WRITING HIS INDIA: POETIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONJUNCTIONS IN OCTAVIO PAZ’S WRITING IN INDIA

by

NICHOLAS P. DIALS

(Under the Direction of DOROTHY M. FIGUEIRA)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to trace the philosophical roots of Octavio Paz’s poetry written during his tenure in India between 1962 and 1968. The following chapters examine the role of Hindu and Western philosophical thought on the poet, as well as looking at the Indian landscapes’ dynamic, natural scenes as influential. With special attention to the collection Ladera este and the poetic narrative El mono gramático, the analyses examine Paz’s poetic work as forms of critical-philosophical dialogue by using the Hindu Advaita-Vedanta tradition, the late writing of Martin Heidegger on poetics, as well as the Deleuzian concept of “becoming” as methods of reading Paz’s work written in or about India.

INDEX WORDS: Octavio Paz, India, poetics, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Hinduism, East-West discourse.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE POET-DIPLOMAT

Leaving his position at the Mexican Embassy in Paris in 1951, Octavio Paz visits India for the first time, traveling from Cairo to Bombay. In his reflections on this experience in *Vislumbres de la India*, published in 1995 just three years before his death, one understands the gravity of this time for Paz as a poet and critic through the detailed memories recollected in this work.\(^1\) In addition to recounting his experiences in India in *Vislumbres*, Paz seeks to create an essay on the cultural history of India, revealing that his interests in the country were beyond the aesthetic, reaching to philosophical, religious, and political arenas. From this account one clearly sees the lasting impression of the Indian landscape on the poet’s thought.

Through Paz’s writing in India, his readers find a location that best describes the conjunction of philosophico-religious concerns in his poetry. Ultimately, Paz defines India to be the space of expressing “the present,” a time and place to address the demand of the current moment in terms of political and creative action. In his 1990 Nobel address, Paz states: “Pero el presente require no solamente atender a sus necesidades inmediatas: también nos pide una reflexión global y más rigurosa. Desde hace mucho creo, y lo creo firmemente, que el ocaso del future anuncia el advenimiento del hoy. Pensar el hoy significa, ante todo, recobrar la mirada crítica” (*In Search of the Present* 64-65).\(^2\) Paz’s concentration on the present underscores the political dimension of his work, which at times seems to be absent or unspoken. Through the

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\(^1\) In *Understanding Octavio Paz*, José Quiroga provides the reader of Paz with a parallel biographical account of his life along with a chronological reading of his poetry and other writings.

\(^2\) “Yet the present requires much more than attention to immediate needs; it demands global soul searching. For a long time I have firmly believed that the twilight of the future heralds the advent of the now. To think about the now means first of all to recover the critical vision” (*In Search of the Present* 30).
Nobel address late in his career, he reveals that this critical vision of the present time is what is
needed in order to gain what he states in concluding Vislumbres as “la reforma de nuestra
civilización” by means of “una reflexión sobre el tiempo” (211). By focusing on Paz’s poetic
work, one sees this concentration on the present realized through visions of landscapes, people,
and an ever-present philosophical concern with these phenomenal experiences.

Recalling a vivid memory from this first visit to India, Paz tells of visiting a small
mosque in Delhi and of the importance of such a small event for him:

Nunca olvidaré una tarde en una mezquita minuscule, a la que penetré por
casualidad. No había nadie. Los muros eran de mármol y ostentaban inscripciones
del Corán. Arriba, el azul de un cielo imposible y benévolo, solo interrumpido, de
vez en cuando, por una bandada verde de pericos. Pasé un largo rato sin hacer ni
pensar en nada. Momento de beatitude, roto al fin por el pesado vuelo circular de
los murciélagos. Sin decerlo, me decían que era hora de volver al mundo. (24)

[I will never forget one afternoon in a tiny mosque I had wandered into by
accident. There was no one there. The walls were made of marble and inscribed
with passages from the Qur’an. Above, the blue of an impassive and benevolent
sky, only interrupted, from time to time, by a flock of green parakeets. I stayed for
hours, thinking of nothing. A moment of beatitude, broken finally by the heavy
circular flight of the bats who had appeared with the fading light. Without saying
it, they told me it was time to return to the world. (19)]

3 “The reformation of our civilization must begin with a reflection on time” (In Light of India 194-195).
This instant of solace is for the poet a moment of inspiration that he compares to many other similar experiences he has while in India, whether in a garden, in the ruins of Galta, or standing on a balcony. For Paz, the ability to pass “un largo rato sin hacer ni pensar en nada” is to gain a critical mindset where he allows the elements of the situation to “speak,” as with the bats in this small mosque. The poet’s entering the religious site is for him, like its devotees, a type of pilgrimage; however, his is not religious in the way of a specific belief system. Paz integrates the images of his environment into his poetry in order to express the sensation of the moment. The inscribed, marble walls of the mosque mixed with the birds and bats show the intensity of the simple experience that leaves the poet contemplative in the present moment. These instances are found throughout his writing and are the focus of the critical analysis at hand. The process of recognition of the surrounding world, then contemplation, and finally his realization of the present is a movement that defines his poetic work, where he creates not only an aesthetic experience out of the event but also a philosophical reflection. “El advenimiento del hoy” is the poet’s realization of the necessity for a keen perception of the momentary nature of time, seen in the descriptive images of India.

Paz’s work in India has not only garnished him praise as a “philosopher-poet.” Along with much admiration, the critical and poetic work coming from Paz’s tenure in India have brought recent criticism in regards to his poetics and his political involvement. In “The Politics of Writing in Octavio Paz’s El mono gramático,” Hugo Moreno finds Paz’s work on India to be conceptually dominating, denying agency to Paz’s subjects—the Indian landscape and its people. Moreno states that by concentrating on a philosophical contemplation of language this text set in Galta refuses anything Indian to actually speak: “…his choice in employing a

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4 Hugo Moreno’s article is furthered discussed in Chapter 3 as a problematic reading of El mono gramático.
multiplicity of speaking voices without ever ceding space to those voices that are frozen at the enchanted margins of the author’s single-minded purpose. Language…” (5). Moreno insists in his evaluation of Paz’s text in which he states that the poet ignores the culture in which he writes in order to prioritize his critical-poetic work above that of his actual environment. Moreno states that Paz does so “in order to get lost in…language, but not in the worldviews of the language and traditions with which he engages” (12). In a far less scholarly criticism of Paz, though notable, Ilan Stavans’ “Of Arms and the Essayist: The Rise and Fall of Octavio Paz” indicts Paz as a cultural dictator whose widespread critical work is an attempt “to turn the universal into a particular or vice versa, all with the effect of showing how Paz is the embodiment of absolute truth” (114). Stavans also accuses Paz and his contemplative reflection on the present of being blind: “…what is left is to search for the inner world—to dream with the eyes closed, to look for the eternal present….The burden of the past is too oppressive. What is needed is a regression, a search for new beginnings” (111). Stavans, like Moreno, finds Paz’s contemplative mode to be a “turning a blind eye” to the actual, historical problems of the world. The readings of Paz offered by Moreno and Stavans provide readings of the poet that contrast with the plethora of positive reviews of Paz seen before 1990; however, Paz’s work in India may also be seen as a conceptual way of engaging political action, a way of making poetry a bridge between the philosophical and the real.6

5 Ilan Stavans’ essay is intriguing in its strident argument that condemns Paz as a poet, a critic, and as a political activist. Refuting this argument Eliot Weinberger, who is a long-time translator and friend of Paz, in “Paz as ‘Dictator’: A Response to Ilan Stavans” utterly rejects Stavans’ critical stance, as well as Stavans’ scholarly ability by highlighting the many historical inaccuracies in his essay. Stavans’ argument remains inviting because of its extremely polemical nature, showing that, indeed, not everyone admires Paz.
6 In 1982, Pas was awarded the Neustadt Prize given by the University of Oklahoma and World Literature Today; following the award an entire edition of the journal was dedicated to Paz and his work, in which one finds much of the cited critical material on Paz of the last thirty years.
In the recent essay “Changing India-West Cultural Dialectics,” anthropologist R.S. Khare turns to Paz for a positive way of meeting the needs of East-West dialogue. In formulating the concept of “responsible globalization,” Khare reads Paz’s relationship with India as egalitarian cultural dialogue. He states, “Once in India in 1951, Paz, as it were, never left India….Paz had interiorized India” (232). In Khare’s opinion, India affected him in a permanent way, and after India he maintained this cross-cultural relationship, which was so markedly shaped by his tenure in the East:

Paz repeatedly returned to such shared richness, connectivity, and communicability while treating the historically intricate and contentious journey of the India-West exchanges. More significantly, as a Mexican thinker, he meaningfully triangulated India, Mexico, and Europe across a wide swath of historical and cultural difference. As a poet-thinker-diplomat, his gaze was historically wide, culturally deep, and yet also acute for contemporary times. Here his poetic aestheticism and philosophical erudition effortlessly stood alongside a politically prudent globalism because he did not see himself just as a distant diplomat or a poet-philosopher but as a co-traveler with humanity. (232)

Through the Khare’s analysis, one sees the synthesis of the varying faces of Paz—the poet, critic, philosopher, and diplomat. Khare’s description of Paz as the “poet-thinker-diplomat” emphasizes the ability of Paz to play multiple roles while maintaining the poetic as a priority, especially in light of his poetic writing as an interlocutor between these other forms of discourse. Paz, here, becomes the exemplification of a balanced, global dialogue between the East and the West. Khare states that this type of “co-traveler” that Paz’s work in India represents is a way of communicating openly, emphasizing inclusivity and fairness (239). Similarly, Yvon Grenier
states in “The Romantic Liberalism of Octavio Paz” that Paz’s method or legacy of aesthetic/political action is representative of a way in which poets, and all artists, can engage the political sphere from “the periphery”: “This is the other possible conjugation between art and politics—that is, besides the politicization of art, there exists the reverse side of the same coin, the estheticization of power (propaganda). And art can inspire us with a radical critique of modernity without forsaking what is valuable in it: criticism, and the political institutions that make peaceful criticism possible” (191). Grenier, as well as Khare, find in Paz the expression of a mature balance between an artistic and a political life. In this reading she sees that Paz, by means of a reliance on art, expresses political-philosophical concerns through conceptual and critical forms. Specifically, by means of poetry, Paz critiques global issues; be it a concern with technology, politics, or art, he does so by engaging philosophical discourse that implies the condition of all humans, whether in India or Mexico.

During his Nobel lecture, Paz states that a critique of modernity is essential in the search for the current state of humanity. This necessary quest made of visions of the past and the future leads to what Paz refers to as the proper center of contemporary humanity’s gaze—the present. He states:

La reflexión sobre el ahora no implica renuncia al future ni olvido del pasado: el presente es el sitio de encuentro de los tres tiempos….Alternativamente luminoso y sombrío, el presente es una esfera donde se unen las dos mitades, la acción y la contemplación. Así como hemos tenido filosofías del pasado y del future, de la eternidad y de la nada, mañana tendremos una filosofía del presente. La experiencia poética puede ser una de sus bases. ¿Qué sabemos del presente? Nada
Reflecting on the now does not mean relinquishing the future or forgetting the past. The present is the meeting place for the two directions of time….The present is alternately luminous and somber, like a sphere that unites the two halves of action and contemplation. Thus, just as we have had philosophies of the past and of the future, of eternity and of the void, tomorrow we shall have a philosophy of the present. The poetic experience could be one of its foundations.

What do we know about the present? Nothing or almost nothing. Yet the poets do know one thing: the present is the source of presences. (32-33)

In the unclear vision that faces the modern human, Paz suggests that for poetry, or the poet, be a guide because of his/her knowledge of poetry’s ability to reveal and to create the present. For Paz, artistic and political dialogue in the present must proceed by means of philosophico-poetic knowledge.

Through analyses of Paz’s poetry in the collection Ladera este written while in India and the later work El mono gramático, the following chapters show the philosophical and religious influences on Paz’s writing, as well as the creative possibilities of his complex, experimental text. In many ways, Paz’s writing that is concentrated on India expresses the overarching artistic and philosophical concern with time. By tracing the Heideggerian roots of Paz’s poetics, in “Comparative Ontologies,” the analysis seeks to contrast Paz poetics rooted in phenomenological philosophy with the other side of his thought, the Eastern influence. Although there is no evidence of Paz having had in-depth study of Hindu philosophy, this section uses the ontology of
the Advaita-Vedanta as a lens through which to see Eastern elements in Paz’s work, ultimately asking where these philosophical roots originate, whether in the East or the West. In the reading of *El monogramático*, the analysis contests the criticism of Hugo Moreno, which finds the text to be a hegemonic meditation on language that ignores the cultural landscape in which the narrative occurs. By using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming,” this section finds a new way of viewing Paz’s text as a “minor” poetics that creates the poet’s vision of India through instances of “stuttering” and “percepts.” By concentrating on Paz’s poetic work, these chapters of this thesis reveal ways in which Paz’s philosophical poetry presents a vision of the East that is personal and in which he takes up the role of “co-traveler” as a Mexican poet in the East.
CHAPTER 2
COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGIES IN THE POETRY OF OCTAVIO PAZ’S
LADERA ESTE

No one rides before, no one comes behind

and the path bears no fresh prints.

How now, am I alone? Ah yes, I see:

the path which the ancients opened up by now is overgrown

and the other, that broad and easy road, I’ve surely left.

-The Venerable Dharmakirti (Vidyakara’s Treasury)

In the writing of Octavio Paz, an evident philosophical and religious consciousness pervades the texts, as is evident in the diverse knowledge and concerns of this author of poetry, prose, and critical-historical volumes on culture, art, and politics. During his tenure as the Mexican ambassador to India between 1962 and 1968, Paz's poetry adumbrates an understanding of cross-cultural philosophical discourse, a sensibility of East and West, as well as a general concern for the creative power of the poet within both traditions. In Vislumbres de la India, reflecting on the experience of his first visit to India, Paz remarks on the way in which he experienced India phenomenally, through taste, smell, and the wonder of this culturally varied place: “Entreví que su secreto no consiste en ser una mezcla de sabores sino una graduación hecha de oposiciones y conjunciones a un tiempo violentas y sutiles” (160). An understanding

7 Unless indicated otherwise, the translations in this analysis come from Eliot Weinberger.
8 “I realized that its secret is not a mixture of flavors, but rather a graduation of opposites that are simultaneously pronounced and subtle. Not a succession, as in the West, but a conjunction. It is a logic that rules nearly all Indian creations” (Weinberger 137-138).
of a logic of conjunctions, contrasting from the metaphysics of the West, provides Paz with an alternative way of constructing poetic discourse that assimilates and critiques the religious and philosophical ontologies of both Europe and the East. India, for Paz, is a diverse touchstone reflecting the varied nature of his poetry and of what could be considered to be a philosophy emerging from his writing.

What one finds as the “conjunction” within the corpus of Octavio Paz's writing is the merging of discourses from the West and from India regarding the essential role of language, especially in relation to the nature of poetry. A search for Paz's influences leads one to the philosophical foundations of his critical work on poetry and to the poetry itself, as a “meta-poetic” form of writing. In this tracing of his roots, European philosophy, by way of a markedly Heideggerian ontology, emerges as a consistently influential source of Paz's conception of the relationship between language and Being. Although intertwined with these ideas in his poetry, the various philosophico-religious concepts from Hinduism and Buddhism also emerge as major catalysts in the formation of Paz's thoughts regarding the qualities of Being. By examining the construction of ontology within the Hindu Advaita Vedanta tradition in juxtaposition with Heidegger's ontology developed in his writing on poetry and poetics, this project's aim is to contrast the philosophies that most influenced Paz's poetry while also observing the confluence between these differing systems. Specifically, in the poems of Ladera Este, a collection written during his tenure in India, one observes how Paz contemplates the various concepts of time in Hinduism, especially by incorporating the presence of maya in his poetic images of the many cities and gardens of India. Also, in this same collection, he maintains a remarkably

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9 In his essay “Octavio Paz: hacia una metapoética de la modernidad,” Francisco R. Alvarez discusses the way in which Paz's writing as critic and as poet serve in an evaluation of modern aesthetics; it is not simply his critical writing found in El arco y la lira that develops these ideas but his poetry itself that comments on the nature and role of poetic language.
Heideggerian notion of poetic vision in modernity as capturing the primordial essence of Being.

By first analyzing the Hindu Advaita Vedanta tradition’s concept of maya, this chapter gives the reader of Paz a lens through which to read the poetry of Ladera este. Then, by explicating “Vrindaban,” a poem from the collection, one will see whether or not Hindu philosophical elements appear within his poetry. After a comparative analysis between Paz and Heidegger’s poetics, this section turns to an examination of the poem “El balcón,” asking whether or not Paz’s poetry contains comparative, parallel philosophies, or if the Western phenomenological poetics found in his earlier writings on poetry pervades these poems written in India.

PAZ’S POETRY JUXTAPOSED WITH THE HINDU CONCEPT OF MAYA

One of the most intriguing, yet perplexing, characteristics of Hindu thought is the varied nature of its histories and traditions. From its roots in the religious practices of the Indus Valley, a conception dating as far back as four millenia, a multiplicity of theologies and philosophies have grown from and into this diverse belief system. In the essay “Hinduism: the way of the banyan,” Julius Lipner compares the structure of the religion to that of the banyan trees in a grove outside Calcutta, stating that they both share the characteristics of being “an interconnected, polycentric phenomenon in the flux of growth, change, and decay” (24). The diversity of Hindu thought renders it ready and open to modulation either by assimilation or by the use of specific trends of thought within the religion as starting points for new philosophical or spiritual inquiry. Gavin Flood in his book An Introduction to Hinduism adds to this observation by noticing the “fuzzy edges” of Hinduism as a systematic religion; however, he also valorizes the “prototypical”: “I take the view that while 'Hinduism' is not a category in the

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10 Gavin Flood sets up a chronology of Hindu thought and civilization, giving a basic outline of time and place of its development into a great world religion; he dates the origins back to between 2500 to 1500 BCE (21).
classical sense of an essence defined by certain properties, there are nevertheless prototypical forms of Hindu practice and belief” (7). The variety of beliefs within the centralized body of belief that is Hinduism puts certain ideas on the periphery of regular thought and practice. Yet, as Flood notes, there are also traditions that do maintain dominance. A main branch of thought is that of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara in the Eighth Century CE, the founder being the creator of monastic orders in India, as well as a commentator on the Vedas (Flood 92, 241).

Within the tradition of the Advaita Vedanta, Sankara constructs a theological ontology concerned with the path of liberation for the religious. Obstructed from Brahmā, or the absolute being, by the phenomenal illusion of reality, which describes the concept of maya, the person must seek moksa, or liberation, from the tangible world by a process of understanding his/her connection to the ultimate reality of Brahmā.11 Within Sankara's commentary maya carries an ontological connection with Brahmā in that it is an integral part of the being of the universe. In their essay “Kala,” which is the standard Sanskrit word for time, Kloetzli and Hildebeitel describe the concept of being in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy as “timeless” (554). Commenting on maya they state, “The veil of maya covers the nondual brahman (unmanifest being) and projects the world of multiplicity and movement....It is even possible to state that 'time does not exist’” (554). Maya is a “covering” in that it is the revelation of an illusory world, one that must be superseded in order to reach Brahmā, which is aptly called “unmanifest being” in this passage. The Advaita tradition holds that the universe is “nondual,” as opposed to other traditions that adamantly profess the dual nature of being as that of Brahmā and maya. In the unity of these two, time does not occupy a place within this ontology because the overarching being is outside phenomenal perception. For the Advaita Vedanta, maya is an aspect of Brahmā’s “unmanifest

11 In a section on Sankara's theology, Flood describes the path to moksa as the attaining of knowledge by stating, “Liberation is the Veda's central message, and only knowledge leads to liberation” (242).
being,” yet it is clearly a subjugated form of reality, because, in reaching liberation, maya is surpassed by means of knowledge.

For the Advaita Vedanta, maya does not connote a negative notion of that which is phenomenal. In later, more dualistic, traditions, however, the concept is shed of its integrated ontological status with Brahman, and in the medieval bhakti traditions, maya is relegated to clear associations with theological notions of evil. In the essay “Maya as Evil: From Classical Hindu Thought to Bhakti Saints and Kabir,” Dinesh Prasad Saklani articulates how maya conceptually turned towards an association with evil in the writing of the bhakti saints of the medieval period:

> Basically, all living creatures are part of perception of Brahman, the Supreme Reality. But, through ignorance, our perception of this reality is obstructed. All sufferings, sorrows and pains of human beings arise from this ignorance. Human beings are deprived of divine pleasure through their ignorance, which is the fruit of wicked maya. The apparent diversity in the world is a mere illusion and deception. The power behind the scenes is invisible, and that is the only truth. (45)

The change of maya from a “covering of unmanifest being” to the deceptive illusion causing all suffering in human life signals a shift in the perception of ontological categories to a dualistic mode of thinking, between the good of Brahman and the evil of the physical world. This movement from the Advaita Vedanta tradition's ontology significantly influences Hindu thought...
and reveals a more theologically-based category of being, especially given the emphasis on the soteriological.\(^\text{12}\)

In clarifying the differences between the two constructions of maya, those of the Advaita Vedanta and the Bhakti Saint traditions, this single idea appears within Hindu thought as significant in emphasizing the variety of ontological philosophies within Hindu thought. Following the metaphor of the banyan tree given by Lipner, Hinduism offers a variety of ways by which one can perceive his or her being in the world. Saklani summarizes the differences between the mayas of the Advaita and Bhakti traditions by describing the former as “the power of Brahman by which [maya] manifests itself as the phenomenal world....without beginning and without end, coexistent with Brahman itself” (44). In illustrating the notion of maya as evil in the Bhakti tradition he restates its illusory and deceptive quality and concludes by saying, “The whole world is reeling in pain because of maya and the only escape is through true devotion....” (46). These conceptions are integral to understanding time in Hindu thought, keeping both the nondualistic and the dualistic ways of understanding being in mind.

For Ocatvio Paz's syncretic method of constructing a philosophical-poetics, both versions holds value in their manners of reflecting human knowledge, and in his poetry and criticism, one sees traces of both at work, emphasizing the fundamental, ontological nature of the phenomenal, as well as the suffering of the present life. In Paz's 1956 critical treatise *El arco y la lira*, he enunciates the comparative philosophical and religious discourse that pervades his poetry by means of a global examination of the nature of poetry and religious revelation. By citing thinkers such as Rudulfo Otto in this section of the text, Paz also reveals his concern for the study of...

\(^{12}\)The need for redemption from the illusory world is emphasized by the consistent allusion to maya as the cause of suffering. Saklani sees the bhakti poets as considering “maya to be an evil and see it as the source of all sufferings, shortcomings, problems and tensions in the world among all human beings....” (55).
comparative religions. Commenting on the similarity of the mystical traditions pan-religiously, Paz states, "La antinomia...constituye así el elemento natural de la teología mística, lo mismo para los cristianos que para los árabes, los hindués y los budistas" (135). Here, one finds the critical affirmation of the concept of maya, even though it is later, after his stay in India, that this concept becomes more evident in his work. Examining the religious essence of poetry in “La revelación poética,” Paz accounts for the religion's common purpose of calling humanity back to some original, or true, state. Paz states:

Al enfrentar el “poco ser” del hombre con el pleno ser de Dios, la religión postula una vida eterna. Nos redime así de la muerte, pero hace de la vida terrestre una larga pena y una expiación de la falta original. Al matar a la muerte, la religión devive a la vida. La eternidad deshabita al instante. Porque vida y muerte son inseparables....Vivimos muriendo....En nombre de la vida eterna, la religión afirma la muerte de esta vida. (142)

[In opposing man's “littleness of being” to God's totality of being, religion posits an eternal life. It thus redeems us from death, but it makes of the earthly life a long punishment and expiation of the original fault. In killing death, religion de-lifes life. Because life and death are inseperable....We live dying.... In the name of eternal life, religion affirms the death of this life. (Ruth L.C. Simms 131)]

This example alludes to the Judeo-Christian notion of the Fall by original sin; however, it also brings up a vital comparison between these world religions, imperative for the Western

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13 Paz cites Rudulfo Otto in reference to the study of the sacred in Otto's The Holy. Addressing this text is a signal of Paz's desire to comprehend the notions of the sacred across the world’s religions, which later appears to develop as a concern for Eastern religious thought.

14 “Antinomy, 'which is the most subtle form of the paradox,' thus constitutes the natural element of mystic theology, for Christians as well as for Moslems, Hindus, and Buddhists” (The Bow and the Lyre 124).
metaphysical tradition, and that of the East, especially in light of the notions of maya and Brahman in Hinduism. By way of expressing the interconnectedness of life and death, Paz activates the Advaita Vedanta's notion of the nondualistic character of being. The “poco ser' de hombre” in comparison with the totality of God also echoes the essential oneness of the ultimate reality of Brahman and the phenomenal quality of human existence in the real world. Given the Bahktis' vision of maya as evil, as well as the Western, religious conception of the fallen world, expiation is necessary by means of suffering in the present life; “vida de muerte” presents the notion of moksa or liberation from the suffering of this life by means of following a particular system of beliefs.

In his poetry Paz describes the experience of realizing the possibility of the phenomenal world through writing. Much of his poetry in Ladera este consists of the poet’s vision of the surrounding world as a place for accessing knowledge of Being. In the poetry written in India, Paz contemplates the reality of the objects surrounding him in a syncretic manner by pursuing Eastern philosophy in his thought, as well as the apparent Western philosophical influences. A common image in these poems is the poet’s vision at night where he is writing and sees the physical world from a striking, unfamiliar perspective; “El balcón,” to be discussed later in this chapter, uses the poet’s height over the city to establish a vision of Delhi by night. In “Vrindaban” the poet is writing at night and encounters a sadhu, a holy man, who carries his thought from his writing in a circular meditation on existence and then back to writing. In this poem maya appears to be the phenomenal world that the poet questions:

Rodeado de noche

follaje inmenso de rumores
grandes cortinas impalpables

hálitos

escribo me detengo

escribo

(Todo está y no está

Todo calladamente se desmorona

Sobre la página). (1-10)

[Surrounded by night

immense forest of breathing

vast impalpable curtains

murmurs

I write

I stop

I write

(All is and is not

And it all falls apart on the page

in silence). (1-10)]
As he experiences this claustrophobic instance, the poet creates the sensation of being surrounded by night, symbolized by “grandes cortinas impalpables,” as a vision that initiates his writing of the poem. He also states that the poem is and is not when written down; it is silent, “se desmorona/ sobre la página.”

Like much of Paz’s poetry, he describes here the ability of writing to create a world, yet also the distance between language and actual things, hindering the poem’s ability to posit meaning. He later asks in the poem, “¿Yo creo en los hombres/ o en los Astros?” (39-40). The poet replies by stating:

Yo creo

(aquí intervienen los puntos suspensivos)

Yo veo. (41-44)

[I believe

(with here a series

of dots)

I see. (41-44)]

The similarity of the syntax used in “yo creo” and “yo veo,” as well as their juxtaposition, raises the question of the poet’s belief, whether it resides in what he sees in the physical world or whether there is some other form of vision, one that might be occurring as he writes at night.

15 “Do I believe in man/ or in the stars?” (39-40).
Shortly after these statements the poet sees lines of beggars on a portico, and he describes this sight as “Putrefacción/ fiebre de formas/ fiebre del tiempo” (55-57). After having questioned his belief in his vision, this image of decomposition appears and is followed by an image of the universe as a peacock’s tale and then as a single eye: “Cola de pavo real el universe entero/ miriades de ojos/ modulaciones reverberaciones de un ojo único” (59-61). The single eye of the universe signals the poet’s encounter with the sadhu, who is seemingly watching him from a distance. He says that “un sadhú me miraba y se reía/ Desde su orilla me miraba/ lejos lejos” (92-94).

The sadhú provides the poet with an image of another man, whose existence he doubted earlier in the poem. It appears that the poet experiences a vision of a man through the thick curtain of the night; however, this holy man is far away, and he disappears, shown by the poet’s asking:

¿Adónde

a qué region del ser

a qué existencia a la intemperie de qué mundos

en qué tiempo? (101-104)

[Where?

To what region of being

---

16 “Putrefaction/ fever of forms/ fever of time” (55-57).
17 “The whole universe a peacock’s tail/ myriads of eyes/ other eyes reflecting/ modulations/ reverberations of a single eye” (59-63).
18 “a saddhu looked at me and laughed/ watching me from the other shore/ far off, far off” (94-96).
to what existence

in the open air of what worlds

in what time? (93-97)]

The sadhu who watches the poet from “su orilla” becomes a parallel for the poet; he is the only other man in the poem, showing a distinct contrast between the writer and the holy man, who the poet describes as “desnudo desgreñado embadurnado” (96). The poet’s vision of the man suggests that the poet imagines the Hindu idea of maya as a separation of time and space, as he is separated from the sadhu. Almost as if the man is another self, the poet imagines that he has disappeared to another type of existence. Using the concept of maya analyzed earlier in this chapter, one can imagine how the poet considers the concept to be a separation between realities, an illusion that distances him from another reality.

As the poet’s visionary eye turns into a myriad of eyes and then to the one universal eye, the poet evokes the concept of the interconnection of all Being in Advaita Vedanta ontology. The distance and difference between the sadhu and the poet is “the apparent diversity in the world…a mere illusion and deception” (Saklani 49). The poet envisions the sadhu as the many images of man in the world; he states:

Santo payaso santo mendigo rey maldito/

es lo mismo

siempre lo mismo

en lo mismo. (129-130)

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19 “Naked uncombed smeared” (98).
[Saint clown saint beggar king damned

it is the same

always the same

within the same. (132-135)]

The spirit of Brahman appears as “the same” within all men, the poet and the beggar; it is the poet’s vision which moves him beyond the veil of maya seeing the universality of human existence. More so, this realization by way of the poet’s nighttime meditation is activated in his writing. Dispersed throughout the poem, there are statements by the poet that show the poet’s work as meta-poetic; he is writing about the power of poetry to bridge the gap between the sadhu’s existence and his own being. He concludes the poem by stating:

Sé lo que creo y lo escribo

Advenimiento del instante

el acto

el movimiento en que se esculpe

y se deshace el ser entero. (150-154)

[I know what I know and I write it

The embodiment of time

the act]
the movement in which the whole being

is sculptured and destroyed. (151-155)]

Having problematized belief and vision, the poet reaffirms his knowledge as that which he writes; his poetry is the creation of reality and thus it is the experience of a presence. Although Paz does not seem to directly allude to his belief in a Hindu worldview, he does absorb the idea of maya as a means of expressing his view that Being must be reached by poetic writing. Reality is across a divide, just as the sadhu who has left is far away. Paz incorporates in this poem an Eastern concept of reality that allows him to address the poetic experience as one that tears the veil of illusion and grasps the real, present world.

PAZ, HEIDEGGER, AND POETICS

Within the section “La revelación poética” of *El arco y la lira*, Paz uses Martin Heidegger's ontology as a primary reference to describe a philosophical poetics. The influence of Heideggerian thought on Paz's poetics pervades *El arco y la lira*, and residual effects of this philosophy may be seen in his poetry. For Paz, these phenomenological ideas remain a major tie to twentieth-century European thought, contrasting with the also present Eastern philosophico-religious tradition which is found in much of Paz's critical writing.20 The effect of Heidegger's thought on Paz appears in the concern for the poet's role in the modern age.21 Although these

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20 After his first encounter with India in 1951, one finds in Paz’s early work on poetics in *El arco y la lira* (1956) references to Eastern thought comparatively with his evaluation of Western philosophical history; also, he further discusses these points in *Corriente alterna* (1967) work on culture, as well as poetics. The later work *Los hijos del lino* (1974), the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, too, adds to this chronology of Paz’s interest in writing comparatively about Eastern and Western thought.

21 Paz references Heidegger frequently in *El arco y la lira* as an informative source for his thought on poetry and ontology, using the philosophical work in *Being and Time*, which was translated into Spanish by the Mexican philosopher José Gaos in 1951, as well as *What is Metaphysics?*. Interestingly, the publication of Paz's work appeared before the publication of his later writing on poetry, even though Paz mentions contemporaneously Heidegger's writing on poetry: “We have not yet heard Heidegger’s last word, but we know that his attempt to find
ideas are tied to the ontology espoused in the earlier work of Heidegger, his later writing on poetry and art aids in clarifying the importance to which he grants the poet. For both Heidegger and Paz, there is no question of the value that is placed on the primacy of language in establishing human existence. Paz's words are consonant with Heidegger's thought when he says, “Todo es lenguage....Las diferencias entre el idioma hablado o escrito y los otros...son muy profundas, pero no tanto que nos hagan olvidar que todos son, esencialmente, lenguaje: sistemas expresivos dotados de poder significativo y comunicativo” (El arco y la lira 20). As if he were echoing Paz's view in El arco y la lira, Heidegger in “What are Poet's For?” later defines language as that which brings human existence into being: “Being, as itself, spans its own province, which is marked off by Being's being present in the word. Language is the precinct, that is the house of Being” (123). Through these passages the essential quality of language in establishing Being is unveiled as primary in the ontological philosophy of both thinkers. Paz follows Heidegger in acknowledging the force of language, especially in its emphasis on the need for the poet to be present, to undertake his or her being-in-the-world, a role of heralding a primordial concern for being.

In Heidegger's essays on the poetry of Friederich Hölderlin, the importance of ontology or the question of being remains the central issue at hand; it is in these writings that Heidegger articulates an aesthetic view of how being is realized in the world by language, and then authentically by means of poetry. He centers the essence of human existence on language as the elementally prioritized factor of human existence. In the essay "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," he states, "It is only language that affords the very possibility of standing in the

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22“All is language....The differences between the spoken and written language and the other...are very profound, but not so profound that they make us forget that all are, essentially language: expressive systems endowed with significative and communicative force” (The Bow and the Lyre 10).
openness of the existent. Only where there is language, is there world, i.e. The perpetually altering circuit of decision and production, of action and responsibility, of decay and confusion....It is good for the fact that (i.e. it affords a guarantee that) man can exist historically" (276). It is by language that there is being, and thus, there is historical existence. This reality includes the positives of the world, such as "action and responsibility," yet existence by language also opens existence to "decay," or the movement away from a clear vision of the question of being. In Heidegger's observation of Western philosophy, this possibility of "decay" is not merely a probability; it has, in fact, become the actual state of Western metaphysics.

In a general study of ontology, as well as "being" in Hindu philosophy, Wilhelm Halbfass reads Heidegger's critique of modern civilization in light of its decline from the question of being towards a technological age, which is no longer concerned with "the gods" or ontological questions. Halbfass states:

Looking back at the tradition of European metaphysics and Western philosophy and science in general, Hiedegger sees a progressive..."oblivion of being,” a growing preoccupation with "entities” instead of "Being"....This process culminates in the globalization of modern science and technology and the nihilism by which it is accompanied; yet at the same time, and out of the depth of oblivion, it opens a new sense and dimension of the significance and the urgency of the question of being. (9)

With "the urgency of the question," Heidegger points at the history of thought in the West as the "decay” of being, as a movement away from this central inquiry into phenomenal existence.
It is "out of the depth," or what Heidegger will term "the abyss," that the role of the poet becomes primary in regaining fundamental being. Heidegger states:

The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable evened of their own mortality. Mortals have not yet come into ownership of their own nature. Death withdraws into the enigmatic. The mystery of pain remains veiled. Love has not been learned. But the mortals are. They are, in that there is language. ("What are Poets For?" 105)

The time is "destitute" because all sense of religion has been lost, notions of mortality are gone, and because death, suffering, and even love "remain veiled." Heidegger insinuates and answers the enigmatic question taken from Hölderlin's poem "Bread and Wine," which asks, "...and what are poets for in a destitute time?" (93). Heidegger's restatement remarks, "In the age of the world's night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss" (92). For Heidegger, it is the poet who "reaches into the abyss" and who dares to "venture Being itself and therefore dare to venture into language" (137).

In the essay "...Poetically Man Dwells...", the role of poetry becomes that of creating "dwelling," which differs from mere existence or being. Through the recourse of his poetry, the poet "ventures" to write and ask questions of ontology. Heidegger writes that poetry constitutes man in authentic existence: "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling" (216). And, in another work, he states, "To 'dwell poetically' means to stand in the presence of the gods and to be involved in the proximity of the essence of things" ("Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" 282). This "dwelling" of the poet that Heidegger expounds upon refers to the unique ability of poetic language to stand in "proximity"
to the essential and to touch the originary nature of being.

Heidegger's attention to the poet's connection to the question of being shows a concern for how this "conversation" occurs in time. The importance of defining the temporal structure of being is imperative to his philosophy as a phenomenologist concerned with the basic question of humanity's existence. Linking the question of time to that of poetry, he states:

Only after "ravenous time" has been riven into present, past and future, does the possibility arise of agreeing on something permanent. We have been a single conversation since the time when it 'is time.' Ever since time arose, we have existed historically. Both—existence as a single conversation and historical existence—are alike ancient, they belong together and are the same thing.

("Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" 279)

This notion of a "single conversation" alludes to being as inclusive of both historical existence and the ahistorical nature of being's having a nature outside temporality. Heidegger is sure to emphasizes the unity of the "conversation" of being; existence belongs to a greater notion of being, as well as residing within time or history. He expresses his concern with the way in which language initiates history by quoting from Hölderlin's "Remembrance": "But that which remains, is established by the poets" (280). Commenting on these lines, Heidegger states that the poet founds "a firm relation" to true existence: "The speech of the poet is establishment not only in the sense of the free act of giving, but at the same time in the sense of the firm basing of human existence on its foundation" (281-282). If the poet's word founds being, then it also is that which begins the conversation of being and human existence; it is, then, what brings humanity back

\[^{23}\text{In Being and Time, Heidegger describes Dasein, or being, as not within the parameters of birth and death but as "stretching" alongside temporal existence: "It stretches itself along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along. The 'between' which relates to birth and death already lies in the Being of Dasein." (426).}\]
from "the abyss" during "the destitute time."

In an analysis of Heidegger's appraisal of the technological age, and the devastation that is Western metaphysics, J.L. Mehta articulates well the concern of Heidegger in a manner that facilitates a comparison to Paz and to the previous study of Hindu thought. In "Heidegger and the Comparison of Indian and Western Philosophy," Mehta summarizes a basic point within the essays on Hölderlin's poetry by remarking that at the center of the drive to overcome the devastation of being is the notion of "home," or of "dwelling" : "The question of Being, as he raises it, amounts at the same time to a quest for a way of thought that can redeem our humanity by overcoming 'the oblivion of Being' and so enable us to break the omnipotence of technology and live in the world as truly our home, in the 'neighborhood' of Being" (311). This concern for being-at-home relates to Paz's final statements in "La revelación poética," where he makes a discussion of religion and ontology in relation to poetry become a meditation on the religio-ethical dimension of poetry, based in the fundamental creativity of the poetic. Paz highlights the interwoven nature of being and individual beings, which is the "conjunction" of ontologies by recognizing the cohabitation of opposites in the same, which corresponds to Heidegger's "single conversation." Paz states, "Es tiemp y ésta aquí. Es el hombre lanzado a ser todos los contrarios que lo constituyen. Y puede llegar a ser todos ellos poerque al nacer ya los lleva en sí, ya es estos. Al ser él mismo, es otro. Otros. Manifestarlos, realizarlos, es la tarea del hombre y del poeta" (El arco y la lira 155). For Paz, the connection between the philosophical traditions in Hinduism and Heideggerian phenomenology resides in this incorporation of notions of being, resulting in a recognition of and belief in the stability of opposites. This characteristic of Paz's thought resonates with the way in which he writes his poetry, which contains clear

24."It is time and it is here. It is man thrown to be all the opposites that constitute him. And he can become them all because at birth he has them in him already, he already is these opposites. In being himself, he is another. Others. To manifest them, to realize them, is the task of the man and the poet" (The Bow and the Lyre 139).
allusions to both European and Indian thought. For Paz, residing at home as a poet consists in traveling the world and understanding the sameness of the other, whether culturally speaking or in the sense of alterity. In his poetry written in India, he, indeed, "manifests the other" through poetry, and he continues the conversation of being that perpetually carries on in his writing.

Beginning the collection *Ladera Este*, “El Balcón” describes a recurrent image in Paz's prose and poetry; it is the experience of standing on a terrace and gazing over a city veiled in darkness. He frequently writes about this experience of looking over the scene of a city, a ruined temple, or a natural feature, like a garden. In “El Balcón,” there is a sense of instantaneous perception by the poet. As he observes the city of Delhi by night, he indicates its momentary existence, how it is at that particular instance. The apparition of the city is what Paz describes in saying:

Quieta

en mitad de la noche

no a la deriva de los siglos

no tendida

clavada

como idea fija

en el centro de la incandescencia

Delhi. (164, 1-8).

[Stillness
in the middle of the night

not adrift with centuries

not spreading out

nailed/

like a fixed idea

to the center of incandescence

Delhi. (165, 1-8)]

In "Understanding Octavio Paz," an introduction to Paz's poetics, as well as a biographical source for Paz's life, José Quiroga remarks on this vision of the city as an absence of materiality; it cannot be seen in the night, apart from the neon lights of the airport. He states, “The poet's 'entrance upon matter,' then, can only take place because of the flexibility afforded by the inner vision of night, uncorrupted by the mirages of daylight, capable of giving objects a kind of formlessness. Both the city and the night are seen as one shape of unclear contours: night has a body and so does the city” (114). The image of the city at night creates a sense of corporeality in the poem. The night, in its shrouding of the city, gives it “formlessness.” In this "inner vision of night," it appears that the poet perceives maya in two ways; he understands the night to be symbolic of the appearance of reality—while at the same time, he senses that this night vision gives him certain knowledge of the true, interconnected being of the city, its objects, and the nothingness of the night. This observation reveals to the poet the illusion of the city while at the same time giving it a type of body.

By means of language, the poet intervenes in the darkness by describing the city from his
point of view on the balcony. Paradoxically, the night is an unveiling of the city by its making apparent the ephemeral quality of the buildings, people, and other physical objects of the real world. The poet recognizes that in the near future, when the sun rises, this vision will end and the physical will again have real, physical characteristics. The distinction between the night and the day reveals the fact that in the light these objects are recognizable and are thus given proper names: "Mañana tendrán nombre/ erguidos serán casas/ mañana serán árboles" (164, 23-25).25 As a means of illuminating the phenomenal quality of reality, language gives these object being by means of recognition in the light and then by subsequently naming them. And, it is the poet's perception that helps him in understanding the duality of being. In the Hiedeggerian and the Hindu sense, he "begins the conversation" of being through this knowledge and is connected to the ultimate sense of being, out of "destitution" or "illusion" and into "dwelling."

The poet recognizes his own temporal existence while observing the duplicity of being, through the veil of maya and the knowledge of being beyond this appearance. In Vislumbres de la India, Paz offers a brief commentary on the doctrine of maya, associating the idea with the Advaita Vedanta's nondualistic philosophy, as well as with the Bhakti Saints' conceptions of this cosmic force. He states, "Maya es tiempo pero no en el sentido occidental, que lo ve como un proceso dinámico, sino como vana repetición de una falsa realidad, una apriencia. Todo lo que cambia adolece de irrealidad; lo real es lo que permanece: el ser absoluto (Brahman)" (204).26 Paz's relegation of maya to a temporal status supports his use of "incandescent" images in constructing Delhi at night in "El balcón." In the poem the speaker changes his subject, after having recognized the city, to the connection between himself and time:

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25“Tomorrow they will have names/ they will stand and be houses/ tomorrow they will be trees” (Weinberger 165, 23-25).
26“Maya is time, not in the Western sense—a dynamic process—but the useless repetition of a false reality, an apparition. Everything that changes suffers from unreality; the real is what lasts: Absolute Being (Brahman)” (Weinberger 189).
Estoy aquí
    en mi comienzo
No me reniego
    me sustento
Acodando al balcón
    veo
nubarrones y un pedazo de luna
lo que está aquí visible
casas gente
    lo real presente
vencido por la hora. (167, 59-69)

[I am here

    at my beginning

I don't deny myself

    I sustain myself

Leaning over the balcony

    I see

huge clouds and a piece of the moon

all this visible here

people houses
the real present

conquered by the hour. (167, 59-69)]

The poet recognizes that there is a beginning in which he enters upon the scene of the city and into temporality. Without denying the present, he continues to observe the city by the light of “un pedazo de luna”. The ethereal quality of these images does not prevent him from discerning what he sees, which are the “casas gentes”. The juxtaposition of these two words creates the sense of one nominal being, a type of “house people”. Yet, this compound noun reveals what the poet recognizes in the phenomenal world; they are houses with people residing within them. Using Heidegger’s phrase, one sees that the poet ascertains that the people are historical beings, who are within “lo real presente” and “vencido por la hora.” Through this understanding the poet begins his “dwelling poetically.”

Concluding the poem the poet experiences the abeyance of what José Quiroga calls the poet’s “entrance upon matter,” and this stalled moment is part of his “inner vision” in grasping time conceptually, as well as in comprehending his place in “the hour” (114):

La hora me levanta

hambre de incarnación padece el tiempo

Más allá de mí mismo

en algún lado aguardo mi llegada. (170, 139-143)

[The hour lifts me
time hungers for incarnation]
Beyond myself

somewhere

I wait for my arrival. (171, 139-143)]

“La hora me levanta” signifies how this instant of observation, which is the poem, pulls him out of the present and outside of time. Separated from the cycle of the hour, the poet is able to reflect on time and language in this moment, yet he also feels the weight of the inevitable “incarnation” of time. This metaphor of “hungry time” represents the movement of being towards temporality, through the ontological power of language. In the writing of his poem, the poet is creating the historical world, as what Heidegger describes as "...establishment not only in the sense of the free act of giving, but at the same time in the sense of the firm basing of human existence on its foundation" ("Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" 281-282).

If one were to compare this thought with the Advaita's maya, in the poet's act of "founding" human existence in time, the poet holds the double duty of both creating and refuting maya. By establishing the historical, the poet opens humanity to the possibility of devastation, illusion, and suffering; however, he also responds to this propensity to decay by continually "reaching into the abyss" and bringing a realization for the need to return to "dwelling," or as J. L. Mehta states, "to break the omnipotence of technology and live in the world as truly our home, in the 'neighborhood' of Being'" (311). This experience of "reaching into the abyss," which one observes in Paz's poem, can be described as ecstatic. In Saklani's reading of maya in the medieval Bhakti Saints, he references the experiential state of the seeker who escapes the illusion of the phenomenal:
A person under the feverish excitement of maya and forgetful of his own smallness imagines that he can embrace the whole of divinity within his own bosom. But when the illusion passes away, a single ray of divine light is seen to detect and discover the universal illusion of maya, it will fly away just as a thief runs away when he is discovered. (49)

The "fever" of the person is the first sign of movement towards liberation, or moksa. This experience reveals his or her "smallness" by means of a "divine light"; it is this light that unveils maya and liberates the person.

In a similar way, Paz describes the Heideggerian notion of a "rupture" of loneliness caused by the "beloved," taking one out of despair into a form of dwelling in being:

Todo se ha puesto a vivir una ida aparte, impenetrable. El mundo se hace ajeno....Y en ese instante sobreviene lo inesperado, lo que ya no esperábamos. El goce ante la irrupción de la presencia amada....Todo había perdido sentido y nosotros estábamos al borde del precipicio de la existencia bruta. (El arco y la lira 151-152)

[Everything has begun to live a separate, impenetrable life. The world becomes alien. And at that instant the unexpected, that which we no longer hoped for supervenes. The joy in the eruption of the beloved presence....Everything had lost its meaning, and we were on the brink of the precipice of brute existence. (Simms 135)]

This passage articulates the way one encounters the nature of true existence through another person and how he or she has this ecstatic revelation, much like the moksa from maya in the
differing traditions of Hinduism. For Paz, this experience occurs in what one could call “dwelling poetically with others,” an incorporation of the “neighborhood of being” and Heidegger’s “dwelling poetically” as authentic existence. One sees in Paz's poetry this outward look on the world that is illuminated by the presence of phenomenal objects; however, there is also a recognition of the ahistorical, interconnected quality of being. It is in this dualism that Paz writes his poet as anticipating his entrance into the scene of Delhi, where he finds “people,” “houses,” and “trees,” all phenomenal objects marking his historicity ("El balcón” 25, 67). In his movement into temporality, the poet carries with him the knowledge of the way to dwell in connection to being, fighting off the separation caused by modernity and embracing the other of time and of the self.

In “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger characterizes Hölderlin as “the poet of the poet” (289). This statement summarizes Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin as the poet that goes into the abyss, which he describes here as being “Between” (288). He states, “In this way the essence of poetry is joined on to the laws of the signs of the gods and of the voice of the people, laws which tend towards and away from each other. The poet himself stands between the former — the gods, and the latter — the people. He is one who has been cast out — out into that Between....” (288). Paz, too, conceives of the poet's role in this manner, understanding the need to recover a state of being that has been lost in modernity. In the essay “Octavio Paz: The Poet as Philosopher,” Manuel Durán regards Paz as Heidegger does Hölderlin in his essays on poetry. Durán evaluates the universal, yet specific, ideas within Paz's prose and poetry as elements of philosophical inquiry: “Paz faces the world, sees the world as a unity, confronts the diversities of culture and explains their apparent oppositions and contradictions, their conjunctions and disjunctions, as different responses to the same identical questions” (592). The varying, at times
contradictory, elements of Paz's writing show his concern with these essential questions of being, and especially a care for being-in-the-world. Ultimately, this preoccupation with ontological inquiry points Paz's reader to the present, to a historical moment. Concluding *Vislumbres de la India*, Paz poignantly asks, “¿En que tiempo vivimos?” (211). This continual flux in situating himself philosophically, religiously, and politically indicates Paz's status as a poet of the “Between.” Because of the concern taken by the poet in this role, Paz becomes for Durán the epitome of the “philosopher-poet” (594). Bridging the gap between East and West in the writing of Paz, the interconnection of discourse on philosophy and religion speaks to the accuracy of this evaluation, and it shows that Paz, too, is “the poet of the poet.”

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27 “In what time do we live?” (195).
CHAPTER 3

READING EL MONO GRAMÁTICO AS A NARRATIVE-POETICS OF BECOMING

So, to be a foreigner in one’s own language...It is to impose on the language, insofar as one speaks it perfectly and soberly, that line of variation that will make you a foreigner in your own tongue, or of the foreign tongue, yours, or of your tongue, an imminent bilingualism for you foreignness.

- Gilles Deleuze (“One Manifesto Less” 213)

In the memoir-like essay Vislumbres de la India, Octavio Paz reflects on his relationship of nearly half of century with the country of India by recalling the spaces, smells, and people that captured his thought and left a marked impression on his critical and poetic work. This encounter with India is present mainly as descriptions throughout his writing during and after his tenure as Mexican ambassador to India during the 1960's. Images of cities and landscapes form a turn in his work in which Paz begins to incorporate Eastern thought and cultural artifacts into his somewhat traditional forms of poetry and criticism. Although not wholly abandoning his previous poetics, which can be found delineated in his well-known work on poetics, El arco y la lira, his post-India writing reflects the phenomenal landscape of ideas that Paz describes as “una graduación hecha de oposiciones y conjunciones a un tiempo violentas y sutiles” (Vislumbres 160).28 This quality of “conjunctions,” which Paz finds so essential to Indian culture, informs his reader of the affects Paz experienced while living in India, demonstrating a lasting change in the rhetorical and philosophical structure of his work. In the poetic narrative El mono gramático, Paz

28“A graduation of opposites that are simultaneously pronounced and subtle. Not a succession, as in the West, but a conjunction” (In Light of India 138).
attempts what many of his critics call his most experimental work of poetry and criticism by erasing boundaries of genre and narrative structure. In this piece Paz finds a means of actualizing the quality of Indian “conjunction,” and by doing so crosses a new threshold of his creative and philosophical imagination.

Upon starting the narrative, which is a path to the town of Galta outside New Delhi, the reader finds himself traveling along with the author/narrator of *El mono gramático* towards an imaginative yet real location within the memory of the writer. This journey involves a reflection on the author's recollection of the phenomenal aspects of the Indian landscape, as well as a philosophical inquiry into the nature of language, which penetrates every aspect of the narrative. Intriguing and enigmatic, the text has created differing opinions regarding Paz's purpose in creating this work. From admiration of Paz's ability demonstrated in the text to a strident critique of his hegemonic position as Western poet in India, this criticism presents an interesting debate on an elusive text of a generally traditional author. As a means of entering into the existing dialogue on *El mono gramático*, this essay attempts to utilize several concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to investigate this experimental text, which displays so well Paz's reflection on the joining of opposing ideas. By using these concepts as tools to discover how Paz makes Spanish “stutter” and as a means of tracing the ways in which the author creates “lines of flight” within his writing on poetry and philosophy, this essay contests the critique of Miguel Oviedo, who sees *El mono gramático* as an assertion of Paz's poetic and philosophical ideology over that of India, marginalizing the voice of characters and places that represent the voice of the cultural other. By looking at this work in terms of a poetics of becoming or a deterritorialization of Spanish and of genre form, this analysis aims to look
beyond a postcolonial critique of the text, as a means of seeing the author as a Deleuzian creator of concepts and lines of flight in his thought concerning a philosophical poetics.

Much of the critical work in dialogue with Paz's *El mono gramático* concentrates on the work as a movement in Paz's thought towards a destabilization of genre forms, a mixing of his previous criticism, poetry, and narrative. As part of a general attempt to locate Paz's writing chronologically, José Miguel Oviedo writes in “Return to the Beginning: Paz in His Recent Poetry” that *El mono gramático* represents a desire to “produce a text which would be an intersection of poetry, narrative and essay, thus putting into practice his former assertion that poetry is always a sort of 'critical poetry,' a reflection of itself” (617). The “critical poetry” of this work does in fact cross genres and forms a new type of critical narrative and poetics in the work of Paz. In addition to recognizing this aspect of the work, Oviedo notes the concentration on foundational questions regarding language that Paz posits by means of this “critical poetry.” As in much of his writing, the questions upon which *El mono gramático* hinges are ones concerned primarily with the relationship between language and ontology. In “The Politics of Writing in Octavio Paz's *El mono* gramático,” Hugo Moreno qualifies the work as “a political text in that it is an effort to critique language through poetry,” as well as noting the preeminence of this philosophical concern with language in the work (12, 16). Moreno's central critique of Paz's concentration on language is that as a narrative set in Galta *El mono gramático* denies the geographic space and its inhabitants’ agency, seeing that Paz as a Western writer utilizes the space as a location for his poetic work. Moreno states that Paz heralds the poet as a creative king,

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29I say “much of the critical work” cautiously because of the general lack of writing on this piece in Paz studies. It seems to hold an elusive role for many critics in the lineage of his work, as is evident by the small amount of criticism on the text, as well as the general glossing of the text by many and the in-depth study of it by very few. José Miguel Oviedo states “that criticism [of the poem] has said it all, and that at the same time everything remains to be said,” suggesting the depth of research and critical opinion in existence, as well as the need for further critical work in certain areas of Paz’s canon (“Return to the Beginning” 612).
ruling the discourse of the text and ignoring the cultural traditions within which he writes:
“...these different tasks of the text are intimately bound to his choice in employing a multiplicity of speaking voices without ever ceding space to those voices that are frozen at the enchanted margins of the author's single-minded purpose. Language...” (5). As a reader of Paz, one must agree with Moreno’s argument that language is a central concern in Paz’s writing; this philosophical trajectory can be traced back to the earliest of Paz’s commentaries on poetry, as well as to the clear attribution of the influence of Heideggerian ontology within these texts.

Although Moreno’s evaluation of El mono gramático offers an important critique of Paz’s relationship to India, it is necessary for one to also see the text, as well as much of Paz’s poetry written in India, with the poet’s intentions in mind, as syncretic and as marking a development in Paz’s thought, one more stage whereby Paz absorbs the culture within which he writes and created new ideas from this new perspective. Reinforcing his critique at the end of his analysis of the text, Moreno sees Paz’s “meditation on language” as a quest for an “‘originary,’ unhistorical” ontological property of language, a search for “the true” nature of the world:

In Paz’s quest for a “transparent” language he, the poet-king, silences the voices of everyone else gathered into the Republic for the sake of the poetic beauty and harmonious resonance of the text. In this way, Paz’s chosen language experience cannibalizes the discourses of the others in order to present a unitary text where free reign can be given to the contemplation of language—as if language no longer came from and spoke for specific places in the world. (16)

Moreno’s argument provides a type of cultural-studies critique concerning Paz’s writing in India, seeing this period of his writing as concentrating too heavily on philosophical questions, instead
of giving agency to those whose land Paz utilizes in his narrative and poetic projects. Paz’s alleged inattention to the ‘other’ in this text the larger discussion of Paz’s prioritization of questions of language over the specifics of culture. This argument has a certain legitimacy, perhaps, but the question remains, how does El mono gramático in particular display Paz’s ability to use experimental forms in writing as a means of engaging these perennial meditations on language, while also creating with the Spanish language a type of poetics of becoming and a minor literature within his writing in India?

In order to utilize the Deleuzian concepts for this analysis, one must first see how Deleuze and Guattari use the concepts “becoming,” “stuttering,” and “percept,” to analyze ways in which writers deterritorialize language within literary texts in order to push a major language to the limits of its syntactic and phonetic fields and thereby create within the text “the outside” of that major language (“He Stuttered” 112). For Deleuze, this creative project is philosophical in nature, since it involves to the writer’s ability to create something conceptually new through the language of a literary work. As a response to the use of Deleuzian philosophy within cultural studies, as well as the tendency to situate Deleuze in the category of poststructuralist philosophy, Ronald Bogue in “Minor Writing and Minor Literature” addresses the connection between Deleuze’s basic philosophical inquiry with his literary interest in the writer’s ability to deterritorialize language. Just as Deleuze defines the purpose of philosophy as one of “creating concepts,” literature, too, provides a space for investigating how one might access the virtual possibilities of moving thought and language outside standard power structures within culture. In creating the new, Deleuze sees pure philosophy at work: “Simply, the time has come for us to ask what philosophy is….We already had the answer, which has not changed: philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts” (What is Philosophy? 2). This statement of
the purpose of philosophy carries over into how he also views the role of language in literature. By inventing new terms for the study of literature according to his philosophical viewpoint, Deleuze creates a lens through which to see the play of language within texts by certain authors; highlighting several of the uses of these terms helps in understanding how to construct a Deleuzian critical analysis of Paz in *El mono gramático*.

In Bogue’s presentation of the Deleuzian concept of minor literature, Bogue explains how minor writers, such as Kafka, resist the power structures existing within language that “control” the ways in which language is used and “channel them into acceptable pragmatic patterns and discipline deviant oscillations and perturbations” (107-108). By creating “lines of flight” within language, a writer produces “lines of continuous variation…immanent within the regimes of signs, available for actualization at any time” (108). This creation of “lines of continuous variation” within literature is both a philosophical and a political task, one that pushes language beyond culturally prescribed linguistic parameters. As a writer engages the virtual within the major language in which he/she writes, the language within the text shows certain signs of deterritorialization in what Deleuze characterizes as “becomings,” “stutterings,” and “percepts.”

In the third chapter of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, “What is a Minor Literature?,” Deleuze and Guattari address the political dimension of an author’s use of language by stating that the object of minor literature is, “To make use of the polylingualism of one’s own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones…” (26). My object, then is to approach Paz as a minor writer, and to concentrate specifically on the concepts of becoming, stuttering, and percepts.
In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe minor literature as a “becoming-other” whereby the minor writer attempts to move language “outside” the limits of a major language. In essence, “becoming-minor” describes the function of writing that innovates new way of using language:

Becoming-minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness is called autonomy. It is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming. (106)

A writer enters into an autonomous use of language by creating, “inventing” ways of making the language of a majority become minor. In this passage, as well as in nearly all his writing on literature, Deleuze emphasizes that it is not by incorporating foreign characteristics, bilingualisms or creoles into the language that a writer subjects language to becoming-minoritarian, but through the use of the major language and its limits in a foreign way. From the collection of writings in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze states in “He Stuttered,” “What [minor writers] do, rather, is invent a minor use of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they minorize this language, much as in music, where the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium” (109). Invention in writing creates contrapuntal form, a “line of continuous variation,” which is a becoming in which the writer engages the major language creatively and creates a minor form within the major language, which can be described in certain manners of becoming as “stuttering” or “percepts” in the language. Taking these opportunities for lines of flight in language, a writer crosses a linguistic border, yet remains in the dominant language; he or she becomes “a foreigner”: “It is to impose
on the language, on all the inner elements of the language—phonological, syntactic, semantic—the work of continuous variation” (“One Manifesto Less” 213). For Deleuze, stuttering in language is a designation of the way in which language is subjected to continuous variation, happening differently for certain writers. He describes the writer of this language as “the stutterer” because of the way the language is made to “vibrate and stutter” while it “passes though a zone of continuous variation”; he also states that these points of variation are ones of “disequilibrium or bifurcation” (“He Stuttered” 107-108). These stutterings affect the foundational linguistic elements of the language by altering, or playing with, the syntax, semantics, and phonology of the sentences. As in the musical example of changing a major chord by making it minor, the writer, too, can reshape language in ways that vary the linguistic patterns and structures at the morphological and sentence levels.

Having described the stuttering writer as a “foreigner in his own language,” Deleuze uses the example of the way in which T. E. Lawrence creates the ambiance of Arabia through his writing. In reading his text one would sense the very quality of the writing to be an entrance into the geographic and cultural space. He states, “Lawrence made English stumble in order to extract from it the music and visions of Arabia” (111). Deleuze notes the elements of the space in which Lawrence’s writing took place; there are signs of foreign language, even though he writes in English. In this case the writer creates a work in which the language becomes the cultural other by means of disorienting his native tongue to sound like the music of Arabia. The idea of the percept is closely linked to this special becoming noted by Deleuze as a quality of stuttering. The percept, too, describes the way in which the writer creates, in a sense, a living landscape out of the world: “We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it.
Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes” (*What is Philosophy?* 169). Deleuze goes on to describe the sensory experience of the percept:

> The percept is the landscape before man, in the absence of man. But why do we say this, since in all these cases the landscape is not independent of the supposed perceptions and memories? How could the town exist without or before man, or the mirror without the old woman it reflects, even if she does not look at herself in it?.... ‘Man absent from but entirely within the landscape.’ Characters can only exist, and the author can only create them, because they do not perceive but have passed into the landscape and are themselves part of the compound of sensations. (169)

The passage from Cézanne used here by Deleuze represents the way in which a place is given form within art as a means of evoking the human presence within these spaces. Characters become essential aspects of the landscapes in which they are made, “part of the compound of sensations,” meaning the images of landscapes are gatherings of sensations within the language of the literary text. In his evaluation of this affect within writing, Bogue states, “What artists do is to extract percepts from perceptions, affects from affections, and give them material embodiment, either by realizing sensation within the material they manipulate or by making the material pass into sensation” (112). As the landscape gains embodiment in writing, a “becoming-world” occurs through the presentation of non-human things through created sensations within writing, much like the vibrations caused by stuttering, which actualizes the possibility of their existence and “embodies” these entities. Although what becomings through stutterings and percepts look like, in a practical sense, seems unclear, these concepts provide a manner of
analyzing features in poetry and in narrative that show how language is pushed to its limits and is
deterritorialized.

Analyzing Paz’s *El mono gramático* with these Deleuzian concepts in mind provides one
with a lens through which one can see his writing as an artistic-critical-philosophical project.
Although Paz attempts this type of syncretism of fields of knowledge in much of his work, it is
in this text that he genuinely embarks on a project of fusing and varying these areas of thought.\(^{30}\)
The poetic narrative of the text is set as a path to a city of ruins, Galta; it is a physical journey led
by the narrator, as well as a critical-philosophical one in which the text enters into moments of
meditation on language, philosophy, and the possibility of an end to this journey and to the
philosophical meditation. The images seen along the path gravitate towards a phenomenal world
in which there are visions of religious figures from Hinduism, such as the monkey-god Hanuman,
as well as visions of writing as possibility. In “The Monkey Grammari an or Poetry as Reconciliation,”
Jaime Alazraki analyses the complexity of this movement between narration and contemplative
inquiry by stating, “Paz turns the metaphorical side of the path to its more literal use by giving a
physical account of his visit to the decayed city: its dusty road, aged vegetation, ruined buildings,
outcast inhabitants….its core is rather a reflection on Galta which becomes a reflection on the
poetic act, which in turn broadens into a reflection on language” (609). Walking along the path to
Galta is for the narrator an unpredictable progression of thought, in which the images of the
landscape of the ruined Indian city guide the narrative towards the question of the end of writing
and contemplation.

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\(^{30}\) In “The Monkey Grammari an or Poetry as Reconciliation,” Jaime Alazraki’s analysis of the text suggests that *El
mono gramático* is philosophically one of Paz’s “most complex works,” and that it begs for critical study (608).
Paz develops in this text a road of becoming, stating frequently, “La fijeza es siempre momentánea” (25). Emerging as a Leitmotif within the text, this statement resounds with the meditative quality of Paz’s thought throughout the work, which seeks not an answer to this thought but a furthering of its exemplification through images and philosophical monologue in the narrative. Preceding these first contemplations on change and becoming, the text sets up the surrounding environment through the narrator’s description of what he sees outside his window. This vision is common in Paz’s narrative text, as well as in his poetry of Ladera este, also written as a reflection on the writer’s time in India. The images of landscapes commonly arise out of the speaker’s looking out of a window or off of a balcony, giving a removed sentiment as if he were at some physical and metaphysical distance. At the beginning of El Mono Gramático, the speaker states:

Tras mi ventana, a unos trescientos metros, la mole verdinegra de la arboleda, montaña de hojas y ramas que se bambolea y amenaza con desplomarse. Un pueblo de hayas, abedules, álamos y fresnos congregados sobre una ligerísima eminencia del terreno….El viento los sacude y los golpea hasta hacerlo alular. Los árboles se retueracen, se doblan, se yerguen de Nuevo con gran estruendo y se estiran como si quisiesen desarraigarse y huir. (13)

[Through my window, some three hundred yards away, the dark green bulk of the grove of trees, a mountain of leaves and branches that sways back and forth and threatens to fall over. A populace of beeches, birches, aspens, and ash trees gathered together on a slight prominence….The wind shakes them and lashes them until they howl in agony. The trees twist, bend straighten up again with a

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31 “Fixity is always momentary” (The Monkey Grammarian 17).
deafening creak and strain upward as though struggling to uproot themselves and flee. (5)]

The description of the trees creates the poet’s vision of the Indian landscape; these entities of organic life provide a foundation for his poetic meditation, initiating the poet’s journey to Galta. Although he is at a distance, “some three hundred yards away,” he is present and feels the movement and anxiety of the firmly rooted trees. Here, the Deleuzian concept of the percept aids in sensing how the poet obtains a sense of presence through the verbal landscape painting. As T.E. Lawrence creates the mood of Arabia, giving it life through his text, Paz alludes to the specific trees and root systems within the groves of this region outside New Delhi, India, showing diversity of plant life and the great root systems of these beings that hold them to the ground (“He Stuttered” 111). The description of the movement of the trees in the grove produces a building momentum within the text, representing the stirring and desire for movement within the poet. The fixed station of the trees confirms the poet’s sense of ontological grounding; he is unable to move, to become. Thus, the trees imply a desire for freedom of movement from himself to the image of the trees. The poet states, however, that the trees, “prefieren quedarse donde están…los habita una obstinación silenciosa” (13). He goes on to see his sentimental projection as impossible, understanding that nature works under a different, organic movement: “Sí, sé que la naturaleza—o lo que así llamamos: ese conjunto de objectos y procesos que no rodea y que, alternativamente, nos engendra y nos devora—no es nuestro cómplice ni nuestro confidente. No es lícito proyectar nuestros sentimientos en las cosas ni atribuirles nuestras sensaciones y pasiones. ¿Tampoco lo serà ver en ellas en guía, una doctrina de vida?” (15).
narrator sees in nature what he calls the “wisdom” of momentary fixity and then the inevitable change of natural life—“ese conjunto de objectos y procesos” (10).

Through the creation of landscape imagery, the poet’s narrative is guided in its reflection on natural metamorphosis, which he calls “change” and “becoming,” and which he allows to shape his thoughts on language. The continual growth and destruction of life, which the poet posits as “una doctrina de vida,” becomes a metaphor for “life” and also for the movement and change in language's meaning; it is what he sees as “transformaciones incesantes...todas son traducciones de traducciones” (28). This section of the text links the double path of the narration between the images of India on the path to Galta and the meditation on language. When these two parts cross, there are moments that one might classify as “stutterings,” where the writer's description of the landscape coincides with his philosophical inquiry into the nature of language and being. Ending this chapter, the poet states that the Leitmotif “fixity is always momentary” must be broken down in order to understand that “fixity is always a moment of change” (23). Making this point concerning language's momentary hold of meaning, he states:

Por tanto, no hay que decir ni siempre ni nunca, sino casi siempre o casi nunca….la fijeza (siempre, nunca, casi siempre, casi nunca, etc.) es momentánea (siempre, nunca, casi siempre, casi nunca, etc.) fijeza (siempre, nunca, casi siempre, casi nunca, etc.) es momentánea (siempre, nunca, casi siempre, casi nunca, etc.) la fijeza…. (30)

[Therefore we ought not to say either always or never, but almost always or almost never....fixity (always, never, almost, always, almost never, etc.) is

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34. “Ceaseless transformations...All of them are translations of translations” (21).
momentary (always, never, almost always, almost never, etc.) fixity (always, never, almost, always, almost never, etc.) is momentary (always, never, almost always, almost never, etc.) fixity. (23)

This section of the text is a point of intensity where the poet is engaging in a philosophical-poetic exploration of language through the reflection on India. Through the repetition of the statement “la fijeza es momentánea,” the poet pushes language to its limit of meaning as a means of showing the instability of meaning and of the poet's identity.

Further in the text, these moments of stuttering become more significant in the way in which they suggest a “becoming” in the writing. In the previous textual examples, the percept and stuttering helped to destabilize meaning within the text, especially in relation to the narrator’s identity and his path of writing. By doing so, these passages “extract percepts from perceptions, affects from affections, and give them material embodiment” (Bogue 112). In the following section, the poet says, “Los árboles repiten a los árboles, las arenas a las arenas...repito las repeticiones, perdido en la maleza de signos....Eres (soy) es una repetición entre las repeticiones. Es eres soy: soy es eres: eres es soy. Demoliciones: me tiendo sobre mis trituraciones, yo habito mis demoliciones” (40). By repeating the verbal conjugations of “ser,” the basic verb form of “to be,” the narrator confuses his own identity with that of others and with inanimate things. This repetition conflates the identities between the first, second, and third persons, creating a moment of stuttering in which the verb most closely signifying existence and being forms the entire sentence, which allows the verb to hold the syntactic role of nouns and other parts of speech. This stuttering shows that the poet sees his identity as a mixture, as

35. “The trees repeat other trees, the sands other sands...I repeat repetitions, lost in the thicket of signs....You are is I am: you are is I. Demolitions: I stretch out full length atop my triturations, I inhabit my demolitions” (37).
destroyed but habitable. The momentarity of fixity manifests itself in the way in which the poet reveals the possibility for infinite repetitions, the virtually real that can be accessed through his writing of the journey. By creating the images of Galta and a meditation on language, he forges new possible identities, but this creation and destruction is not merely a nominal form. By using verb forms to make up his sentences, the poet speaks of language as active, changing, and moving. He discloses a proposed philosophical foundation of language, which enables his meditation on the ontological state of entities in a condition of perpetual becoming.

As part of Paz's text, there are various photographs and depictions of Galta, including several drawings of the monkey-god Hanuman. The poet's expression, “Eres (soy) es una repetición entre las repeticiones. Es eres soy: soy es eres: eres es soy,” is juxtaposed against a photograph of a great stone sculpture of Hanuman on which devotees journeying to Galta to write prayers (40). And, it is here in the text that the narrator brings in the two other central persons of his narrative—Hanuman and Splendor. Following this chapter he reflects at length on the “monkey-grammarian” Hanuman as he sees remnants of the pilgrim's devotion to the site of his temple in Galta in the writing on the stone: “Espesura indescifrable de líneas, trazos, volutas, mapas: discurso del fuego sobre el muro” (41). In this mixture of images and lines on the wall, the poet recognizes, or at perhaps imagines, the body of a woman, Splendor. She is nude and her image mixes with that of a pool of water: “Sobre el cuerpo tendido de Esplendor sube y baja el oleaje. Sombra de un animal bebiendo sombras entre las piernas abiertas de la muchacha. El agua: la sombra; la luz: el silencio. La luz: el agua; la sombra: el silencio. El silencio: el agua; la

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36. *An indecipherable thicket of lines, strokes, spirals, maps: the discourse of fire on the wall* (38).
Splendor's description interlocks with the physical world around which the vision of her feminine body takes place. The poet notes the basic element of life, “agua,” then qualities of light, “sombra” and “luz,” as well as the absence of sound in this vision, “silencio.” These elements contrast with her body, yet they become part of her as well by the washing of water over her legs, and by the play of light within the interstices of her body—“sombras de las piernas abiertas” (42). The syntax of the final sentence within this passage separates the individual elements described by the poet, and it puts them in differing relationships, each in connection with the other element in a sort of analogous relation. This section separates the elements in the image, foreshadowing the dissection of Splendor's body later in the text.

The narration concerning Splendor ends with a stark image of her body dissected and in many pieces, and it is divided to the point of being imperceptible, unable to be seen: “El cuerpo de Esplendor se retuerce, se desgaja y se reparte en una, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, ocho, nueve, diez porciones—hasta desvanecerse enteramente” (65). This moment of violence in the text follows an erotic love scene between Splendor and a man, and their bodies in sexual union are described as “cuerpo más palpado que visto, cuerpo hecho de pedazos de cuerpo...corriente de vibraciones de sensaciones de percepciones de imágenes de sensaciones de vibraciones ...cadena de las percepciones de las sensaciones del cuerpo total que se disipa” (67). The poet describes how the lovers' bodies dissolve into individuated parts during intercourse, and these portions of their bodies become vibrations through the intense experience of sex. In the poet's vision, the

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38. “Splendor's body is racked, torn apart, divided into one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten parts—until it finally vanishes altogether” (70).
39. “...a body more felt than seen, a body made of pieces of a body...a current of vibrations of sensations of perceptions of images of sensations of vibrations...a chain of sensations of the total body that fades away to nothingness” (67).
anthropomorphized images of Splendor and her lover “dissipate” as they make love, becoming only parts of bodies and then “nothing.” The poet reveals later that this violent bodily description is a metaphor for sacrifice and the restorative function of poetry as a linguistic act. Stating that in the midst of this tale of the woman's dismemberment, related here to a Hindu ritual, the poet reflects on a resurrection ritual, in which the body of Splendor is returned by the gods. He states, “En esta secuencia litúrgica hay diez divinos, diez oblaciones, diez recompensas, diez porciones del grupo del sacrificio y el Poema que la dice consiste en estrofas de versos de diez sílabas. El poema no es otro que Esplendor” (82). The sequences of ten form together a restorative ritual that brings Splendor embodiment; she gains life again after having dissolved into nothingness during the intense erotic scene. Yet, the poet adds here that she is not just a figure of a woman's body and that she is made of parts of words. Her body is the Poem, and the account of her dismemberment and resurrection is the path of language. Her restoration serves to reveal how the creation of the poem, through language, brings life once again.

Like the poet-narrator, the character juxtaposed to Splendor in the narration, Hanuman, too, is on a journey founded in language within the text, in which he realizes the path of language, much as the narrator does in his meditations on language:

Una página de enmarañada caligrafía vegetal. Maleza de signos: ¿cómo leerla, cómo abrirse paso entre esta espesura? Hanuman sonríe con place ante la analogía que se le acaba de ocurrir: caligrafía y vegetación, arboleda y escritura, lectura y camino. La lecture considerada como un camino hacia...El camino como una lectura: ¿una interpretación del mundo natural? Vuelve a cerrar los ojos y se ve a

40“In this liturgical sequence there are ten divinities, ten oblations, ten restitutions, ten portions of the group of the sacrifice, and the Poem in which it is said consists of stanzas of verses of ten syllables. The Poem is none other than Splendor” (92).
si mismo, en otro edad, escribiendo....Por eso el universo es un texto insenato y que ni siquiera para los dioses es legible. La crítica del universo (y la de los dioses) se llama gramática....(47)

[A page of tangled plant calligraphy. A thicket of signs: how to read it, how to clear a path through this denseness? Hanuman smiles with pleasure at the analogy that has just occurred to him: calligraphy and vegetation, a grove of trees and writing, reading and a path. Following a path: reading a stretch of ground deciphering a fragment of world. Reading considered as a path toward...The path as a reading: an interpretation of the natural world? He closes his eyes once more and sees himself in another age, writing....Hence the universe is a meaningless text, one which even the gods find illegible. The critique of the universe (and that of the gods) is called grammar. (47-48)]

The divine monkey sees the natural world around him in the form of signs that carry meaning, and his path is a revelation of their meanings, a constant interpretive process. The journey of Hanuman looks much like that of the poet-narrator, and in fact, Hanuman is the poet’s double, in that both are on this Indian path, contemplating language. Throughout the text the photographs of the statues and drawings of Hanuman depict him as covered in writing, as if his very being were writing. It seems that in using Hanuman as “the monkey-grammariann” the narrator indicates that the writing on Hanuman calls for a reading of his body, which would allude to the impossibility of finding meaning in the “texto insenato,” or Hanuman's body. As a crucial, yet enigmatic point, this image of Hanuman means what the text states at the beginning, that there is no meaning, ultimately, with language: “lo mejor será escoger el camino de Galta, recorrello de nuevo (inventarlo a medida que lo recorro) y sin darme cuenta, casi insensiblemente, ir hasta el
fin....Tal vez por eso escribí 'ir hasta el fin': para saber qué hay detrás del fin. Una trampa verbal; después del fin no hay nada pues si algo hubiese el fin no sería fin” (11).\footnote{The best thing to do will be to choose the path to Galta, traverse it again (invent it as I traverse it), and without realizing it, almost imperceptibly, go to the end....Perhaps that is why I wrote 'going to the end': in order to find out, in order to discover what there is after the end. A verbal trap; after the end there is nothing, since if there were, the end would not be the end” (1-2).} From the beginning of the text, the narrator expresses with honest intention that he is on a journey towards an end by means of language, which creates the path. The vision of Hanuman, as well as that of Splendor, shows the elemental quality of language in the creation of being, shown in Splendor as the Poem, and in interpreting the world, as seen in Hanuman, the monkey-grammariam.

Through reading the narratives of Splendor and Hanuman, one might agree that Paz's narrative creation then follows what Moreno names “a quest to ask whether one can use language as a means to endow things with their actual being” (13). With Paz's former writings on poetics in mind, this one can indeed affirm Moreno's conclusion that “Paz earnestly invests his faith in the idea that poetry ought to effect a critique of everyday language in order to disclose for an instant the 'true' being of things” (14). Although Paz indeed “invests his faith” in poetry, by analyzing the text at hand it is clear that poetry does not necessarily disclose the “true being” of things, as Paz hoped to do in his earlier poetics.\footnote{This early poetics is analyzed in chapter one in regards to their Heideggerian influence by looking at El arco y la lira published in 1956, as well as the late Heideggerian poetic philosophy.} Standing as a symbol for reading, Hanuman projects the notion that the narrator's path is a reading, whereas Splendor emphasizes the path as the writing of poetry. As seen from the passage at the beginning of the text, both reading and writing lead to the end of language, as it dissolves upon being read or written. Paz suggests this idea in order to show the inability of language ultimately to mean anything, and this situation is so because of the ever-changing nature of both language and the natural world. One sees a corollary between a natural language of the forest and that of a written language in the image of
Hanuman reading the “enmarañada caligrafía vegetal,” as well as in the monkey-god's seemingly prophetic vision of writing. Through the use of these characters, which seem to be allegories in the narrative, Paz creates potential becomings and locations of stutterings as the narrator's journey parallels that of Splendor and Hanuman. These are instances of the narrator experiencing becoming-woman, becoming-divine/animal as his own identity is broken down along with that of the characters, and as the narratives become more intertwined. By means of his use of language in these sections, the poet makes Spanish “speak a foreign language,” an Eastern language saturated in the cultural images and myth of India. Through stutterings and the becomings of percepts, Paz makes “use of the polylingualism of one’s own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones” (“What is a Minor Literature” 26). In using India as the setting of his text, Paz is able to experiment with language and to deterritorialize the language syntactically and semantically. He does so in order to create a philosophical space in which he can question the foundations of language and those of his own poetics.

The purpose of utilizing the Indian landscape and religious tradition is to provide Paz an opportunity to occupy a location in which the Spanish language is marginal or minor. He uses this location as a place of becoming-other, and he finds that it is here that he is able to experiment with the power of poetry. Through his narrative-poetics in El mono gramático, Paz explores the infinite possibilities of creation with poetry, of pushing language to its limits, and of experimenting with his former, foundational poetics, which posit the essential relationship between language and ontology. Moreno states that Paz’s goal in the end is to describe the world philosophically through poetry: “Paz's meditation on language is a quest for an 'originary,'
unhistorical language that restores to human language its ability to present the world as it ‘is’ in actuality” (15). What Moreno seems to miss is the possibility of the virtual as an engagement of the real, but he instead emphasizes the actual political, cultural situation in which he writes. Paz’s poetry in the analyzed text is an exploration of the real, which is shown in the many complex descriptions and pictures of India, the ruined temples, as well as the natural features of the animal and plant life seen during this journey. Instead of viewing Paz's text as a hegemonic encounter with a cultural other, which Moreno suggests, one can interpret the text through the terms Paz explicitly uses to describe poetry at the conclusion of the text:

La poesía no quiere saber qué hay al fin del camino; concibe al texto como una serie de estratos traslúcidos en cuyo interior las distintas partes—las distintas corrientes verbales y semánticas—, al entrelazarse o desenlazarse, reflejarse o anularse, producen momentáneas configuraciones. La poesía busca, se contempla, se funde y se anula en las cristalizaciones del lenguaje. Apariciones, metamorfosis, volatizaciones, precipitaciones de presencias. (134)

[Poetry does not attempt to discover what there is at the end of the road; it conceives of the text as a series of transparent strata within which the various parts—the different verbal and semantic currents—produce momentary configurations as they intertwine or break apart, as they reflect each other or efface each other. Poetry contemplates itself, fuses with itself, and obliterates itself in the crystallizations of language. (155)]

As meta-poetic discourse within this experimental text, the narrator in this passage reflects on the way in which poetry creates images, dissolves them, and then creates new ones through various
deterritorializations of sentence structure and word forms. For Paz, it is significant that he is able to experiment with this type of creative poetics and to theorize about it at the same time in the text; his practice is another form of varying the language of the work by moving in and out of genres unpredictably.

In “Literature and Life,” Deleuze describes writing as a perpetual becoming and that becoming and writing are inseparable: “Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (1). What this analysis considers to be Paz's poetics of becoming resonates with this statement regarding the role poetry has in creating percepts, those moments of “nonhuman becomings” in the descriptions of Indian landscape and the sculpture of Hanuman. It resonates as well with the way the narrator makes language enter zones of deterritorialization through verbal stutterings. Paz uses these instances as means of showing the infinites possibilities of life by way of poetic writing; for him, it is the vehicle of reaching the “virtual” aspects of human life and the world. Moreno's concern with Paz's “cannibalization” of the other's discourse dissolves in view of Paz's poetics as a representation of possible life (16). Paz's writing is purposefully “unhistorical” because in poetry he wants to engage all possible becomings of the world he creates. In “He Stuttered” Deleuze sees this ability of the writer as a sign of the greatness of a true writer:

It is a matter of digging under the stories, cracking open the opinions, and reaching regions without memories, when the self must be destroyed...one's language lets an unknown foreign language escape from it, so that one can reach the limits of language itself and become something other than a writer,
conquering fragmented visions that pass through the words of a poet, the colors of a painter and the sounds of a musician. (113)

In this mature text of Paz, one sees this type of creative work, a writer reaching “the limits of language” and the foreignness of his native tongue. Moreno is correct that Paz seeks in this text to become something other than a poet and to play with the great possibilities of poetic creation; in fact, he does create what Moreno critically calls “a most ambitious poetic-philosophical-political project” (12). However, this title of “poet-philosopher-critic” is not, as Moreno suggests, an indication of Paz’s shortcomings, but a complementary and accurate view of the complex nature of Paz’s poetics of becoming within this text.  

43 Manuel Durán in “Octavio Paz: The Poet as Philosopher” seems to be the first to give Paz this type of title, which he intends to show the general philosophical concerns that preoccupy nearly all of Paz's work.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In my initial approach to the topic of Octavio Paz’s writings in India, I approached the subject with the idea of finding religious influences on Paz’s work that could be identified as artifacts emanating from the diverse, polytheistic religious culture of India. This research proved fruitful, yet it began to lead my studies in an unexpected path. Rather than expressing a simple cultural interest in Eastern religion, Paz’s writing, his poetry in particular, showed roots in European philosophical discourses that seemed at odds with those internal to the culture in which he wrote during much of the 1960’s. As I began tracing these influences, I began to see that much of Paz’s creative project in India was a continuation of his previous work in poetics, which in most works also revealed an ever-present interest in both Western and Eastern philosophy. Through these chapters of this thesis, I examine the ways in which Paz’s poetry either explicitly or implicitly makes allusions to philosophical questions regarding writing and being. By focusing on Paz’s poetry as the nexus of this discourse, the examination shows how he creates a contemplative/philosophical poetics. In concluding these chapters, I return to Ladera este as a location of Paz’s philosophical thought.

Of the works examined here, the majority contain the common motif within Paz’s poetic writing of the poet’s contemplation of the time of day, which in many cases contains the power of nighttime to incite the poet’s meditation. In the poems “Madrugada al raso” and “Un Anochecer,” Paz encapsulates the most fundamental portion of time, by describing a day in India
through his observation of sunrise and nightfall. By concentrating on the rise and fall of the sun, the poet preserves his experience of the day, his knowledge of the present. In “Madrugada al raso,” the sky is personified in the poet’s description of “los labios y las manos del viento/ el corazón del agua” (1-2). The image of the sky is what bears light to the poet’s eyes; it is what seems to first come alive with the sun’s movement across the earth. In this brief poetic observation, Paz incorporates the cycle of natural life as a parallel of the coming day: “la vida que nace cada día/ la muerte que nace cada vida” (5-6). The arrival of light does not merely symbolize the approach of warmth and life; paradoxically, it also contains the opposing image of death as that which gives birth to life. As the poet wakes, “froto mis párpados”, he sees the sky as an entity that moves through the earth (7).

Through the poet’s part by part building of the sky as a being, this section of the poem contains a somewhat ominous sentiment because of the grand image of sky, or light, conquering the landscape in the horizon of the poet’s vision, “el cielo anda en la tierra” (8).

In contrast to this experience of seeing the conquering, rising sun, “Un anochecer” contains the depiction of imminent darkness as night falls on a garden scene. Within this poem the two strongest elements present are light and darkness, much like the coming light of morning in the last. As darkness approaches the poet questions, “Qué la sostiene, entreabierta/ claridad anochecida/ luz por los jardines suelta?” (1-3). He wonders what creates this clear portrait of the garden at dusk, asking what keeps it gradually becoming dark instead of immediately dark. In

44 “Hands and lips of wind/ heart of water” (1-2)
45 “The life that is born every day/ the death that is born every life” (5-6).
46 “I rub my eyes” (7).
47 “The sky walks the land” (8).
48 “What sustains it/ half-open, the clarity of nightfall/ the light let loose in the gardens?” (1-3).
the following stanzas, the poet addresses the trees, birds, and the fence that all seem to decrease in their tangibility in the twilight: “Sobre las bardas—intactos/ todavía resplandores/ instantes ensimismados” (7-9). Closing this brief observation, there is the disappearance of perceivable imagery in the garden, and the poet feels the weight of the time of day about which he so frequently writes—night: “...los confines/ se borran, la cal es negra/ el mundo es menos creíble” (14-16). As the small world of the garden becomes less visible to the poet, he sees the landscape in a new way. No longer within the confines of their physical shape, the trees, birds and inanimate objects in the garden lose their contours and color, and because of this “erasing” of the edges, the poet as observer sees the world as less real. As he meditates on the nightfall, Paz reveals the complexity of simple observation, and in doing so, he shows the ability of poetry to convey the tangibility, or lack thereof, of the surrounding world. Although these examples are simple and rather small in comparison with other poems, discussed in this thesis, “Madrugada al ras” and “Un Anochecer” contain the repeating motif of the power of light on a landscape in inspiring the poet's work. As the coming of day and then the immanent darkness, the imagery in these poems represents how the poet utilizes the world around him as a medium for philosophical contemplation on the nature of reality.

As representative of Paz's writing in India, the poems of *Ladera este* exemplify the poet's experience of being in the diverse sub-continent. These poems show the inspiration derived from the Indian landscape that enables the creation of a new world formed by a poetics of being and becoming. Beginning *El arco y la lira*, Paz describes the role poetry has in the world, and it is in this text that he situates the foundation of his “faith” in the poetic act:

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49 “Pure, self-absorbed moments/ still gleam/ on the fences” (7-9).
50 “Edges blur, lime is black/ the world is less credible” (15-16).
La poesía es conocimiento, salvación, poder, abandon. Operación capaz de cambiar al mundo, la actividad poética es revolucionaria por naturaleza; ejercicio spiritual, es un método otro….Niega a la historia: en su seno se resuelven todos los conflictos objectives y el hombre adquiere al fin conciencia de ser algo más que tránsito. (13).

[Poetry is knowledge, salvation, power, abandonment. An operation capable of changing the world, poetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise, it is a means of interior liberation. Poetry reveals this world; it creates another....It denies history: at its core all objective conflicts are resolved and man at last acquires consciousness of being something more than a transient. (The Bow and the Lyre 3)]

Similarly in Paz's Nobel address, he repeats his belief that the writing of poetry reveals the world, creates the new, and exemplifies the “present” that he desires for humanity to encounter as reality. He states, “Pero el presente requiere no solamente atender a sus necesidades inmediatas: también nos pide una reflexión global y más rigurosa. Desde hace mucho creo, y lo creo firmemente, que el ocaso del futuro anuncia el advenimiento del hoy” (65).51 For Paz, we must turn our attention in politics, religion, and philosophy towards the present as a way of thinking about time and history. With a regard for “the now,” Paz advocates the foundation of a new poetic-thinking, and through this production of poetry of the now, as seen in the studied examples, there will be a clearer picture of the world and an image of a world that could be.

51 “...the present requires much more than attention to immediate needs; it demands global soul-searching. For a long time I have firmly believed that the twilight of the future heralds the advent of the now” (30).
In this final analysis, I turn back to Paz's poetry because of the foundational nature of his poetry as the ultimate mode of identifying the Mexican essayist, critic, and philosophical poet. As found in the conclusions of R.S. Khare and Manuel Durán, many of the critical readings of Paz seek to define him by one of these qualifying descriptions, emphasizing a certain genre of his writing or a period in his career; however, using his definition of poetry, the simple title of Poet represents the complexity of his creative, critical thought that was so greatly influenced by India.
REFERENCES


