh all come under the verbal assault of the Yahwist prophets. A tell-tale trait of a Yahwist is the condemning of the cities as dens of iniquity. The theme is evident in this novel in the references to Renada, where Angela was schooled and where she, of course, did not feel at home and longed to return to Valverde. Lázaro worshipped the cities, figuratively, for in them he learned the theories he embraced, until his conversion to the Gospel according to Don Manuel. Similar to Renada, implicit scorn is shown toward the village from where the judge comes in search of witnesses against the accused criminal of "un repugnante crimen." That town was another; more worldly, "aldea próxima," because it had crime and a magistrate (29). We can interpret this nearby village as being more urban than Valverde, because the latter has no crime to speak of (30). One of the unfortunate by-products of increased modernity and populace in cities is the proportionate rise in crime. The nearby village had a criminal and a judge, because they had more crime. Don Manuel wanted nothing to do with the judge, nor his social problems. The priest therefore metaphorically rejects the emissary of Babylon, laying bare his Yahwist-like attitude towards foreign kings and the cultures they foment

The most convincing evidence of vestiges of Yahwism can be found in the beliefs, words, and behavior of Don Manuel. Highly indicative of his Hebraic-influenced thought and behavior is his inability to accept the orthodox Christian faith as it is believed in Valverde and virtually all of Christendom. He is absolutely without belief in an afterlife, which the novel makes increasingly clear

as his life diminishes. He cannot accept the concept of the resurrection of the body and soul, the belief in the salvation of recently deceased children, and other tenets (Hell, Heaven) that form the theological framework of the Christian movement that became reified in the low Middle Ages. His religion is existential. He believes in helping others to enjoy their time on earth and “morir bien.” This is done by strengthening his parishioners’ faith in a religion in which he himself does not (cannot) believe. He has no interest in legal causes or social movements such as Lázaro’s proposed “sindicato” (48), reminding us, like Jesus, that his kingdom is not of this world. Like the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, Don Manuel is in metaphysical misery, because he is acutely aware of the fictionality of all things, including the institution of the Catholic Church. He is emotionally as isolated from his village as the Hebrew prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos, who were forced to speak from outside the cities. He exists in a metaphysical desert with the full knowledge of Yahweh’s purposes and man’s vanities. Thus the tragedy and martyrdom of Don Manuel: though figuratively a Yahwist prophet, he keeps silent and refuses to deliver his message of incomprehension and doubt. It is only through Lázaro (and somewhat through Angela) that he allows himself to break his silence. He must, for sanity’s sake, voice his misgivings to someone, “porque si no, me atormentaría tanto, tanto, que acabaría gritándola en medio de la plaza” (43). Don Manuel’s resistance, skepticism, or just downright disbelief in the Christian mythology structured by mortals is the single element of the narrative that is most denotative of his alliance with the burning, doubting, and decentering tradition of the Yahwists. Similar to the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus, who is commonly designated the greatest of the prophets, Don Manuel is fully aware of the vanity of the physical world. His impulses are, at base, deconstructive and subversive, but he refuses to deliver his directive in blinding clarity out of his love for the villagers. The remarks of the congregation upon seeing Don Manuel’s emotions as he gives Lázaro the Communion (¡Cómo le quiere! [41]) give an accurate description of how the priest feels toward all those of the town.

But as shown in two cases mentioned earlier, Don Manuel’s orientation toward skepticism and his impulse to subvert the mythologies occasionally surfaces: in his refusal before the judge and in his rejection of the orthodox belief that newborns who die go directly to heaven. In a more thorough study on this topic, it is argued that manipulation and deception, “el engañar bien” of the traditional textual, ecclesiastical, and societal authorities is a distinguishing characteristic of the priest’s behavior (Pennington). The priest subtly scorns the Bishop’s ability to authorize the performance of miracles; the former’s rendition of the High Mass is changed by his introducing “un santo ejercicio” of having the entire congregation recite the Creed; a man who has no blame or responsibility in the matter is pressured to marry a woman with a bastard child; the priest praises a puppeteer for going on with the show instead of helping his dying wife in her last moments; a father’s authority is usurped by the priest as the latter sends the son to go home, abrogating the father’s instruction to find one of the lost calves; he reinterprets scripture to suggest that “todos los bandoleros son buenos;” and he twists and turns a multitude of texts to suit his gently deceptive purposes: Calderón’s *La vida es sueño*, Marx’s *Das Kapital*, and the Bible itself. Although his actions demythologize to a degree the traditional Christianity of the Church,

the priest does not attack the beliefs of his parishioners. To the contrary, he frees them to believe more than Catholicism allows, by permitting the incorporation and invention of local rituals and by urging them to expand their definitions of religion, when he states “todas las religiones son verdaderas” (43).

Because of Don Manuel’s devotion to his believers, he fights, for the most part, successfully against his Yahwist tendencies and holds his decentering vision to himself. His doubts and disbelief only surface in sublimated ways and are assimilated into the local culture; as we see, for example, in his changing of procedure in the reading the High Mass and falling silent for parts of it. But he is a house divided against itself. The psychological burden of internalizing the inclinations to cry out like an Israelite prophet takes its toll. The priest finds a listener and an emotional safety valve in Lázaro, but Don Manuel’s inner struggle to repress his dissident vision saps his strength as he advances in years: “El pueblo todo observó que a Don Manuel le menguaban las fuerzas, que se fatigaba. Su voz misma, aquella voz que era un milagro, adquirió un cierto temblor íntimo. Se le asomaban las lágrimas con cualquier motivo” (49). This is not a normal description of old age, but, rather, one of silent martyrdom. The priest has become an internal paradox, a prophet called to speak out against the works of mortals and the constructedness of culture. But he refuses to fulfill his calling because of the devastating effects his word would have on his beloved listeners. As he explains to Lázaro, the truth he could speak is insufferable. “La verdad? La verdad, Lázaro, es acaso algo terrible, algo intolerable, algo mortal; la gente sencilla no podría vivir con ella” (43).

Soon the priest passes away before his congregation, and Blasillo, the village idiot, dies with him. Since Blasillo learned to echo Don Manuel’s voice in repeating, “Dios mío, Dios mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?” the former is linked metonymically to priest. He is Don Manuel before his consciousness was awakened and he began to reason and question his faith. To transplant a quote the priest used in a different context, Blasillo is like Don Manuel “cuando no empezó mi conciencia” (47). Without the mental ability of most adults, Blasillo remains very much the child who believed and continues to believe. He lives in the present, like primitive man, with no consciousness of himself, happy in his world of ignorance and very limited abilities. He is the converse of Don Manuel, who is fully conscious of his metaphysical misery, as the epigraph at the beginning of the novel adumbrates.

Blasillo’s semiotic importance as the childlike Don Manuel is confirmed in the paragraph where the former tries to draw near to the priest as he dies. Some of the faithful attempt to prevent Blasillo from doing so. The priest instructs them: “Dejadle que se me acerque. Ven, Blasillo, dame la mano” (53). The intertext of Christ’s remark, “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” is unmistakable. The principle implication of the scriptural intertext is that children are highly valued by Jesus and that they are more innocent or pure than adults. But what is most intriguing for our present discussion is to notice what is left unsaid but understood. Those words of Jesus were followed in the same scripture by, “for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Blasillo, symbolically, is the child who is going to heaven. We are left here with somewhat of an *aporia*, causing a principal construct of the work to be put under erasure. The central textual assertion has been that Don Manuel could not believe in the fundamentals of the resurrection

and died without restoring his faith. At first glance, we could presume by the incompleteness or knowing omission of the rest of the scripture (“of such is the Kingdom of Heaven”) that the passage parallels and symbolizes Don Manuel’s incomplete Christian belief that there is no heaven or afterlife awaiting mortals. But from a deconstructive perspective, it is equally as likely that listeners and readers familiar with the intertext would automatically remember the complete context about the children comprising the Kingdom of Heaven. Indeed, this was the point of Jesus allowing the little children to come forward: to stress to his listeners that those of simple hearts and unsophisticated intellects were going to be the first ones to enter heaven. If we allow for the freeplay of the latter interpretive possibility (that the textual omission reinforces the message that heaven awaits simple believers), and we recall that the priest dies holding to the hand of this child of Heaven (53), we have a scene that strongly suggests that Don Manuel’s conviction at his death is linked always and already with the primitive Blasillo’s. That is, he believes as child. To establish more solidly the nature and existence of Don Manuel’s belief as he dies, it is imperative to remember that the priest does believe his own religion, as he emphatically stated to Angela: “¡Creo!” (45). He cannot give credence to the myths of modern Christianity, but he does believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it pertains to interpersonal behavior and morality. One should not equate his inability to accept certain tenets with a complete disbelief of the creed. In his final moments on earth, Don Manuel, wrapped in the arms of Blasillo (the true believer), died “creyendo no creer lo que más nos interesa, pero sin creer creerlo, creyéndolo en una desolación activa y resignada,” as Angela perfectly describes the plurivocality of the images (57). The scene of mutual embrace between the unyielding reason of an adult Yahwist Christian and the unquestioning faith of a pre-cognizant, mythological child compels us to conclude that Don Manuel’s paradoxes, contradictions, and metaphysical agony are resolved and dissolved in his death.⁵

In conclusion, we may say that the very fundamental tension and clash between two opposing worldviews is played out in this short novel. Valverde de Lucerna, with its Hellenized Christianity and local customs, represents the mythological consciousness of a primitive, static society where all things fit into consistent and eternal perpetuity. Don Manuel portrays the self-conscious, introspective, vibrant Yahwist impulse of constant change and restlessness that is never content with the implicit presumptuousness of a culture or religion that offers all answers to everything. Valverde’s mythological position is reinforced in the imagery of the sacred mountain, the lake, the cult of the dead, the abbey ruins, the shepherdess on the mountainside, and even the silent snow that falls and stays forever on its peaks but dissolves in the lake of death. The village and its surroundings are an ageless realm that repeats and re-inscribes its cherished beliefs in ritual, prayers, and charitable actions. Don Manuel’s decentering, questioning, and vigorous vision is not revealed to his followers; he suppresses

⁵ The actions and imagery at the priest’s death may be taken as a rare metaphor for a full deconstruction of a text, which always includes a movement of reconstitution—reincorporating the whole—after the decentering and unmasking.

those tendencies in his martyrdom. Only through Lázaro's notes and Angela's "confesión" (25) are we able to piece together his internal struggle and misery. Ultimately, we see that the two divergent worlds are joined in death, co-equal, with neither in a privileged position. Don Manuel and Blasillo depart this life linked together: as the priest holds the believer's hand, the latter dies in his bosom. The scene figuratively unites the cold with the hot, skeptic with the blissfully ignorant, the Yahwist with the Hellene, self-consciousness with mythological pre-consciousness. As Bloom affirms, "Between these two poles, the Hebrew and the Hellene, arises the dynamism of our world" (43), and the novel suggests that only in death will they be reconciled. Both philosophies, both impulses, personified in Don Manuel and Blasillo, are deemed to be equal stature and value through the symbolic actions on Angela, who soon thereafter sanctifies these spiritual champions as she pronounces "mi San Manuel" and "mi San Blasillo" (58). In the end, the imagery and words describing the priest's death signal that there is no privileging of the Hebrew over the Hellene; nor is the converse implied. But an understanding of the Yahwist impulse and society's inclination to fossilize aids considerably in appreciating Unamuno's talent for weaving philosophy into literature and perceiving more fully the depth of Don Manuel's self-sacrifice.

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