

The Tenacity of Faint Hopes: Neruda in the Late 1920s

The title of my essay is spliced from two different verses in "Sonata y Destrucciones." As a whole the phrase describes accurately the dialectical tension that plagued Neruda during the years leading up to the Great Depression. However damaging and alienating the late 1920s and early 30s were for Neruda, social and existencial alienation serves paradoxically as the very basis for the rejuvenation of Neruda's poetry. Indeed, we could go as far as to claim that this alienating state of affairs is the *necessary preamble* for creating more comprehensive poetry, found, for instance, in *Canto general*. In both Chile and the Orient the social circumstances offer "faint hopes" to the young poet. But hope is the subject's internalizing of conditions over which he often has little or no control. The individual who hopes generally does so *passively*. Thus the need to speak of "tenacity," which reflects Neruda's *active* resistance against the prevailing socio-economic situation and his attempt to use poetry as vehicle for overcoming his alienation. In what follows I am going to analyze this passive/active dialectic as it plays itself out in the *Residencia en la tierra* poems. Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra* (1925-1935) and the first section of *Tercera residencia* (1935-1945) document his battle with language as a struggle to be accepted socially and not be marginalized in society.

Neruda's struggle for artistic autonomy and professional recognition plays a decisive role in these poems. "Success" in the field of culture, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown, is not defined, as in the economic realm, by direct financial advancement, but rather by the symbolic profits one may derive as a player in the field. While this holds true, particularly in the case of those who have inherited cultural and economic capital, it is exceedingly difficult for an artist from a working-class background, such as Neruda, to gain recognition and acceptance in the poetic field. The disadvantages weigh him down from the very start, making the chances of "success" all the more tenuous. By contrast, poets with inherited economic and cultural capital, like Vicente Huidobro, deem poetry to be "prophecy and sport simultaneously." To borrow the words of Bourdieu, poets like Huidobro, "move like fish in the water," while the more disadvantaged, like salmon, must swim against the current. So Neruda's "avantgardist" stage—the *Residencias*—is not a game, a moment of position jostling, or a chance

to ruffle the feathers of traditionalists, but rather a serious and suffering moment of his life expressed in his poetry. It is a period of intense emotional and economic crisis. This, and his stay in Spain during the civil war, explain, to a large degree, his shift from avantgardist to critical realist poetry or popular *poésie engagé*, whereas for other poets—like Huidobro—the vangardist phase lasts much longer. I use the term “phase” here intentionally. Huidobro’s poetry, even in the 1940s, generally remains straightjacketed in vanguard aesthetics. For Neruda, by contrast, this vangardist stage fits into a larger framework as a dialectically related part to the whole.

As friends such as Rafael Alberti, José Hernández, and Federico García Lorca commit themselves to the Republican side, as the Nationalist assaults on civilians and the Republic mount, and as his surrogate home, Madrid, is invaded by Nationalist forces and is bombarded, Neruda’s political commitment deepens. The severity and immediacy of the war-time situation transform the way he conceives his poetry: in a poetic reportage he graphically records the events of the civil war from a Republican point of view. So Neruda’s concerns with and passionate interests in the experimentalism of the *avant garde* gradually begins to wane as he is challenged to express the socio-political reality that is painfully exploding around him. His vangardist phase, *Residencia en la tierra*, is intimately associated with cultural and personal alienation in the Orient, and simply cannot survive in historical conditions that demand its repudiation. Introversion and convoluted language transform themselves through their negation: extroversion (commitment) and intelligible realism. Yet Neruda’s experience in the Orient, recorded in the *Residencia en la tierra* poetry, lays the groundwork formally and thematically for *Tercera residencia* and *Canto general*. Without *Residencia en la tierra* the later works, which gain a sophisticated understanding of historical, political, social and poetic factors, would be impossible.

I. The Struggle for Autonomy

It is in the Orient in particular that Neruda, as a young Consul who barely manages to make ends meet, writes the greater portion of *Residencia en la tierra*. As Neruda himself remarks in his memoirs, he is immediately faced with multifaceted social conflicts that pit the interests of the developed, imperialist countries against those of the local population:

Todo el esoterismo filosófico de los países orientales,
confrontado con la vida real, se revelaba como un subproducto

de la inquietud, de la neurosis, de la desorientación y del oportunismo occidentales; es decir, de la crisis de principios del capitalismo. En la India no había por aquellos años muchos sitios para las contemplaciones del ombligo profundo. Una vida de brutales exigencias materiales, una condición colonial cimentada en la más acendrada abyección, miles de muertos cada día, de cólera, de viruela, de fiebres y de hambre, organizaciones feudales desequilibradas por su inmensa población y su pobreza industrial imprimían a la vida una gran ferocidad en la que los reflejos místicos desaparecían.

As a foreigner living out an existence as a poorly paid Consul, Neruda had to deal with these brutal contradictions in Indian society on a continual basis. His own social situation was nothing but ironic. He had been given an official post working for the Chilean government abroad and thus was socially and rhetorically accepted as a member of the professional class. As a foreign diplomat he was granted a special status that allowed him to associate with other official representatives of the British government. But his own real economic status contradicted the political position with which he had been "consecrated." Neruda found himself trapped between two worlds. The reality of his economic status made him feel uncomfortable among the British civil servants who had much more when it came to economic means and who were the official representatives of the Empire in India. By the same token, even though his economic status made him a natural ally of the working population in India, he held a special political post which made him a professional. This was a situation of which Neruda, by his own account, was very aware:

Las castas tenían clasificadas la población india como en un coliseo paralelepípedo de galerías superpuestas en cuyo tope se sentaban los dioses. Los ingleses mantenían a su vez su escalafón de castas que iba desde el pequeño empleado de tienda, pasaba por los profesionales e intelectuales, seguía con los exportadores, y culminaba con la azotea del aparato en la cual se sentaban cómodamente los aristócratas del Civil Service y los banqueros del *empire*.

From his autobiography, letters he wrote during this period, and the work of his biographers, we know that the open social conflicts that beset Indian society had a very profound effect on Neruda but he did not feel empowered to do anything about them. His working conditions, in which he fulfilled his duty as a bureaucrat who at times would have to wait for weeks or months before carrying out official duty, also added to the solitude that engulfed him. In 1928, in a letter to the

Chilean writer José Santos González Vera he expressed his desperation due to personal and social conditions:

Yo sufro, me angustio con hallazgos horribles, me quema el clima, maldigo a mi madre y a mi abuela, converso días enteros con mi cacatúa, pago por mensualidades un elefante. Los días me caen en la cabeza como palos, no escribo, no leo, vestido de blanco y con casco de corcho, auténtico fantasma, mis deseos están influenciados por la tempestad y las limonadas.

In this atmosphere poetry takes on two different general roles. This alienation drowns him, but he is able to keep his head above water by believing, desperately, that poetry represents a refuge, an escape valve that helps him affirm himself and gives him a reason to live. This, in effect, is the "prophetic" stage of his poetry. At this stage in his life, Neruda does seem somewhat persuaded by the bourgeois canonization of the poet as a "genius" or "prophet." On one occasion the young Neruda even described himself brashly as a gifted individual of "ambiciones expresivas bastante sobrehumanas." In this statement we can see the insecurity about and subsequent overcompensation for his precarious struggle to gain recognition in the poetic field. This type of a reaction makes sense if we look at his dominated position in the field of cultural production as well as the socio-economic and affective impact of exile in India.

Surrounded, virtually lost in his social environment, and overcome by the social injustices and his own economic plight, Neruda seeks his expression and revenge in the density of language. The more ephemeral and esoteric, the more he can champion himself as a survivor of the circumstances. Even more significantly, he can perhaps abandon his job as a bureaucrat who sells his labor power to the State, and aspire to be a "professional" poet, which would allow him to have more control over his own destiny. In this latter case, he would be at the mercy of publishing houses and editors, but if he were successful, he could attain a certain degree of autonomy. But this is an uneasy proposition that is weighed down by the reality of his real economic and social dependence. This, then, explains the other major current in his poetry of the period, the one that takes precedence over the former: his alienation produces an interest in learning from the surrounding reality and critically recording it. This side of Neruda's poetic enterprise exposes indirectly the brutalities of capitalism and imperialism in the British colonies.

II. Spectres and the Weight of Objectivity

We can observe the alienation he suffers from due to his economic livelihood, his social relations, his exile, and his poetic theory in two poems from the *Residencias* period, "Galope muerto" and "Sonata y destrucciones." In the first poem the speaker dissolves into the nature he strives to describe; in the second he begins to acknowledge and confront the natural forces that haunt him.

A first stage in the process of recording his own alienation and learning from it is represented vividly in "Galope muerto," written in Chile in 1926:

Como cenizas, como mares poblándose,
 en la sumergida lentitud, en lo informe,
 o como se oyen desde el alto de los caminos
 cruzar las campanadas en cruz,
 teniendo ese sonido ya aparte del metal,
 confuso, pesando, haciéndose polvo
 en el mismo molino de la formas demasiado lejos,
 o recordadas o no vistas,
 y el perfume de las ciruelas que rodando a tierra
 se pudren en el tiempo, infinitamente verdes.

It seems as though a series of negating images are in fact the protagonists of this environment: "ashes," "confused," "ponderous" (or weighing), "dust," [forms] "either remembered or not seen" and the "plums...[that] rot." Forms are here detached from their by-products. The problem is that the virtual omnipotence of matter engulfs the speaker. At this point, he is incapable of accessing or approximating these natural elements in language. The poet confronts nature with the apparent impotence of poetic language. So the sound that resonates from the metal bell is confusing, weighty, and turning to dust. Entropy and chance have seized the poet's imagination: all forms seem to decompose or disintegrate to the point where they may be "o recordadas o no vistas." The fear that inhabits the poet is that his poetry will meet this fate as well. While there is a by-product in Nature's work—the cherries' perfume, the ash, the populating seas, the bell's sound—it is in peril of escaping the senses of human beings. Nature's own labor and our work in it face the probability of being enveloped by natural laws and of being forgotten by other human beings.

The only oblique references to human beings are the senses—*someone* must be hearing the bells and smelling the cherries. Yet, even at this stage of his poetic production, there are among the gaps in this stanza, presences which are generated. These positive or generating elements are in fact *relations*: the sound of the bell, for instance, is produced by the impact of two metals, and must be created or rung by

someone. But the sound is not something that one can empirically point to because it is the *mediation* of material production. Like the language of the poet, it is a communicative vessel which has social ramifications; it is the production of matter, but it fades away, except in the consciousness and daily life of the community. But if that community is absent, the poet's labor cannot attain fruition. While nature can carry on without human intervention, human beings are dependent on nature for everything that they are. Human activity and its creative products (poetry or a bell's music) are helplessly dependent on nature, but nature, human beings' "inorganic body" in the words of Marx, outlives us. In "Galope muerto," then, Neruda affirms the rift between human beings and their creative or forced labor; the latter immersed in the former.

In the first verses we come across the interpenetration of material forms and their (apparently) ephemeral by-products. Yet the result at this stage in the dialectical process is the reification—or referential detachment—that is necessary to make the part intelligible in its relation to the whole. The part, nature in this instance, is detached from human life even though both are part of a whole—our vital experiences as human beings. By observing things this way Neruda has isolated objectivity and tried to analyze its motion. And the result is that as he underlines the destructiveness of this process—of material change—the remnants act as positive counterforces to this entropy.

So Neruda has focused his attention on the social despair that besieges him in the Orient. Since humans are absent, or are only present in the fruits of their labor, Neruda's dialectical method and understanding has not reached the heights it does in *Canto general*. However, as Jaime Concha and Alain Sicard maintain, we can already verify it at work in the *Residencia en la tierra*, as these verses attest:

Aquello todo tan rápido, tan viviente,
 inmóvil sin embargo, como la polea loca en sí misma,
 esas ruedas de los motores, en fin.
 Existiendo como las puntadas secas en las costuras del árbol,
 callado, por alrededor, de tal modo,
 mezclando todos los limbos sus colas.
 Es que de dónde, por dónde, en qué orilla?
 El rodeo constante, incierto, tan mudo,
 como las lilas alrededor del convento
 o la llegada de la muerte a la lengua del buey
 que cae a tumbos, guardabajo, y cuyos cuernos quieren sonar.
 (9-10)

The first verse immediately appears to contradict the second verse of

the first stanza ("sumergida lentitud"), unless the sluggishness is the way material things appear, and the swiftness of all that is unitary change, is Time. These existing things ("existiendo") are in the process of becoming, or of "secreting time" as Christopher Caudwell puts it. Significantly, the only verbs are gerunds—the very expression of being in a grammatical form. Contradictions are in fact the motorforce of these natural and inanimate things. In slowness and, even more graphically, in immobility velocity meets its opposite.

As a metaphor the pulley captures succinctly the idea that Neruda is trying to convey: even though the wheel appears, from a distance, to be a still sphere, it is rotating at a rapid rate. But the wheel's shape does not change when it is in motion. The same can be said for the rope attached to the pulley: its geometrical outline—the straight line—seems to be immobile, but the rope too is moving. Notice, however, that Neruda places the emphasis on the pulley itself or, as in the following verse, on motor wheels. What interests him is the genesis of this motion, its *raison d'être*.

The speaker is omniscient, yet he is the one who searches, who asks: "Es que de dónde, por dónde en qué orilla?" In other words, what is the origin of this growth, this death, this life? The speaker's own uncertainty is underlined by that question and by the references to "El rodeo constante, incierto, tan mudo" and "las costuras del árbol, callado." Transformation is constant and rapid, but its source is what remains an enigma.

However, Neruda is not content to simply block off all access to the origin of the movement that surrounds him by declaring it a mystery. His critical realist method and way of thinking encourages him to go beyond those limits. In the first stanza he already suggested a possible solution: it is not found in things-in-themselves, but in the *relations* among things and human beings. Indeed, the last two verses of this stanza revisit the consequences of these internal relations. While change may reign supreme—in the case of the ox's death—it does not lead to nothingness. Implicit references in these two verses point to metaphors for poetry. The ox's tongue and horns are communicative and artistic vehicles respectively. Following a familiar artistic claim, Neruda may be suggesting that, even though the poet is mortal, his works may stand as popular instruments to be used posthumously. Indeed, it is this search for meaning and, ultimately, immortality that produces anxiety in him and drives him forward.

In the third stanza the speaker emerges more fully than in the first two and leads us to believe that our hypothesis about the ox is accurate:

Por eso, en lo inmóvil, deteniéndose, percibir,
 entonces, como aleteo inmenso, encima,
 como abejas muertas o números,
 ay, lo que mi corazón pálido no puede abarcar,
 en multitudes, en lágrimas saliendo apenas,
 y esfuerzos humanos, tormentas,
 acciones negras descubiertas de repente
 como hielos, desorden vasto,
 oceánico, para mí que entro cantando,
 como con una espada entre indefensos. (10)

Whereas before the speaker's presence was scarcely identified, in these verses the speaker does not despair even though he is still faced with the "vast disorder." On the contrary, he expresses his frustration at not being capable of recording all the results of this disorder: "ay, lo que mi corazón pálido no puede abarcar." Even though confusion takes center stage here, the speaker does not feel necessarily entrapped or burdened by existential anguish—as Manuel Durán and Margery Safir contend. If anything, one could argue that he is overconfident; proof perhaps of what several critics have called his "prophetic vocation." Thus his exuberant declaration that he enters "cantando, / como una espada entre indefensos." But this inflated stance contrasts with his "pale heart." In perceiving the reality that surrounds him Neruda confronts the seemingly "pale" attempt to represent that reality in his poetry. But this is on the level of appearance. On a deeper, internally related level, there is an infinite amount of natural activity that lies underneath the appearance of chaos. As these verses underscore, human beings do not just capitulate to the objectivity of nature; they attempt, however imperfectly, to *shape* nature through their intervention. However overwhelmed he may be by the complexity of reality and his ability to represent it, the poet still manages to map out its major forces.

The fourth and fifth stanzas return to the question that he posed in the second; namely, what is the origin of relations (sound, the transition between night and time, etc.)?

Ahora bien, de qué está hecho ese surgir de palomas
 que hay entre la noche y el tiempo, como una barranca
 húmeda?

Ese sonido ya tan largo
 que cae listando de piedras los caminos,
 más bien, cuando solo una hora
 crece de improviso, extendiéndose sin tregua.

Adentro del anillo del verano

una vez los grandes zapallos escuchan,
 estirando sus plantas conmovedoras,
 de eso, de lo que solicitándose mucho,
 de lo lleno, oscuros de pesadas gotas (10).

These final stanzas address and clarify the questions raised throughout the poem if we follow the images highlighted previously. If we claim that the doves, commonly associated with poets and poetry, fulfill their archetypal role, the connection with the sound ("ese sonido") becomes more apparent. The poet's words, like stones on the road, are only meaningful when they are read and understood by most human beings. His words only have "eternal charm," as Marx put it in the *Grundrisse*, when they become part of living history. It is only by joining social history that poetry can hope to become an historical invariant, that is, an active part of human memory. But we cannot help but recall that this sound, like the bell's, is as ephemeral and fragile as life itself.

In this poem, as in the bulk of the *Residencia en la tierra* poems, Neruda is forced to come to grips with time, or the recognition of difference and finality, even in Chile (where he faced no language barrier) just before his departure to the Orient, where his tenuous economic status seems to weigh on him so heavily. Indeed, we know from biographical sources and Neruda's own memoirs that he led a precarious existence as a student and, later, as a poorly paid functionary in Santiago before his departure to the Orient. Significantly though, Neruda does not turn away from the pressure of time, but rather launches himself into an exploration of it. By doing so, he begins to discover the limits of his existence, mutually determined as it is by time and space. The title of the poem itself, "Galope muerto," testifies to this negative dialectic. The "gallop" metaphorically represents change, motion, entropy; while the "dead" figures are emblems of time and the end of life.

III. Affirmation Amidst Destruction

This is in fact the thread that the reader can follow throughout *Residencia en la tierra* (including the first half of the *Tercera residencia*). "Sonata y destrucciones" was written in Rangoon in 1928, and is an intensification of the speaker's search for meaning in an environment that appears bereft of significance to him. The social situation in which Neruda was living at the time hindered the flowering of his needs and potentials. Yet the poet advances beyond his stance in "Galope muerto" by affirming himself in the ruins that surround him. In this sense "So-

nata y destrucciones" is analogous to a later poem in *Tercera residencia*—"Canto sobre unas ruinas"—save one all-important difference: the destruction here does not refer to Nationalist offensives during the Spanish civil war, but rather to evolution in nature. In this context Neruda suffers from existential anguish yet he tries to make it a creative part of himself.

Después de mucho, después de vagas leguas,
 confuso de dominios, incierto de territorios,
 acompañado de pobres esperanzas
 y compañías infieles y desconfiados sueños,
 amo lo tenaz que aún sobrevive en mis ojos,
 oigo en mi corazón mis pasos de jinete,
 muerdo del fuego dormido y la sal arruinada,
 y de noche, de atmósfera oscura y luto prófugo,
 aquel que vela a la orilla de los campamentos,
 el viajero armado de estériles resistencias,
 detenido entre sombras que crecen y alas que tiemblan,
 me siento ser, y mi brazo de piedra me defiende. (43)

A qualitative leap has taken place in Neruda as regards his alienation. In the beginning of *Residencia en la tierra*, voids appeared in tandem with motion, a motion in which the individual was lost. This sense of misdirection is captured in the images "vague leagues," "confused," "uncertain." Neruda could have easily settled for the relativism of things if concrete economic and social reality had not persistently eaten away at him. These very forces, along with his exile, contribute to a new personal transformation. But the speaker now reverses his direction. Rather than fleeing from what threatens him—change in the universe, the finality of the self—he now faces the destruction that lays before him. As the title suggests, the very instrument of his liberation ("sonata"—poetry) becomes imbricated in the realm of necessity (those forces that exist semi-autonomously from human life). Negation becomes the object of affirmation: "Amo lo tenaz que aún sobrevive en mis ojos, / oigo en mi corazón mis pasos de jinete, / muerdo del fuego dormido y la sal arruinada." As the very effects of absence, negation and destruction begin to turn into their opposites, they furnish a space for presence, affirmation and creation.

What is ingenious about these verses is the way Neruda portrays this transition in both form and content. He begins with ambiguous and inconstant images—"vague," "confused," "uncertain"—and then moves, in verses three and four, to apparent oxymorons (or dialectical relations)—"faint hopes," "unfaithful company" and "distrustful dreams"—to bold affirmations—"I love," "I hear," "I bite." In that

way the process Neruda had to go through in his life is recaptured in three distinct yet intertwined stages. Moreover, Neruda's understanding of this transformation has evidently followed a similar pattern: the images develop from the abstract to the concrete. Neruda has become accustomed to the alienation that has plagued him and it has become the force against which he can make his life meaningful and less alienated. In this context his poetry becomes a recording of his engagement with these objective forces. This sharpens his social consciousness. Now the speaker states that he feels himself becoming, or, as he announces in the second stanza, he adores his "propio ser perdido" (43). In other words, his individual struggle becomes intelligible as he becomes more conscious of the social context.

Hay entre ciencias de llanto un altar confuso,
 y en mi sesión de atardeceres sin perfume,
 en mis abandonados dormitorios donde habita la luna,
 y arañas de mi propiedad, y destrucciones que me son
 queridas,
 adoro mi propio ser perdido, mi substancia imperfecta,
 mi golpe de plata y mi pérdida eterna.
 Ardíó la uva húmeda, y su agua funeral
 aún vacila, aún reside,
 y el patrimonio estéril, y el domicilio traidor.
 Quién hizo ceremonia de cenizas?
 Quién amó lo perdido, quién protegió lo último?
 El hueso del padre, la madera del buque muerto,
 y su propio final, su misma huida,
 su fuerza triste, su dios miserable? (43-44)

The adverse conditions, an integral part of the speaker's being, are here enumerated and given more ominous weight through the repetition of conjunctions and commas. This poetic technique forces the reader to digest the bitterness of these characterizations of the speaker's home. It is as though his desire is coming to terms with reality—the reality of motion, change, as well as the social reality of living in those specific economic conditions in the Orient: "adoro mi propio ser perdido, mi substancia imperfecta." At this stage the "destruction" or change he observed before him in nature has become a part of him. In this setting a perplexing statement like "destrucciones que me son, / queridas" can be grasped in its dialectical complexity. The suffering he has endured has led to a better understanding of himself.

As half of this stanza testifies—and Rodríguez Monegal is correct to point out—a good part of the speaker's anguish is due to his familial relations. Exile and his economic status do take their toll, but

his relations with his father in particular, who never encouraged him as a young poet, crushed his self-confidence. So, rehabilitating himself necessarily involves critiquing this antagonistic tie with his father. Repetition plays a crucial role here. Possessive adjectives pertaining to the first person—the speaker—clash structurally and thematically with those connected to the third person (his father). So the tension in this domestic scenario is thereby increased.

Yet Neruda's poetry also occupies more space in his life as his connections to his father, and to the family generally, deteriorate. His family is characterized here in unmistakably negative terms as "patrimonio estéril" and "domicilio traidor." In the absence of strong familial and social bonds, the speaker posits poetry as an intimate, cathartic vehicle for expressing his feelings of desolation, his involvement in spontaneous passionate affairs, and his disenchantment with his economic and professional status.

It is interesting to note in passing that his rejection of direct monetary rewards and the "respectable" and well-paid position his working-class family wanted him to enter, while typical of the field of the cultural production, produces a great deal of frustration if he does not reap symbolic profits. And at this stage Neruda has yet to become a legitimate player in the field, so this cathartic vehicle may be therapeutic, but it is not of help economically. He only begins to gain notoriety in the field when he manages to have *Residencia en la tierra* published in Spain. But even at that point he continued to live off of his modest salary as a member of the diplomatic corps.

The result of social and economic anxiety is that it opens up a gaping hole in his life which is replaced by his poetic vocation and erotic exploration (Josie Bliss being the most celebrated of his early lovers). Neruda's close friend and biographer Volodia Teitelboim gives contradictory explanations for the poet's erotic exploration, both of which, in my estimation, are right. On the one hand, Teitelboim states that Neruda confided to him that "no podía resistir el amor el amor o la insinuación femenina." On the other hand, the biographer says that Neruda "se agarra a la vida. Lo atan a ella las mujeres, porque no es todavía la Mujer. Pero esto de ir de cama en cama, de niña en niña, nativa, mulata o inglesa, lo daña por dentro y lo satura de hastío." Both quotes are undoubtedly true. His life does lose some meaning as he engages in all these erotic affairs, which often exacerbate his alienation. But Neruda also seems to have derived some important human meaning and pleasure during these rendezvous. Neruda feels magnetically attached to women and accepts adventures as they come. Poetry and erotic explorations help provide him with creativity and

pleasure in an otherwise estranging environment.

Internalizing the alienations that plague him helps Neruda, and his erotic encounters and poetry give him the strength to survive and then to combat his solitude. The last stanza of "Sonata y destrucciones" summarizes succinctly this procedure of negating social alienation burdening him:

Acecho, pues, lo inanimado y lo doliente,
y el testimonio extraño que sostengo,
con eficiencia cruel y escrito en cenizas,
es la forma de olvido que prefiero,
el nombre que doy a la tierra, el valor de mis sueños,
la cantidad interminable que divido
con mis ojos de invierno, durante cada día de este mundo (44).

The first verse, in fact, encapsulates precisely the essence of his struggle. He lies in wait of the inanimate (the material forces that change constantly) and the harmful (the effects of those forces on human beings, in particular, on the poet). Oscillating between self-negation and self-transformation, his poetic enterprise, "testimonio extraño," is still rooted in the recognition and acceptance of alienation and negation. Indeed, the laws of the universe govern his own finality and dominate his conscious existence, as witness the references to death in "la forma de olvido" and "mis ojos de invierno." Yet he finds meaning in documenting his own struggle for survival in an alien environment. And it is true that his social conditions have changed little, so why should one expect him to be able to overcome this alienation? Yet I hope it is evident from the analysis of "Galope muerto" and "Sonata y destrucciones" that the speaker and his Weltanshaung undergo metamorphosis in the first volume of *Residencia en la tierra*. No longer adversaries, but rather allies in his journey, nature, economic depravation, and social isolation furnish him with the weapons for his struggle. Armed with these and his many rendezvous with Josie Bliss, he transforms his poetry into the testament of his revitalization.

In the face of the overwhelming force of economic, social, and natural phenomena, which envelop and almost smother the poet, we are left with "faint hopes." But that is not all. The hopes, however faint they may be, do not only consist of "angustia, confesiones, melancolía" balanced with "misterio, profecía, y plenitud" as Rodríguez Monegal contends. In a general sense it is true that *Residencia en la tierra* is populated with references to the speaker's alienation, but Neruda does not wallow sorrowfully in his estrangement nor champion his solitude. Even though Neruda's *Residencias* are consciously autobiographical and subjectively inclined, they do not celebrate his

solitude, or melodramatically make tragic claims for the individual. The torrent of anguish Neruda feels is never presented as a statement about human nature per se. To consider only the "faint hopes" or the "mystery" in the *Residencias* is to resign oneself to a fixed view of human nature. This reading overlooks the vital countervailing tendency, the dynamic, negative force in Neruda's dialectic. Tenacity drives him forward, allows him to recognize and overcome the social alienation that has invaded him, and provides the occasion for restoring hope in "España en el corazón". Immersed in the Spanish civil war, in the heat of class struggle, Neruda is able to negate the negation of his experience in the Orient. No longer suffering from a language barrier, social isolation, and the tedium tied to his job, and faced with outwardly unjust socio-political conditions that affect him on a daily basis, Neruda is able to expand the range of his poetry both in form and content. The harsh realism of the civil war demands to be heard and the moral imperative of the poet responds.

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