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Surrealism and Nature in the Poetry of Enrique Molina

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Hipertexto

The artistic process of the European Avant-garde originated in close relation to the rise of the industrial economy and the rapid development of technology. As Walter Benjamin noted in the first version of his famous “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” (1935), the improvement of the industrial techniques of reproduction and manipulation of reality contributed to dismantling the “aura” of the work of art (its irreplaceable *Hic et Nunc*), transforming the very bases of what we understand by art.

The influence of technique represented an inescapable condition of avant-garde movements, and Surrealism is no exception. The “automatisme psychique” (Breton, OC I 328) that Surrealism puts into practice, with its application of psychoanalytical principles to the process of poetical creation, conjured up in most cases a “world of things” (Benjamin 182): a plethora of objects whose obsolescence is made apparent, along with the industrial context in which they were produced. Thus, the canon of Surrealism was composed, as Benjamin pointed out, by the “outmoded”: those “first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the first pictures, the fleeting objects, the big pianos, the dresses of five years ago” (Benjamin 181). This ephemeral sense of time that dates every commodity also defines the common urban nature of French Surrealism, with Paris at the center, as a ready-to-be-explored microcosm.

Certainly, one of the essential sources of proliferation for the surrealist image was, according to Adorno, the “commodity fetishes” (*Notes* 89) from the incipient industrial society of the end of 19th century and beginning of the 20th Century. Nevertheless, it is necessary to pinpoint other effects of the developing industrialism in the evolution of surrealism that critics have not explored as much: the formation of a sort of “myth of nature”, whose development originated from the experience of the American wilderness by French surrealist poets and artists. The critique of Western instrumental reason concentrates on nature all the fantasies of liberation from work, from planning, and from utilitarianism—characteristics, all of them, of the industrial society in which the surrealist movement was born.

Therefore, the primitive art and ways of life more akin to an idealized harmony with nature—typical of pre-industrial societies—aroused the attraction of French surrealism from the beginning and outlined a particular kind of “Rousseauian” ideal.

According to Breton, surrealists search “la vision dite primitive”, pushed by “le dessèchement des sources d’inspiration entraîné par le rationalisme et l’ utilitarisme” (*Entretiens* 248). Consequently, nature always appears in their works surrounded by a fascination about what escapes the control of reason and the order of human activity. The concept of the sacred, as used by another author who collaborated with the surrealist movement, Georges Bataille, also delves into a similar understanding of nature: “Le monde sacré n’est, en un sens, que le monde naturel subsistant dans la mesure où il n’est pas entièrement réductible à l’ordre instauré par le travail, c’est-à-dire, à l’ordre profane” (115). That kind of universe, spared from industrial production and imbued with animal forces impervious to domestication, generates the mythological creatures (half bird, half woman, for example) that inhabit the collages of Max Ernst in *La femme à mille têtes* (1929), or the lush and colorful vegetation that we can see in André Masson’s paintings.¹

Furthermore, this attraction for the wild determines the selection of particular authors as the forerunners of Surrealism in the canon of this avant-garde movement. That is the case of the French naïf painter Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), whose representations of a never experienced, imaginary tropic stirred up the admiration of the members of the Surrealist group (Breton, *Martinique* 22-23). To Rousseau, I should add the name of Isidore Ducasse, “Count of Lautréamont”. Ducasse is the only “surrealist avant la lettre” whose prestige and significance was never questioned in the whole history of the French group (Sarrion 39). His main work, *Les chants de Maldoror* (1869), one of the “sacred books” of this avant-garde movement, is an extensive display of myriad poetic representations of animal forces, carried away by a violent and transgressive attack on rationality. This dominant feature of Ducasse’s literature has motivated Gaston Bachelard’s definition of this author as a perfect illustration of what the French critic called the “complexe de la vie animale” (9).

Surrealist literature developed an ambivalent attitude towards technology and industrialism. On the one hand, it shows a fascination for the obsolescence of objects. On the other hand, it also considered, against the industrial context where it was born, the primal forces of nature as an expression of the liberating powers of the individual. This feature determined, for example, the description of the Canary Islands flora in André Breton’s *L’amour fou* (1937). In this book, the poet not only compares the rare plants of the Orotava to the oneiric world of *Alice in Wonderland*, but also imagines how the extinct Jurassic fauna that inhabited those places in a remote past is now a component of “la libido humaine” (OC II 739). It is possible to interpret the poetic urge to fuse with the Teide volcano, expressed by Breton in this work, as a declaration made in terms reminiscent of the European romanticism: “Teide admirable, prend ma vie! Tourne sous ces mains rayonnantes et fais miroiter tous mes versants. Je ne veux faire avec toi qu’un seul être de ta chair, de la chair des méduses, qu’un seul être qui soit la méduse des mers du désir” (OC II 763)².

¹ Thompson (1993) refers to many examples of the topic of nature in French surrealism, focusing mainly in the field of literature, and demonstrating how the opposition between nature and civilization, is extremely relevant for this avant-garde movement in the articulation of its general criticism towards reason.

² Aubert has analyzed the prevailing presence of the topic of nature in Breton’s writings as a “turn towards reality” (198) that took place in his works towards mid-1940s. Concerning the influence of

We only have to recall some key passages of Hölderlin's *Der Tod des Empedokles* in which the poem's main lyrical self longs to merge with the Etna in a sole unity, to ascertain how surrealism is not so distant from the Romantic adoration of the primal forces of nature as images of the sublime³. In this sense, Surrealism represents a continuation of the Romantic view of the sublime and its ingrained "technophobia". Its will to restore in the human being the sensibility ruined by reason and utilitarianism comes back to the rejection that Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, William Blake or Novalis expressed concerning the increasingly pervasive domain of science and technique (Argulol 23).

In North America the situation during the 19th century was somewhat the opposite: the North-American assimilation of European Romanticism did not share the same rejection of technology. Rather, it was the need to create a new synthesis between technique and nature that motivated what Leo Marx called 'a post-romantic, industrial version of the pastoral design' in the United States (32). Thus, the North American sense of the sublime expanded its boundaries to include a fascination for technology—the new realities that Capitalism was creating appeared in the works of Walt Whitman and R.W. Emerson as an object of reflexion and admiration.

In the case of Surrealism, we will see how its ascendancy in South American literature contributed to strengthening the European, Romantic, technophobic image of nature as a primal, uncontrolled force pitted against a rationalistic civilization that is thought to diminish the spiritual dimension of the human being. This is the case of Enrique Molina's Surrealist poetry. The leaning towards nature as a stronghold of forces, which escape the control of the rational and express a desire for liberation in the human being, is essential to understand how the surrealist imagination conceived the "New World".

Unquestionably, the journey to Latin America represented for the European surrealists a "peregrinación a las fuentes del mito y la magia latinoamericanas" (Núñez 314). For Breton, Mexico became the "lugar surrealista por excelencia" (Schneider 157). However, it was in Martinique where the author of *Nadja* elaborated, along with the painter André Masson, a poetic view of the tropics that conceived American nature as a sort of involuntary surreal artwork, judged from primarily artistic categories. In this way, the Martinican jungle appears, for both artists, as a "rêve rimbaldien de plans contrariés" (*Martinique* 20): A place where the

Romanticism in the construction of a Surrealist "sublime", Aubert also points out what separates Romanticism and Surrealism according to Breton: "Romantic writing tended to offer mere escape and fantasy and did not engage with notions of the real or the self" (198).

³ A reading of Hölderlin's essay "Foundation of Empedokles" ("Grund zum Empedokles") can shed some light on Empedokles' sacrificial act of throwing himself to the lava of Etna: unification with nature, loss of individuality in favour of a totality that has to be recomposed. As the German poet writes in the mentioned essay: "Natur und Kunst sind sich im reinen Leben nur harmonisch entgegengesetzt" ("Nature and art are, in the pure life, only harmonically opposed") (547). That this work remained unfinished after three different re-elaborations shows how the poet himself could not in the end completely resolve the paradox between harmony and opposition that entails the dichotomy nature-culture, and, consequently, could not complete the work. Nevertheless, Breton's invocation to Teide is placed in a similar context of tension between culture and nature, the individual and totality that corresponds to Hölderlin's poem.

surrealists question their fervent ban to any imitative art, for “on n’a vraiment rien à ajouter à ce site pour le parfaire” (22).

About this, critics have discussed in what ways the identification between the surreal and Latin America (brought about by a European look at the nature and cultures of the region) might have contributed to excessively simplifying, or even falsifying, the self-referential conceptions of Latin Americans themselves. Valentín Ferdinán has observed this reputedly pernicious influence, which might even have determined the failure of Surrealism as an artistic movement in Latin America. According to Ferdinán, this failure would be due to the enormous socio-economic differences between Europe and Latin America, as well as the absence of an established artistic canon against which to rebel. Ferdinán claims that the “predisposición natural entre la poética surrealista y el arte (o la realidad) latinoamericana” (77), suggested by the European surrealists, contaminated with European colonialism self-referential conceptions of Latin American culture, such as “lo real maravilloso” or the “realismo mágico”.

This argument would also explain why surrealism, according to Ferdinand, lost its subversive power in Latin American poetry and put an obstacle to the emergence of a true historical awareness capable of articulating a “utopía efectiva en sus poéticas” (100). In his view, Surrealism in Latin America would have annihilated “toda esperanza de liberación contenida en la idea de un asalto a la razón” (Ibid.). If Surrealism originated as a “poética de la mercancía”, in a society with a fully developed industrialization, it was bound to fail as a movement of artistic emancipation in societies “signadas por la escasez” (99), as is the case in Latin America.

Nevertheless, to encompass the whole cultural significance of Latin American surrealism with terms such as “failure” or “success” is highly debatable. Against Ferdinán’s claim, it seems unclear that French Surrealism can be reduced to a “circulación de objetos guiada por el azar objetivo” (99).⁴ As a reaction to

⁴ About the social influence of Latin American Surrealism, there are diverging views among the critics depending on whether they adopt a long-term perspective. In this sense, the Surrealist Chilean group *Mandrágora* is a case in point. As Nicholson notes: “It seems reasonable to surmise, along with these critics, that one of the problems facing the Mandrágora group was that of diffusion: like the pioneer group in Argentina, their publications and activities reached a limited audience and therefore their message had minimal impact. But if we distinguish between the question of immediate impact and that of longer-term effects, Mandrágora’s presence in Chile emerges as a more complex phenomenon. Though little attention may have been paid to their demonstrations or their publications in the 1930s and 1940s, the group can be credited with initiating a significant, albeit slow and subtle, shift in Chilean literary culture.” (74). Concerning the political significance of Surrealism in Latin America, many authors in the orbit of Surrealism present glaring contradictions and inconsistencies between artistic and political stances. They had a difficulty to articulate their rebellious spirit into a coherent political agenda. In this aspect, French surrealists were no different: the European group never wholly and homogeneously defined their socio-political aspirations. To complicate things further, their views underwent an evolution extremely critical of the historical developments of Marxism, which makes it difficult to see them as a coherent social project. Any complete account of the history of French surrealism (e.g. Durozoi 1997; Nadeau 1972) dedicates many pages to detail the nature of polemics, discussions, disagreements and disaffections that punctuated the relations of French surrealism with Marxism and its political representatives in France and abroad. The “materialism” of Surrealists was from the beginning far from the Marxist orthodox conceptions of historical progress, as Alquié points out: “Loin de se soumettre au système de l’histoire, l’expérience surréaliste permet-elle de juger l’histoire selon la norme de quelque éternité” (61). How to conciliate

industrialism, Surrealism also entailed a sense of the sublime in nature, mainly understood as a form of questioning the supremacy of European rationalism, with its idea of progress, reason and technique. This sort of “myth of nature” prolonged the echoes of European Romantic literature into the poetic of Surrealism. Unlike the North American sense of the sublime, which sought the harmonization of nature and technique, the surrealist influence in Latin America strengthened a clearly anti-rationalistic view that made such a harmonization impossible. As always happens with anti-rationalistic stances, its potential subversive content presents itself in all its ambiguity, allowing a regressive as much as a progressive interpretation according to the overtones in which the questioning of reason is carried out. Leaving judgements on the “progressive” or “regressive” character of Latin American Surrealism aside for the moment, I will first concentrate on studying the reception and influence of Surrealism in Latin America through the analysis of some crucial poems of one of the main Latin American Surrealist poets, Enrique Molina (1910-1997). More specifically, I will focus on the dichotomy between nature and culture, which is unequivocally one of its principal themes.

The works of Enrique Molina present, thematically, a “regression” to the earliest sources of French Surrealism –especially Lautréamont and Rimbaud. As a result, the theme of Nature (as opposed to History) becomes, in response to the image French surrealists projected over Latin America, one of the central motifs of his poetry. While it is true that this theme separates his poetry from the historico-political debates of the Argentinean arena, we should look at how the surrealist rebellion against reason shapes his poems. It is also crucial to clarify, despite the socio-economical differences between Latin America and Europe, the extent to which we can consider Molina’s works part of the same process of questioning western rational structures initiated by French Surrealism.

In general terms, critics have met with many difficulties when trying to understand how Latin American poets genuinely assimilated the aesthetic and ideological principles of Surrealism. Surrealism produced its first green shoots in Latin America as early as 1927—with the Argentinian Aldo Pellegrini’s group, which started the publication of the Surrealist poetry magazine *Qué* in Buenos Aires that year. From that date onwards, the connection to Surrealism of Latin American poets has always been surrounded by terminological and taxonomical disputes. Stefan Baciú, the author of the famous *Antología surrealista latinoamericana*, distinguishes between “surrealistas”, “surrealizantes” and “parasurrealistas”, striving to demarcate, with unfair results, the contribution of Surrealism from the influence of other European avant-garde movements, such as Huidobro’s “creacionismo” (592).

In Molina’s case, apart from some formal characteristics of his poetry —“automatic writing”, conception of the poetic image, for example—the author interpreted Surrealism as a “concepción total del hombre” (*Obra completa* 34), an “ética”, a “sentido de la libertad, de la poesía y el amor que se puede expresar a través de cualquier lenguaje” (Sefamí 146). Molina understood the values of surrealism to his poetic writing as a fight against “siglos de cultura racionalista.”

that viewpoint out of the reach of historical time with the Marxist dialectics of time is certainly a major difficulty that can explain, along with other divergences, the problematic relation between Surrealism and Marxism.

Thus, surrealism represents a “ruptura de los estrechos límites que encierran a los seres y les impiden una fraternidad profunda entre sí y el universo”, as he wrote in the article “Vía Libre”, published in 1952 in the first issue of the Surrealist magazine *A partir de cero* (Sola 241).

Certainly, Molina did not give to his surrealist ethics a clear political articulation. Nevertheless, his poetry does contain a strong implicit criticism against the excesses of reason. In this sense, it is necessary to point out that such an intense criticism does not come exclusively from the influence of French surrealism. More directly, Molina adopted the theme of the opposition between nature and history, pre-eminently influenced by Pablo Neruda’s *Residencia en la tierra* (1925-1932). This crucial work, widely read by Molina’s generation in Argentina, was strongly indebted to “los más directos progenitores de los surrealistas”, to put it in Jaime Alazraki’s terms (33). Molina took from *Residencia* one of its core elements: the expansion of a poetic subject that goes beyond biographical aspects to delve into the material depth of nature and its dynamic forces. As Jaime Concha has indicated in his excellent study on Neruda’s book: “la mirada del poeta no es nunca subjetiva, y su yo no permanece clausurado en una pseudo-interioridad hermética, antes bien, su intimidad está poblada por las fuerzas de la naturaleza, y es su comunión con ellas lo que da a su canto el valor de fulgurante revelación que posee” (41).

An analysis of Molina’s first book enables one to confirm how the Argentinian author introduced an “expanded subjectivity” akin to *Residencia*, although its poetic voice is still mixed with more conventional, biographical elements in tune with the literary landscape of the so-called Argentinian Generation of 1940.⁵ Molina concentrated on what Concha calls “la metafísica materialista de Neruda” (63), his descent to the obscure depth of matter, in which the degradation and germination of life, birth and death, are meticulously explored. For example, in the opening poem of *Residencia*, entitled “Galope muerto”, we can read: “y el perfume de las ciruelas que rodando a tierra / se pudren en el tiempo, infinitamente verdes” (Neruda 257). The poet’s will to intimately relate both complementary forces –creation and destruction– is clear in its apparent paradoxical force.

⁵ The “Generación del 40” in Argentina was mainly considered as a “reacción contra el hermetismo de la vanguardia precedente” (Giordano 789).

The poetic subject, in contact with the transformational forces of organic matter, aims to represent the primal telluric energy of nature. The revealing power of vegetable matter is also central to Molina's first book *Las cosas y el delirio* (1941). If we take as an example the opening poem, "Mientras corren los grandes días", we find a desire, analogous to Neruda's, to explore the mystery of Nature's vital forces:

Arde en las cosas un terror antiguo, un profundo y secreto
soplo,
un ácido orgulloso y sombrío que llena las piedras de
grandes agujeros,
y torna crueles las húmedas manzanas, los árboles que el sol
consagró [...]. (1987: 13)

Raw and manufactured matter—the "húmedas manzanas" and the "frutas de yeso" mentioned further on—show a secret power the poet struggles to name. "Terror antiguo", "secreto soplo", "ácido orgulloso" are syntagms that allude to that compelling energy, which takes over things and provokes in the poetic subject exposed to it a form of delirium. These verses concentrate one of the encompassing themes of Molina's poetry, namely, the experience of a threatening or terrifying beauty acting as an aggression. This "force" is the one that "torna crueles las húmedas manzanas" in the poem mentioned above, and implies the conception of the presence of things as something that coerces or subjugates the will. As in *Residencia*, the subject focuses on exploring matter, deciphering its sense, all the time imprisoned by its fascinating presence. Reality becomes an enigma that only allows a glimpse of its laws of perpetual, creative-destructive motion:

Y así, a través de los rostros apacibles, del invariable giro
Del Verano,
A través de los muebles inmóviles y mansos, de las canciones
De alegre esplendor,
Todo habla al absorto e indefenso testigo, a las postreras
Sombras trepadoras,
De su incierta partida, de las manos transformándose en la
Gramilla estival. (1987: 14)

In Molina's poetry, reality originates as a continuous emergence of primal forces that both attract and "elude" the poetic subject, which holds to a violent desire to experience the deepest secrets of matter, from the tiniest to the most immense. This characteristic is certainly the orientation that surrealism takes in Molina's poetry. Going deeper into the expression of the elemental forces of nature becomes the unattainable, ultimate goal of the poetic experience. Against an idealized conception of nature as a quiet, peaceful retreat, Molina's representation also explores its terrifying, threatening side. His critique of the excesses of reason casts an image of nature as a domain of primal, violent forces, hostile to human will. Thus, Molina's books published from the 50s onwards, such as *Costumbres errantes o la redondez de la tierra* (1951) and *Amantes antípodas* (1961) illustrate a problematic path from civilization to nature. This is the case, for example, in "No, Robinson", from *Amantes antípodas*. In this text, Daniel Defoe's character is understood to be symbolic of the poet: someone who rejects the civilized world in order to restore the bond with nature, and makes of his solitude a form of coming back to grips with himself and with the world. The poem is addressed to Robinson himself and admonishes him to

remain apart from the civilized world, and to continue living in his “isla rechinante”, among “helechos descomunales”:

No cedas ahora viejo perro
No regreses con tu manzana hirviendo arrastrando tus
Plumas de oscuro pájaro evadido
Y ese olor a raíces y setas en la luz del cuchillo
Confabulado con los secretos de la luna
Tu calabaza de anfitrión abandonada a la saliva marina tus
Visiones
Tu hosco esplendor entre las valvas ciclónicas. (1987: 175)

Robinson accepts the extreme conditions of his uprooting, transforming it into an existential stance, insofar as his exaltation of nature denies all sorts of metaphysical domains:

Más abandonado que un dios
Más salvaje que un niño
Más resistente que las montañas contra ese cielo que te
Disputa tus alimentos legendarios
¡ah Robinson sin auxilio sin terror ni remordimiento! [...] tocado hasta la médula por la gracia del abismo
¡vociferando contra tu padre inexistente entre los mástiles carcomidos por la resaca! (1987: 176)

The recurring portrayal of an individual that chooses a natural domain against a civilized one constitutes a major motif of Molina’s poetic imagination. The poem “Vagabonds” of Rimbaud’s *Les illuminations* alludes to an “engagement” to make mankind return to its “état primitif du fils du soleil” (135). Molina uses the same formula to define his main poetic stance: “la esencia de la poesía no puede ser otra que la de un incorformismo esencial, un permanente gesto de desafío a la condición humana (...) capaz de alimentar el deseo de devolverle al hombre todos sus poderes, de revelarle su perdida condición de hijo del sol” (Ortega 533). The “original man” is for Molina a naked being that rejects the conventions of civilization and willingly embraces a peculiar sort of “animality” represented in different ways in many of his poems, as we will see. For example, in the poem “Alta marea” Molina configures a poetic subject that lives “con la tensión mortal de la bestia que acecha en el sol de su instinto” (1987: 225).

This poetic, which is based both on an unrestrained identification with nature and a rejection of civilization, carries an unresolved contradiction, insofar as the search for fusion with nature is necessarily expressed by language, that is, through culturally established meanings. As Adorno pointed out, the search for a pure natural beauty is a form of “myth transposed into the imagination” (87). The tendency of Molina towards primitivism is not totally free from a romantic nostalgia from nature. According to the German philosopher, this nostalgia originated in the beginning of Modernity as a reaction against the overwhelming power of technique and the unstoppable force of progress: “so long as the progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth, it will be impossible—in spite of all proof to the contrary—completely to counter the perception that what antedates the trend is in its backwardness better and more humane” (84).

Therefore, it is possible to claim that Molina's attraction towards wild, violent nature is not a naive form of ahistoricism, but an ethical response against to an interpretation of history only considered through the looking glass of technical progress. Hence the inescapable contradiction I pointed out before, given that, as Adorno claimed, "the anamnesis of freedom in natural beauty deceives because it seeks freedom in the old unfreedom" (87). Indeed, nature itself would represent this un-freedom, since fusing to it ultimately entails the dissolution of conscience. In other words: nature, as a force of attraction towards the origin, paradoxically destroys the conscience that it is supposed to liberate. This ambiguity, distinctive in all mythical realities, is at the core of Molina's poetry.

Molina's poetry delves into the problematic dialectic that opposes culture and nature, progress and primitivism. Its representation of manufactured objects is in tune with the aesthetic principles of the surrealist object, as defined in programmatic texts such as André Breton's "Situation surréaliste de l'objet". Insofar as surrealism's fondness of objects was apparent from the beginning of the French avant-garde group, the reflection on the object from a poetic or sculptural point of view constitutes an important part of its theoretical interests. Following the theorizations of the French surrealists, the surrealist object emerges from a subversion of its "value in use" for the sake of its capacity to embody, as Salvador Dalí claimed, "phantasmes et représentations susceptibles d'être provoqués par la réalisation d'actes inconscients" (Breton, OC II 494). Molina's poetry focuses on following the "return trip" of the object, from its manufactured state to an impossible natural condition. As a result of this singular regression to the origin, the object undergoes a process of "animalization", concentrating in it an expression of a libidinal urge that destroys its value in use. In the poem "Una silla natural", in *Amantes antípodas*, we can find a good example of this process as a result of which the functional object escapes its utilitarian condition:

[...] Se hincha furiosamente como un artefacto delirante
en la carpintería del caos
donde no son más terribles las abluciones de las estrellas y
el llanto de los muertos
que este objeto implacable y ritual apostado en mi destino:
una silla
la ciega esfinge de cocina contra cuyas membranas inmensas
atruenan los astros. (1987: 197)

Molina's object delirium attributes animal features ("membranas") to a kitchen chair, an artefact transfigured by images that combine the cosmic and the chaotic. This hybrid of manufactured and natural elements also appears in other poems of the Argentinian author, such as "Calzado humano". This text illustrates another process of the "animalization" of a manufactured object particularly interesting. So much so as it coincides, in its concept, with the famous painting "Le modèle rouge" (1935) by the Belgian artist, René Magritte, who collaborated for some years with the leading group of French Surrealism (Sarrion 274). Magritte's painting represents a very particular kind of footwear, half-leather boots, half-human feet: hybrid objects that escape their manufactured state to release an irrepressible will of primal contact with the earth.

Molina's text delves into images analogous to Magritte's painting. "Calzado humano" is a celebration of shoes expressing a primal desire for union with the earth, in which they take on living characteristics, and show "labios de cuero", "bocas curtidas" that travel around the planet as "caparazones errantes" (1987: 294). In tune with the "animalizing" tendency of Molina's poetic images, the object's metamorphosis into a living entity adopts a different aesthetic solution compared to the painting by Magritte mentioned above. In "Calzado humano", the shoes finally assume the aggressive will of molinian images: "¡Dementes zapatos míos mocasines hambrientos de garras de pantera!" (1987: 294). As it happens in the case of other poetic images in Molina's texts, primal forces modify the form of things and instil in them a violent, animal compulsion. The analogy with Magritte reveals a similar tendency in the surrealist imagination towards this kind of dialectic reality in which the domain of the rational opposes the instinctive urges displayed in the poetic images.

This process of animalization of the object as expression of a latent wild energy finds a clear literary antecedent in *Les chants de Maldoror*, a precursor of French surrealism. This book of Isidore Ducasse reveals what Gaston Bachelard has called "une véritable phénoménologie de l'agression" (9), in which images of animal violence primarily encapsulate primitive impulses. Bachelard studies the manifold proliferation of references to animal organs related to aggression—claws, fangs, suckers, stings...—and the actions carried out with them as a special kind of poetic "primitivisme" (53), whereby Lautréamont expressed his rejection of the oppressive boundaries of the society of his time.

In affinity with this "animalizing" tendency, Nature appears in Molina's poetry as an uncontrollable, violent force that, in some cases, turns against the poetic subject itself. There are many examples of this throughout his poems. For instance, in "El amor a lo lejos", the poetic subject find itself "suplicando el lazo del estrangulador / lanzado por estrellas salvajes sobre la llanura de un cuerpo" (1987: 131). In "Hermano vagabundo muerto", it is strangled by "los tentáculos del sol" (1987: 182), receiving "un desgarrador latigazo desde la luna" (1987: 183). In "Ninguna esperanza", we can read "Quizás te amenazan las flores / quizás tu enemigo es el viento"(1987: 253). All forms of natural beauty appear to be conflictive, uncontrollable, and aggressive.

Such a "poetry of aggression" –to use Bachelard's expression about Lautréamont– determines the representation of the natural environment, and constitutes a problematic way of recomposing the "fraternidad profunda entre sí y el universo" (1984: 34) that the Argentinian poet searched for in the Surrealist approach to poetry. Molina interpreted that approach as an opposing argument against the intense eagerness of rationalism to control nature. Descartes, in one of the most historically significant proclamations of rationalism, the *Discours de la méthode* (1637) considered one of the fundamental goals of reason "nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature" (61). In contrast, Molina's poetic discourse is mainly presented as an endless producer of fascination for the irreducibility of the primal forces of nature, adding to the early influence of Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra* the subsequent contributions of the poetic of Surrealism.

Another form assumed by the opposition of nature and culture in Molina's imagination, similar to the one described above, is related to an outburst of nature in the middle of the "world of things" of the civilized order. Molina adopts this contrast as one of the primary stimuli for his poetic images. Natural forces threaten all built spaces (especially the bedroom in a house or a hotel), and all the objects represented inside. The house is invaded by ants ("Hay una casa en ruinas invadida por las hormigas", 1987: 135); there are pianos full of "plantas oceánicas" (1987: 137); the floor becomes "un montón de hojas rojas" (1987: 138); there are rooms "donde brota la lluvia" (1987: 148), or "invadidas por helechos gigantes" (1987: 162); there are "malezas de camarote atascado en la selva" (1987: 196); the lover's loft is placed "en las raíces de la selva virgen" (1987: 198). Other times, the house is dismantled and opened to the elements "el piso se ha resquebrajado / pasan tan altos esos regueros de flores y nubes" (1987: 308). The opacity of walls blocks the view of the open space. Therefore, the poet imagines transparent enclosed spaces: a room appears as a "cámara de cristal" (1987: 131), a "caverna de cristal" (1987: 142), or a "castillo transparente" (1987: 135). Both the process of the animalization of the object and the outburst of the natural in the middle of a civilized domain, force a focus on the same opposition between nature and culture that not only subverts the order of things but also brings about their regression to an earlier and chaotic state.

Concerning the comparison between Latin American Surrealism and its European origins, it is clear that there is no significant rupture in Molina's case, but a deepening of a central line of inquiry in European Surrealism. French surrealism conceives nature as a domain that "escapes rational and linguistic control" (Thompson, ii), a sphere irreducible to the total control of the human being. Molina, in turn, displays a poetic of nature that entails a tacit critique of the dominant instrumental reason. Unlike the North American sublime, his conception of nature, in tune with European surrealism, adopts a stance opposed to the harmonious coexistence of nature and technique. We have shown how Molina's poetry, in its search for the primitive and its object delirium, drifts from culture to nature on different thematic levels. This tendency highlights the paradoxical situation of what we referred to as "myth of nature": the point where the freeing of conscience and its destruction approach each other to the limit.

This combination of violence and exaltation, fear and fascination, in Molina's view of Nature not only represents a continuity with the French surrealist sense of the sublime. It is also an exploration of the literary roots of this avant-garde movement: Lautrémont's "poetry of aggression" appears as a significant echo in the analysis of Molina's approach to the uncontrollable, violent side of nature.

The terrifying effects of primal forces constitute a concept of the sublime that excludes any predominance of technique. What Molina's poetry rather shows is the dereliction and abandonment of civilization in favour of a mythical fascination with nature. In his theoretical writings, the Argentine poet aspires to a complete harmony of the individual with its natural environment. However, his poetry illustrates a constant confrontation with the primal violence of nature.

In conclusion, the natural sublime of Molina's poetry is driven by a profound, critical rejection of the prevailing western rationalism, and, consequently, still

nurtured by the romantic roots of European surrealism. In this sense, it is meaningful to recall the socio-economic differences of South America with both Europe and North America during the second half of the 20th century. According to the article by Ferdinán mentioned above, these differences made of Latin America a “terreno poco fértil para el experimento surrealista” (89). However, it might rather be the opposite: that Latin America was indeed a fertile terrain for the adoption and development of this “myth of nature”, which is embedded so deeply in the romantic roots of European surrealism. In contrast, Ferdinán neglects this aspect of French surrealism by conceiving it only from the more direct and apparent impact of commodity production and industrialism.

A reading of Molina’s poetry from the nature-culture opposition confronts us with a dilemma: regressive rejection of progress from an underdeveloped economic zone of the world, or rebelliousness and criticism against a projected complete control of technique over nature? Both elements might coexist, although we believe that in Molina’s myth of nature the second view predominates.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer published their work *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1947) at the moment of the expansion of surrealism in Latin America (the late 1940s). They denounced in this work the conversion of western rationalism into an ideology: driven by “the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature”, rationalism tends to become “all-encompassing” (23) for “the control of internal and external nature has been made the absolute purpose of life” (24). Considered from an eco-critical perspective, Enrique Molina’s poetry appears as tenaciously opposed to an all-encompassing reason. His poems give expression to that fear of nature that, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, remains embedded in the rationalistic project. Their sense of the sublime constitutes an attempt to preserve the “unknown” from the ultimate influence of rationalism. Along with other important categories of Latin American literature, such as the “realismo mágico”, Molina’s poetry focuses on the mystery of the uncontrollable, the rebellious primal forces, and their ultimate resilience to total clarification or instrumentalism.

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