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**TITLE:** Desiring a (Sur)real Body: The Feminine and Nature Beyond the Nation in Argentine Surrealist Poetry

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**ABSTRACT:** The goal of this article will be to trace a destabilization of the literary cartography that set the stage for the Argentine state's national language—one realized in surrealist poetry's appropriation of the figures and images of the earth, woman, and the unobtainable. To this end, I will center certain fragmentary tendencies in the works of four surrealist poets: Juan José Ceselli, Juan Antonio Vasco, Francisco Madariaga and Enrique Molina. I will outline the slippages and breaks in their poetic language, which open space for an understanding of the impossible grounds of Argentina's patriarchal national language, as it is articulated in literature from as early as Sarmiento.

**KEYWORDS:** Surrealism, Poetry, Argentina, Deconstruction, Feminism, Nature

**RESUMEN:** El fin de este artículo será trazar una desestabilización de los términos de la cartografía literaria que daba (y da) escena al lenguaje del estado-nación argentino—una desestabilización realizada a través de una apropiación de las figuras e imágenes de la tierra, la mujer y lo inalcanzable dentro de la poesía surrealista argentina. Para lograr esta meta, indagaré en los trabajos de cuatro poetas argentinos: Juan José Ceselli, Juan Antonio Vasco, Francisco Madariaga y Enrique Molina. Destacaré los deslizamientos y quiebres en su lenguaje poético para fundar un entendimiento de la base imposible del lenguaje patriarcal nacional de Argentina, tal como se ha articulado en la literatura desde Sarmiento.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** surrealismo, poesía, Argentina, deconstrucción, feminismo, naturaleza

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Conor Craig Harris received his doctorate in Hispanic Studies from the University of California, Riverside. His research focuses on poetry, video and militancy in Argentina, Chile and among the Mapuche, as ways of thinking alternative relational modalities in the neoliberal moment. His interests also extend to urban spatial practices, graffiti, idleness and the affective charge of the martyr.

# Desiring a (Sur)real Body: The Feminine and Nature Beyond the Nation in Argentine Surrealist Poetry

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This article will trace a destabilization of the literary cartography that set the stage for the Argentine state's national language—one realized in surrealist poetry's appropriation of the figures and images of the earth, woman, and the unobtainable. To this end, in the works of four poets—Juan José Cesselli, Juan Antonio Vasco, Francisco Madariaga and Enrique Molina—I will highlight the ruins, remains, hints and signs of a reading that would expose a tendency and an imaginary before which the presuppositions of a determinate nation-state's literature would tremble. Although the poets, all men, fail to escape the patriarchal limits of the moment's literature—itsself a phallogocentric construction serving only to engender new forms of subjectivation—their poetry presents us, perhaps unwittingly, with a different vision of nature and the feminine than that of dominant national tendencies. By not attempting to ground a totalizing understanding of the feminine, nature, and the terms of the unstable signifying chain binding the two concepts in the group's work, these poets undermine the base required for the inscription of a national language. These concepts presuppose passivity when used to establish the patriarchal's intrinsic hierarchy so, insofar as they become confused and unstable in the group's works, those same works will never be completely incorporable to a nationalist literary project. They force recognition of the national *nomos* as incomplete and unstable, given

that it is erected on and through an imaginary that violently assumes the femininity of certain bodies and the land, associating two concepts that both supersede and encompass the discursive limit at which this poetry situates itself, in ruins.

To approach the issue from another angle, one perhaps more generative—maintaining all the weight of that perhaps—I will recall a reflection by the Argentine philosopher León Rozitchner. Exploring similar themes in his posthumously published *Materialismo ensoñado*, he avers that “la palabra poética habla prolongando en nosotros la lengua maternal: convierte en lengua viva una lengua que fue dada por muerta” (22). So, in keeping with the spirit of that poetic prolongation, this work will attempt to exceed a mere close reading, for all that that will be essential to my study, because any particular reading will only ever trap the same repressed forces that I propose to trace. This article will be based on a both fragmentary and inadequate selection of certain aspects of these works by necessity of demonstrating the need to constantly affirm any given language's inability to refer something completely alien to it. I do not propose that these themes are the dominant ones in the group—rather, because they underlie their poetry, bringing them to the surface reveals the group's limits, as well as those of all national literatures. However, by way of an introduction, we must realize that there is no approach to surrealism, wherever it may

be, that can presume for it an isolated origin. So, I will begin in another place, at another moment, to later arrive at Argentina.

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Surrealism in France began to regroup in the wake of the second world war and, in 1947, Georges Bataille set about re-introducing it to the world with an exposition of surrealist works. But the prior years' brutal violence broke through to affect the members of a movement that had conceived of itself as beyond the capricious inauthenticity of the world, a group bound up in its own dreams. Placing surrealism into dialogue with the world it pretended to abandon, an always impossible abandonment, Bataille asserts that despite any coming changes, the world

cannot be entirely freed from the 'utilitarian, rational, aesthetic or moral imperatives' from which the surrealist act necessarily frees itself. Such an act can be performed only if it is accepted as a sacred act (in the *profanatory* sense of the word): *against the unacceptable world of rational utility.* (69-70)

Setting itself beside the world was never enough; following Bataille, surrealism needed to recognize the potential inherent to a combative relationship with the various orders belonging to the world, to be free. That is, the potential of opposition to the concept of Order itself. It was time for the movement to (re)enter the flow of history—a flow that had violently erupted in the lives of the world, belying and undermining the presumed moral base of the concept “Europe.” Thus, having witnessed a crisis of the Law that destabilized the Law's foundation, surrealism was set to take up anew the question of Law's inherent violence, manifest in its foundational archivization of national linguistic and social norms within geographically delimited spaces. But, in doing so, it also had to confront the fact that the violence of the

nation's language was also a violence inherent to literature—that is, it had to confront its own violence.

We should ask—why do I situate the Argentine surrealist group, the first outside of France, so obliquely? Initially because the poets whose works I examine here were writing in the wake of this very crisis. But also, because they were supremely aware of the crisis as it emerged in France and thus influenced their own works. Although never without reservations nor qualifications, this is due to Latin American artists not being able to entirely subtract themselves from their history's colonial dialectic and its intellectual and cultural aftermath. A truth that persists even as their art's situation vis à vis Europe demonstrates a mimesis exceeding the terms of any symbolic-mimetic relationship that might obtain, with an eye toward founding a national being in that excess. I note this here to underline the traces of a shared responsibility hidden beyond the word “surrealism” that the Argentines borrow from the French, despite being more than just their European influences, and how that responsibility bears on their work's conflictive relation to the Argentine nation. The question of this difficult relation, that of literature's role in articulating a distinct (national) being, is crucial to the stakes of my investigation and, as emerges in criticism and the writings of these poets, is key for any approach to questions of Latin American nation-hood and of Latin American *being*. Jean Franco highlights that Latin Americans have tended to see art “as an expression of the artist's whole self: a self which is living in a society and which therefore has a collective as well as an individual concern”—and cannot, thereby, be isolated nor asocial (11). This echoes Aldo Pellegrini, founder of the Argentine group—who, by way of self-justification, notes in the first edition of the magazine *Qué* that

toda palabra está en el corazón mismo de los problemas del ser. Es decir, que para un hombre determinado, su

misterio toma la forma de sus palabras (en un sentido más amplio: toma la forma de sus signos). (19)

One can bring those two assertions together thus: as soon as *being* becomes generalizable and thus generalized in a word, here “Argentine,” it has already long been separated from the human body in order to (re)impose itself on that very body, in a double gesture that constructs both the nation and the national subject. The state’s word is imposed upon the citizen. Or, more accurately, it is always retroactively written on the body that comes to be “citizen,” rendering the presumptively passive body either masculine or feminine and (re)affirming it as the space of the nation-state’s law. A law that must always mark its subjects as it is erected, establishing borders and terms for the traditions of the subjects it individualizes, and who embody the nation as they are incorporated to it. Moreover, this process does not exclude the fatherland’s literal and figurative “body”—nature and the land—subjected to the Argentine national imaginary’s civilizing impulses since the foundational tension between civilization and barbarism. A foundational tension that is the very denigration/denial of the land and nature upon which the national vision is inscribed, and which is “naturalized” in being named.

For Argentina, as for any other colonized country,

naturaleza culturizada y cultura natural son los polos sobre los que se asienta un problema cultural y político: la gobernabilidad de América Latina, la constitución de los estados. (Montaldo 107)

Here, Graciela Montaldo puts in stark relief the problematic borne by Argentine literature and culture and locates its beginning in Sarmiento. His work unleashed the process of fabricating a national writing that was a constant vacillation between various perspectives intending, every one, to subordinate nature

to the Law. Sarmiento, in this telling, begins the tradition that encompasses the surrealists; with Sarmiento begins the literary task that will demand constant responses from coming Argentine *literati* (and in a work that opens with a French phrase, no less). As the process of naming territories and establishing a hierarchical relation between state and territory begins, a *literary duty* is proposed, a call to which all subsequent Argentine writers respond in one way or another. Although this debt may never be contained in a mere duty, and the responses will be unique to the authors who respond to this call, and always incomplete.

This focus on taming the space of the territory, the land and nature, will form a constant part of Argentine literature, at times explicitly and at others implicitly. As Montaldo asserts,

para Sarmiento hay que retrazar el mapa, apropiarse de ese cuerpo, asentarlo y fijarlo a través de la navegación de los ríos, las costumbres de la polis, establecer sobre el espacio la tela de araña de las comunicaciones. (114)

A nation will always appropriate its “savage body” to found itself—a “body” which, of course, neither belongs to nor has anything to do with the nation, and will be *made* savage, “saved” as much as “animalized,” only by dictating the national. And for Sarmiento,

la manera de apropiarse de ese cuerpo, puramente bárbaro, es a través del mundo de la estética, es decir, de la “mentira.” La naturaleza contiene la *diferencia* radical y absoluta con la identidad de la barbarie social. (Montaldo 117)

“Argentine” aesthetics, from their beginning, have been forged in a constant relation with the state and its laws—this, in fact, is the only way to articulate this aggregation of power’s pre-tensions. Montaldo says it well when she underlines this process as one half of a dual

directionality inherent to this imposed reflection on the country's space—

la primera dirección focaliza el problema de escribir la patria y el Estado—el momento de constitución del Estado—[...] en un espacio que también es real y relativamente desconocido, resistente a la ley, que la escritura debe cartografiar para ubicar y organizar la acción política. (104)

By assuming this task, Argentine literature has vacillated between, on the one hand, discarding nature completely in favor of the urban and, on the other, total condemnation of urban “civilization’s” superficiality, without at any point ceasing to subordinate the natural to human efforts. Nevertheless, the appearance of surrealism signaled a deviation from the two routes characterizing Argentine literary production up until that point—*Sur* versus *Boedo*, European aesthetics versus social engagement and popular aesthetics. A duality in which neither group sufficiently interrogated the *place* of its own writing, the place *proper* to it, which directly and indirectly determined its terms. This is not to say that the surrealists rejected the fundamental gestures of the literary—how could they hope to achieve this, located as they were in Latin American urban centers?—but rather that they expropriated the tools and visions predominant in nationalist literature and allowed them to become confused in their poetry. This poetry sinks into the endless signifying of the finite literary system—the poets do not escape, but nor do they give in to the forceful expectations and presumptions of their *milieu*. Upon reading their works, they resound as a writing of the impossibility of phallogocentric national literature containing the natural within a *single sign*—neither woman, nor nation, nor state, nor the parts of nature that serve as synecdoche for all of nature. Nature cannot be contained even in the signifier “nature,” hinging as it does on and in the law. And languishing behind this poetic signifying chain is the very idea of the

Feminine in its conjunction with Nature. This juncture is that onto which the state’s law attempts to write itself; and, the object of this poetry’s desire. This poetry is launched at the Feminine-Nature conceptual juncture, searching for something other beneath the nation, at the limits of its law and alongside the natural. While it never escapes the aforementioned presumptions, for being, in the end, poetry, there is within or behind it an excess that upends the presumptions of both natural and feminine servility predominant, then as now, in a nationalist poetry seeking to perch on “nature’s body” to proclaim itself masculine. Argentine surrealism intended, albeit briefly and frustratedly, to situate itself as close as possible to the insurmountable and uncontainable natural. In that attempt, this poetry signaled that limit from which a new system of (anti)national signs might begin. As such, I intend to trace here the interruptions of the predominant vision of the natural/feminine/poetry glimpsed in the works of four members of the group. In this way, we can see where and how to follow this path; where and how this illusory, impossible figure comes, ever so slightly, into view.

## Juan José Ceselli’s Ritual

Although by no means the best known of the group’s works, Juan José Ceselli’s 1966 *El paraíso desenterrado* offers us an introduction to the themes that will come to dominate my work, scattered throughout the works of these poets. As he said in a rare interview, the book is an attempt at “recuperación del bien perdido por medio del conocimiento y del amor” (“Reportaje...”). Although I will differ from a straightforward reading of the book’s arcane and esoteric themes, this sense of loss, recuperation and celebration of the human (without primitivist reductivism) will be important below. These reflections are something of a poetico-theoretical excursus, as well as an introduction to the broader impetus of my work. Just as this book presents



nada hay más allá de ti y de mí  
 nosotros seremos a la vez el Infierno  
   [y la Gloria  
 nosotros seremos la Eternidad (13-14)

It seeks mystical demystification, as paradoxical as it sounds—a differential unity between heaven and hell, the idea of eternity beyond the present of the two and of writing, re-presented on poetry’s page alone. Something far off but interminable, absent but pursued—from the beginning we perceive surrealist automaticity in the distance, and must (again) grasp and bury it, for it to be Bataille’s immanent critique of the transcendent order of the world and not merely an attempt at escape.

This (feminized) you as interlocutor, desired femininity, eternity’s moment; she is all of this without being exhausted in any one term. The titular poem ends with a brusque image, blending nature and the feminine—“tus senos pesan en mis manos / como un fruto en la rama” (14). Nature as a term, as category, does not escape the poetry, of course, given its (de)establishment through the nation-state’s language and culture. This writing wants to contain everything while it also recognizes that impossibility. Beginning in this poem, there is a slippage in terms that determines and highlights the impossibility that we extract any *single* meaning from this book. Moreover, as writing, the book reaffirms a duty to problematize instantiating hierarchies and divisions. A duty to presume neither the validity nor consistency of terms arising from the subjugation of what would be called nature; to erase the slippery distinctions that the Sarmiento-esque artistic-national discourse establishes between things. These destabilizing lexical slippages seep through the book, such that distinctions fold one over the other and the terms and figures, imposed to from them erect a patriarchal nationality, become confused—although Ceselli achieves this from within those same terms and figures.

All of this becomes clear in continuation, in numbered fragments laying out the

terms that come to form the ritual thematic. The first term that appears to be problematized is “the body,” in the increasing indeterminacy between the (feminine) other’s body and nature: “su cuerpo es una fiesta de manantiales / su sexo un mordisco de hierba fresca” (15). The you is distant—the voice has switched to the third person and now reflects *on* her instead of discoursing *with and before* her. This lends a more reflexive and memorial tone, much as it signals the vacillation of this “you” between interlocutor and object of desire, future present and past, that will mark the rest of the book. While the poems reflect on what she may be, she is depersonalized and the earlier, intimate tone is undermined in this hesitant transition. Thus, the relation between speaker and interlocutor becomes confused, as she/you becomes more object than interlocutor. But the prior intimacy, the distant sensuality behind the present of writing, is not totally effaced. Established here is the growing indistinction between nature and the lover that will reign throughout this book-ritual: distance’s intimacy bound to the present’s force, confusion between subject/object, active/passive. Within this so-called “nature” one also finds the female body that makes poetry possible, without being present for it—in the territory where the poetic I affirms “hurgo sus mitos con mis armas más salvajes / sables que matan según las mareas / soles que se apagan después de haber amado” (15). Poetry is situated alongside the feminine, close enough to touch it, or harm it, on the page where it is written. However, instead of harming *her*, it brings violence against *myths and presumptions*, always imposed in and with a *name*. Not against nature (nor the feminine) as such, if those even exist in themselves, but everything that covers her upon uncovering her, so that together “desgarrados por una libertad terrible / vamos a vivir a un país donde siempre es de día” (15).

But poetry will only ever be *beside* what is here called feminine, never hitting the mark, only the page that rises as the pen is lowered to write. By (tres)passing along the

page, poetry's word games remain a step removed from whatever might be the full presence of nature, the feminine, the body, behind its words. Yet, another of the fragments says that "su presencia convulsiona la naturaleza," being a part apart from it (16). Chiasmatic ambiguity in the fragment allows this presence, already described as made only of parts (taken) from nature, to both shake and be shaken by nature. This writing and the presence that is its object will always only be impositions, but ones composed from the very material upon which they are imposed—"nature" never obtains what it describes but nor does it prevent glimpses of that that it struggles to subject. The word nature (and its signifying chain woman/other/presence/lover) is unveiled in these fragments as both polysemic interlocutor and object of this book-ritual.

And from the re-revelation of the desired object, love's words ascend vertiginously, delirious with immediacy veiled by the present and past wings of this secret (of) desire. He, it's always and only ever a he that speaks these things, pronounces of the two figures (speaker and desired), "acostados sobre el delirio / nosotros justificamos a Dios" (17). He suggests here the end of the great myth, the axle of all hierarchies and every structure that presumes to tear us from immediacy and cast us out into time. This poetry, then, further assumes what Bataille identifies as surrealism's primordial condition—the absence of myth converted into a myth of absence. By assuming it, it intends to generate new terms *from* a world dreamed of within whatever we are offered by the nation-state, *for* the world *sin qua non*, the world before law. That is, as the poem affirms, "no es verdad que nos han expulsado del Paraíso / muy lejos pasa un tren con ruido al campo" (18). This Paradise was never far from us, neither as readers nor from the book's two, but was rather veiled in its inexhaustible plenitude by poetry, literature, all writing's inadequate terms—in brief, the words of the state's culture and law. This poetry does not, however,

pretend some return to the primitive, nor does it pose itself as alone capable of complete self-destruction and (re)entry to the natural before *logos*. No—it's hidden amidst all of man's artifices, all the constructs forming humanity's creative will, re-appropriated for something more expansive than its context, Argentina's national territory. Ceselli seeks to unearth paradise with the collapse of hierarchies that subjugate reality by separating the "human" from the "natural." With every line, the text intends to undermine these presumptions' primacy and highlight the alterity of a *present* way: an extant paradise, immanent to human reality, wrought of both human and natural in as much as those two terms define, without exhausting, one another. A presence still human, because "¿quién es Dios si no yo mismo / cuando la poseo?" (20); that is, when writing, when marking a page with seeds of a new world, dreaming with nature a world neither exclusive nor restricted. The book's introduction, and thus our introduction to the group's dominant thematics, closes with a motto for another you, more obviously the you that you are, reader—"serás Dios / cuando seas más loco que Dios" (20). This will be the guiding motto of Ceselli's book *and* my reading of the other poets. Poets that desire a nature, a lover, an unobtainable presence—their writing's shadow, grounding them as it escapes.

## Juan Antonio Vasco, Counter-Borders

The second poet, Juan Antonio Vasco, rather than simply approach presences, traces and celebrates the liberatory potential of the marks it leaves in writing, poetry, and civilization. Efforts to destabilize man's limited consignatory structures underpin his works, beginning with the book *Cambio de horario*—tentative efforts to find himself somewhere between feminine, natural, poetry and anti-national freedom.

From “En la casa de postas,” dedicated to Enrique Molina, we read—

[e]l pájaro que se quita sus plumas de hierro  
para marcar los rostros de las muchachas  
[con un  
signo que reluce más allá de los días que  
habitamos (103)

Poetic writing is a force never entirely split from nature, incorporating the natural by writing it, granting it a body with a name and locating it *within* speech. In Vasco, eroticism is united and confused with nature’s aspects, the one for the other as subject and object of desire, insofar as they are coetaneous in poetry. This bond is “una inagotable corriente de caricias” from “esa presencia de hombre partido en dos,” again, we see the ambiguous “tú,” and “[e]res el agua negra donde toda blasfemia alcanza / la transparencia del deseo” (103). Sensuality hangs suspended between nature and civilization: based in one, facing another, spinning endlessly. It exists in the space opened by the cleavage produced in humanity’s being cast out of nature, unable to erase that leap’s traces. The feminine body subjugated and marked through writing is here also the space and moment of humanity’s liberatory possibility; the space behind “nature” to which one tries constantly to return, only to spring anew towards, and from, death. If this wish be, necessarily, blasphemous, it is due to the rigid structures that reign amongst the people as established in the nation-state’s writing. But as “Noticias del paraíso” affirms, the subjects most able to approach nature are the poets; that is, “cada pájaro tiene un nido detrás de su nido para / construir con paciencia el infinito” (105). The bird-poets in Vasco possess all the necessary tools for a literary construction at once constant, eternal and, as ambivalent, liberatory. A construction of ruins ruined in and by its own processuality—eternal and therefore unstable and destabilizing any presumption of settling meaning or archiving it—acts decisive for the law’s territorial demarcation. Through this process

we might watch as “Adán y Eva liberados por fin de su injusta condena / domestican aves del paraíso y las sueltan en la / asamblea del pueblo,” disseminating amongst those unjustly limited as the *people* by the law, tools for the (re)construction of the world (105).

The book’s lexicon makes it clear that this “bird” occupies, and therefore realizes as liberatory, the space beyond which any terminological distinction corraling the mother is lost. Theirs are the nests concealing the mother’s nest, the natal land. In “El vuelo de los pájaros,” this bird-agitator “augura mejores días / mañanas con los senos descubiertos / con la blusa de agua de instinto / la mujer desnuda que huye entre los barcos y las calles,” showing us the way, the traces that crisscross all civilizations perched upon the real (107). Again, there is a slippage between terms: woman and nature are combined and confused by plumage that marks the vital plenitude awaiting in the eternity of reality’s uncovering. However, this also signals the impossibility of a total uncovering and, thus, any uncovering—ambivalence is the most one can expect from

La bella destrucción del vino del ocaso de las  
historias edificantes  
los telones perforados por los cabezazos de la  
realidad  
la libertad ardiendo por los cuatros costados  
(107)

Poetry’s revelation of woman-nature’s desperate flight will always only ever be partial, never clear nor total. Hers is a flight always beyond national language’s determinations, unreachable within *logos*; and, moreover, ignored within surrealist discourses and their treatment of the feminine, never but *veiled* by the constitutive illusion that surrealism *unveils*—the illusion of the feminine body *and* its passivity.

Vasco avers that this incomplete poetic liberation is decidedly *American*, a trace of both the conquest and the law’s violent imposition (inscription is never but imposition, yet not exhausted in it) on the land and

people. But he never retreats from what has happened: he doesn't presume to erase history and instead continues with what good remains or might be extracted from it. Within this terrain of constant reconstructions, he strives to weave *something* from the ruins. In "América tiene hijos"

América se mete la mano en el seno y saca los  
piojos de la conquista reducidos a polvo de  
cabeza de jíbaro eficientes como una biblioteca  
un arco de alambre de echar a rodar cabezas  
de tamaño natural  
cabezas de garrote vil y de horca y de amor indígena  
con palmas de sosiego a la hora de la ola del  
mar de la arena de la selva de la mala palabra  
de los pájaros con cola de nácar marina y de  
pluma de sueño (118)

He denounces, in torrential enjambment unimpeded by orthography, the constructions bound by conquest's remains to render violence unto those with "cabezas de [...]," diminished by neither historical obsession nor mythology of violence. However, a syntactic indeterminacy forged in this a-orthographic enjambment also allows these same poets to realize violence against themselves, backed by libraries' terrible efficiency. They are, rhetorically and formally, at the center of *this* construction, because poetry is also a construction, ambivalent and awaiting "la hora de [...] los pájaros." Of course, these bird-poets with "pluma de sueño," that exist to liberate our minds of ambivalences, are the surrealists. They are striving to perforate the mythological skein extended above a nature made "feminine" by history's violently foundational double movement of naming the natural to establish the historical. Supplementing this poem, "América desuella a sus hijos" emphasizes that there are no liberatory niceties "porque la única verdad está en nuestra garganta / en esa mujer que pone un pie a cada lado del / precipicio / y orina sobre América" (119). The niceties of colonial pests, still worshipping national mythology, could never, and yet will always, be the bird-poets' tools. Nature, woman, poetry and liberty are

all ambivalent, human, full of potential—they are actions and thereby affirm a voice, coopted and distorted as it may be. All that remains to us is that

Abracemos el destino de América suelta para  
[vivir  
sobre las llanuras y el mar plantando una pierna  
en la tierra podrida  
porque su salvaje autonomía construye cada  
mañana la selva y el océano y el asiento de  
nuestra costumbre que estalla en mitad de cada  
país (119)

The nature and liberatory customs of a poetry attempting to perforate a national mythology's veil don't appear but explode, violently and rudely within the nation-state's order. An eruption always incomplete, more than could be contained by, and thus always opposed to, the borders of a pestilent law. Always to come, always fated, always on the other side of the said and sayable.

This is Vasco's motto in "La insurrección" from *Destino común*: "la eterna voluntad / insurgente de América" (156 my emphasis). This poetry, as in Ceselli's anti-hierarchical style, directs itself against the mere idea of a unique and univocal nation, *erected on the earth and making it "nature," feminine*. It asks, "¿quién puede fusilar al pan? / ¿Quién sitiará a la gaviota en su nido?" recognizing that

el padre de los hermanitos sonríe sin dejar  
[por eso  
de dar rienda suelta a sus lágrimas que bebe  
[bajo  
la mesa el perro de la bondad del hombre  
el perro de la familia  
el magnífico perro de la Ciencia hijo de la perra  
del Poder  
el perro fiel del destino  
el bello perro innato de la muerte (156-57)

This poetry projects the strong sense that this reality sliding behind the chain nature/woman/liberty is society's original liberty, the unobtainable "mother" figure, and that "esa mujer desnuda despierta en el estanque de / sábanas blancas / la libertad el sudor de

su sueño" (157). Without rejecting human progress, we glimpse from between these words an exit from the colonialist national lie, an escape from the father's dogs—from law and from borders. Again, enjambment links goodness, family and science to Power, fate and finally, death—a submissive dog, various submissive dogs, confused in the finitude beneath the Father's table. That is, on the ground, invisible to Father, closer to mother than Him but, in the end, his—illusions that bring only death. Only in the future, when our brothers flee father's home, will it make sense to say that "La libertad su tumba / su botella en el mar / Una ciudad de América respira en su laberinto / ¡beber el ron ardiente de la fraternidad!" (157).

## Francisco Madariaga, of Trains and the Mother

The third poet, Francisco Madariaga's poetry carries the land's traces beyond rebellion, taking up anew an idealized return to the mother-woman-earth figure as a unifying theme. For him, it renders slippery and inconstant the underlying delimitations of man, sense and poetry.

His book *Las jaulas del sol* portrays the path to the ground as illuminated by the light of an ambiguous love, one without an object, in "El amor es continuo." In tender action, another indefinite "tú," another interlocutor of indeterminate visage, is carried along "hasta la Piedra loca de la hermandad del amor / que adorabas en la tierra de tu infancia" (49). Infancy's homeland, the mother that watches over and protects us before language makes space for the immanent love that sustains a limitrophe brotherhood beyond borders and nations. Yet, this group is *still* a brotherhood, *still* a masculine association at language's limit, protected by the mother yet *still* distant from her. A group forever there with her; bordering childhood's land and love's insanity, but unable to reach it because, as a *brotherhood*, it is articulated in

the same word that erects the patriarchal nation-state. Terrible for Madariaga, infancy's land possesses a constant presence; *it is presence itself*. Although, whenever it appears it is as the limit to which the trains crisscrossing this poetry might arrive without crossing. The interlocutor is always arriving to this land but never enters it, standing and staring in front of her, trapped by and in a language of arrival. This love will always be a means and measure of arrival, demanding a constant translation of *where* one wishes to arrive and displacing that arrival toward the future. But it will never reach the point of *arrival* nor ever anything that can be fixed or stopped.

"El amor es continuo y el viento lo despierta y lo adora / con sus hombres hasta la tierra de la salvación / y el infinito" (49). Love, like all words, is simultaneously said and done. Existing alongside humanity, it guides and takes us *there* but never *beyond*, it leaves us at the entrance to salvation's lands, before the mother and the infinite forever on the other side of the "hasta." As soon as we're born from love we are subjugated by language and the being-cast-out that is imposed upon us, preventing our regress to natal lands. As in, for example, "El hechizo natal," birth's effects appear in this poetry as "¡Tu tren descarrilado entre las brujas!" (52). The moment of birth is always also disembarking the train, love, such that humanity ends spellbound in the gears of life, language and the nation-state. In the poem's words life, at "[u]na estación pequeña te ofrece el hotel de sus ocios, / y tú para siempre entre las pócimas y los filtros." Barely born you enter magic, the illusion of language—constructs that strive to trap us at a real distance from the mother's lands. An ideal for us always already unobtainable, always already alienated in and by the nation's word. This poem's vision of the human condition is of insurmountable internal division—a vision of Heideggerian *dasein* cast into the clearing, paralyzed by the spells of the absolute. Following the poetic voice



a maternal force that, while always removed from the mother-figure, marks the trace in masculine society of what is (un)veiled between the links of the chain woman/mother/nature.

This wish to give in before the sun is fleetingly inscribed in the poem “Cartas de invierno,” as a momentary confusion between the poem’s and the poet’s voices.

Hace veinte años que quiero relatar perdidas  
[cosas.  
No puedo iniciar nada que no sea el torpe  
[vicio de  
mi alma de grabarse y retorcerse, o si no balas,  
tajos de deseo, guaridas repentinas de la vida  
(64)

Madariaga’s poetry is the useless and pre-emptively frustrated bandage for the wounds desire opens on the body incorporated to the nation-state. Throughout this book and another, *El delito natal*, the desire to reach lost things through and behind the word marks this poetry, and it is clumsy and vicious because of it. Its own limits are (un)veiled as a hand extended towards natal lands, the mother, liberty—limits from which poetry itself springs, being also its central fount. A poetry of

[c]ohetes a la luz de la luna, cohetes  
[de la infancia, pero  
surgiendo de los pantanos, de los ojos  
[de los gatos  
monteses hundidos en el agua.

Or as that same poem closes, closing the book that shares its name, a poetry that screams

[o]h madre de todos los amores, ven a mí,  
[adórame con  
tus hijas. Tiernísima del bosque, ven a mí, yo  
[tengo  
una bolsa de fuego cautivado por los gatos  
monteses pegada sobre el labio,  
¡reviéntame en tu olor! (74)

## Enrique Molina and Passion’s Exile

To conclude, I turn to Enrique Molina, of whose poetry Julio Ortega has said that “se propone como visión de un *primer día* de la realidad” (531). Maternal space sinks to the level of the presumed in Molina, the level of the unsaid structuring the poet’s exile throughout America. At one and the same time, it reproduces the structural positioning of the feminine figure as grounding the nation-state *and* reveals the impossibility of totalizing that grounding, which appears with the imposition of the repressive, yet elevating, name nature (/woman/land/mother/...). As Enrique Pezzoni says, “como en una traducción verbal de un posible cuadro de Magritte, la mujer es el ropaje que oculta al fantasma del deseo desnudo” (779). Or again, in Ortega’s words, “*el lenguaje aquí figura la vecindad del paraíso perseguido*” (538). If on the poetry’s surface this underlying current is not apparent, the figures of woman, mother, the prior and freedom will serve as clues to the unifying thread that cuts through Molina’s work, much like that of the others.

I’ll begin with *Pasiones terrestres*, a book that traces a universal exile begun on the first day of life. “A Vahíne” is directed to the titular figure, a female subject in a painting by Gauguin, or rather subject *to* his painting—captured in and distanced by the man’s paints, only present as absented by his brush. So, for all that it pretends to speak to her, the distance multiplied in re-presentation is never overcome, a fate seemingly reserved for women—always objects of representation, exposed to the melancholiacs’ writing. As the poem indicates, she

[yace] ahora, inmóvil como el cielo,  
mientras [sostiene] una flor sin nombre,  
un testimonio de la desamparada primavera  
[en que [mora] (78)

The poem doesn’t dialogue with the woman, a life always impossibly distanced from and



algo de mi ser que me reclama  
sonando tiernamente, tristemente,  
a través de los muros  
como el materno acento de unos llanos  
el implacable canto del amor y la lejanía

and will remain listening “porque así son las venas / en el hombre. / Ligadas para siempre a algún lugar / de cuyo polvo nacén” (103-104). This is the state (of man) always divided in itself: cleaved from nature, while cleaving to the nature possessing it. A tension that itself hangs on the tension between being and being here, the permanence of movement between the lines “[y]o era aquella tierra / Yo era su canción empedernida” and “[y] ahora mismo / ligado estoy a ella. / Ligado a su ceniza y a su fuego.” As readers we are overcome by the constant hiatus between the once and now; a hiatus that is the *there* from which spring both man and the *where* wherein he encounters himself. The blank page that will always be the space of writing and the written page distanced from the void, the wound of a desire marking the scene of a solitary writing distanced from what it believes its source.

The work recognizes that, for the man confronting the land on which he stands, all that can be said is written on the page—“Sólo hay morada en ti para el recuerdo. / Porque tú eres / la última verdad. / Y tu nostalgia / es la única dádiva que entregas a tus hijos” (105). Nothing of man is based, nor will it be, in nature, in the mother’s space, once and again the ambiguous “tú”—because he constructs his own fleeting and illusory grounding in each moment of being himself constructed. This is the kernel, the unrecoverable secret, of the entire group’s work, presented here for our consideration—the mother, nature, the origin, liberty from borders and nations, poetry, and the word. All remain on the other side of an insurmountable hiatus from which man’s edifices spring and above which they are erected—a plenitude to which these poets strive to return. Unobtainable presence; nostalgia for the always only imagined pre-state liberty; *her* representation... we are reminded

of the artificiality of man’s edifices, instead of having that artificiality hidden beneath the false image of a submissive nature. This is the task that the Argentine group, perhaps unwittingly, took up in the face of their national poetic history. Or, said in another voice, as it always has been, “Tierra mía, / sé que me estás llamando / donde nada es más cruel que tu propia belleza” (Molina 106).

## Conclusions

While conclusions are preemptively proscribed for the destabilization of a language within which we could speak of them, I would like to revisit the above briefly. Molina proposes for the reader an exile on the ground, from the artifices of a national language forged upon the presumed passivity of a subjected feminine. Madariaga and Vasco offer two possible visions of that exile’s end. Madariaga sees a loving return to the immediacy of the land and the plenitude of presence awaiting the impossible arrival of those cast away in language. Vasco, on the other hand, offers an imaginary of liberation, of a land risen up against the deferred materiality of the law of man. Whether you follow those paths or another into exile, they will all offer you the possibility of that immersion in the indeterminacy of a sensual language hesitating before any fixed identification, the thematic and stylistic thread that Ceselli offers us in the work I reflected on above. Teasing out this current of impossibility throughout the texts of these poets, I have highlighted how these works’ freely associating language and oneiric thematic reveal the inherent instability of a national language’s attempts to ground itself in the aesthetic and political delimitation of a particular state’s territory. While the exile proposed in Molina’s work may only carry us between slumping mansions, realizing the immanence of that which is barred from and by language nonetheless offers up a project and a thought of all that might be otherwise than the restrictions imposed on us, against which these poets are positioned.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> While there are many other poets who might be included in a discussion of surrealism's influence in Argentina, for the purposes of this article I am adhering to the commonly recognized grouping around the journal *A partir de cero*, particularly as commented by Graciela Maturo in her book *El surrealismo en la poesía argentina* and Gerald Langowski in his *El surrealismo en la ficción hispanoamericana*. Both texts also include excellent appendices of further reading, for the curious reader. Of particular note are Olga Orozco and Alejandra Pizarnik, who both, in their own ways, engage with and yet problematize the language of the core surrealist group—Orozco offering an experience of reality's mediation by language that undercuts the lyrical positioning of the male poets, and Pizarnik taking their rhetoric and imagery to an ironic extreme. But, given their distinct relations to the style and the depth of their *oeuvres*, I have been forced to leave them aside in my commentary.

<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout, all references to the patriarchal and the consignatory functions proper to the law are explicitly referring to Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Trans. Eric Prenowitz (U of Chicago 1996).

<sup>3</sup> This project cleaves closely to that articulated by Reynaldo Jiménez in his immense work, *El cóncavo. Imágenes irreductibles y super-realismos sudamericanos*, wherein he does the extensive work of tracing certain destabilizing slippages within surrealist and other poetic languages, beginning with a reading of Aldo Pellegrini, founder of the Argentine group. His work is equal parts surrealist reflection and critical intervention, and a prolonged engagement would destabilize my own work overly much, but it comes strongly recommended to any reader interested in these themes. I would like to extend here a thanks to one of the reviewers of my work, who recommended the book to me.

<sup>4</sup> I would argue that this assertion articulates, differently, what Peter Bürger has called the avant-garde's protest, in his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Trans. Michael Shaw (U of Minnesota Press 1984). A protest against the supposed autonomy of Art as granted by the bourgeois order, in order to annul the critical potency of Art. As he says, and I will reaffirm, however,

this avant-garde still fails to liberate itself from the limitations placed by the bourgeois state.

<sup>5</sup> I take this concept, of the national language and its material effects of structuring both the conceptual and physical spaces of the nation, directly from the work of Nicos Poulantzas *State, Power, Socialism*, Trans. Patrick Camiller (Verso 2014). See, in particular, Part 1 of that text.

<sup>6</sup> As concerns the duty to respond in the face of a call, I refer to this problematic's formulation in Jacques Derrida's *Pasiones*, Trans. Horacio Pons (Amorrortu 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Regarding this vacillation, see Jean Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist* (Penguin 1970) pp. 103-20 & 140-47.

<sup>8</sup> In this sense, they diverge from Octavio Paz's poetics, that Jean Franco describes as a method of opposing oneself to historicism and contradicting the historical. See Jean Franco, "From Modernization to Resistance," *Critical Passions*, Ed. Jean Franco, Mary Louise Pratt and Katherine Newman (Duke UP 1999) pp. 298.

<sup>9</sup> As regards the subordination of the woman in all aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin American poetry, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Genero y Ciudadanía: las mujeres en diálogo con la nación," *Esplendores y miserias del siglo XIX: cultura y sociedad en América Latina*, Comp. Beatriz González Stephan, Javier Lasarte, Graciela Montaldo, and María Julia Daroqui (Monte Avila Editores Latinoamericana 1995) pp. 261-76.

<sup>10</sup> As regards the absence of myth as the primordial condition of surrealism, see the above referenced text of George Bataille, *ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> I am thinking here of the pharmakon in Derrida and writing as product of the father's pen, thus the sovereign's. Rather, the chain of fathers/sovereigns that pretend to grant (or not) writing access to the truth. See principally Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, Trans. Barbara Johnson (U of Chicago 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the construction of politics, brotherhood and fraternity and their role as fundamental presumptions for the law, see Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, Trans. George Collins (Verso 1997).

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