

- Simeoni, Gabriele. *Devisas o emblemas heroicas y morales*. León de Francia: Guilliemo Roville, 1561.
- Torquemada, Antonio de. *Jardín de flores curiosas*. 1570. Ed. Giovanni Allegra. Madrid: Castalia, 1982.
- Villalva, Juan Francisco de. *Empresas espirituales y morales*. Baeza: Fernando Díaz de Montoya, 1613.

## Paranormal Subjects in Vallejo and Lezama

**Brett Levinson**

*University of Chicago*

In *El laberinto de la soledad* and *Piedra de sol* (and elsewhere) Octavio Paz posits the idea that the cuts and wounds brought about by the Conquest are Latin America's origin, its birth. According to Paz, there is, therefore, no primordial Latin American wholeness previous to violence and division since in Latin America this division is itself primordial. This thesis faintly recalls, but is not quite in line with the abundant and rich modern tradition of Latin American scholarship (one that extends roughly from José Martí to Roberto González Echeverría) that has considered the question of the Latin American self in terms of lost origins. True, the two paradigms—that of Paz, that of the lost origin—begin with separation (and therefore with pain). But whereas studies concerned with lost origins grow out of the conviction that the Latin American subject has been cut off from his/her roots, authenticity or wholeness (due, of course, to the colonial situation), Paz' work is grounded on the cut itself—not on the separation from the origin but on separation as the origin. For Paz division is the defining characteristic and the foundational component of the Latin American experience. The attempt to overcome division hence reflects a desire not to recuperate the true Latin American subject but, on the contrary, to erase the very essence of a strictly Latin American position.

Exactly how this split Latin American subject might function as a *subject*, however, is no easy matter. I use the word "subject" in the modern, that is to say, Cartesian sense: as the originary creator, the self that molds the objective world, the agent that builds or assembles his or her own (personal or collective) history or culture. For Descartes this subject is the foundation of all human knowledge and existence and is therefore whole by definition, since it is necessarily on the scene prior to any force that might divide it. Of course, (via psychoanalysis) we have become quite accustomed to talking about "fragmented subjects." Yet it must be acknowledged that this phrase, however commonplace it might be, is a contradiction in terms: in the Western tradition a being cannot be both split and a subject, both cut by some force and an

gin that preceeds all force. Unless, of course, one radically rethinks the question of subjectivity itself.

### IN TRUTH, EVERYBODY IS HOME; IN REALITY, NO ONE

Such a radical rethinking can be found in the texts of two of Latin America's most important poets, César Vallejo and José Lezama Lima. I shall commence with Vallejo's "No vive ya nadie en la casa," now included in the prose poems of the posthumous *Los poemas humanos*. The piece opens with a description of an abandoned house, one in which all the rooms "yacen despoblados" (239). Suggested here is an exodus or departure, one possibly related to a mass death (given the obvious connection of the signifier *yacer* and the dead, the "dearly departed"). The house, then, cannot be understood as an *empty*, but as an *emptied* space, one that the dwellers have left behind: "Nadie ya queda, pues que todos han partido" (239).<sup>1</sup>

Now, given this introduction, one might expect Vallejo's text to take up the issues of homelessness, exile and loss—perhaps the loss of life, perhaps the loss of one's property, place, subject position, or originary dwelling. But such is not the case at all, as is indicated by the following words: "Cuando alguien se va alguien queda" (239). The poem, we see, is concerned not with those who have departed, but with those who remain after such withdrawals. But who is this "alguien" that stays at home after *all* have left ("todos han partido")? Who remains when no one remains, who clings to life after everyone is gone?

Such questions merely touch upon the uncanny twists in Vallejo's text. Indeed, as it turns out, these remaining dwellers represent not merely the left-overs of the departed, but their truth, their essence: "Todos han partido de la casa, en realidad, pero todos se han quedado en verdad" (239). Vallejo here employs one of his signature techniques: he uses worn-out *figures* of speech ("en realidad" and "en verdad"), yet restores to those phrases their "literal" sense. The just-cited line states that while *all* have departed *in reality*—the empirical bodies have *in fact* left the house—these same bodies have remained at home "en verdad," *in truth*, in their essence. This idea is substantiated by the following: "No es el recuerdo de ellos lo que queda, sino ellos mismos" (239). What remains is not the memory of the inhabitants, but they themselves; not the recollection of the subject, but the subject itself: "el sujeto del acto" (240). Thus we can reread the previously quoted "cuando alguien se va alguien queda." The double "alguien" refers not to two different "somebodies," one who leaves and one who stays. "Al-

guien," rather, refers to the same body doubled: the "alguien" who remains is, *en verdad*, the "alguien" who departs *en realidad*.

It is necessary to add a few points to these paradoxical equations. As already noted, the focus of Vallejo's poem is the "someone who *remains*." Yet in the final lines of the text the verb "quedar" is replaced by "continuar": "Y no es tampoco que ellos queden en la casa, sino que continúan por la casa. . . . Lo que continúa en la casa es el órgano, el agente en gerundio y en círculo. . . . Lo que continúa en la casa es el pie, los labios, los ojos, el corazón. . . . Lo que continúa en la casa, es el sujeto del acto" (239-40). The being that remains, it is indicated, is not fixed, but ex-static, in flux, a gerund: "el agente en gerundio y en círculo." The remainder, then, cannot be true within the Platonic understanding of truth. In Platonic doctrine, of course, the true world is the one that lies beyond transformation, outside of mortality and time. But Vallejo's true beings are true even, and especially, as they *continually* move, transmute. This means also that such true dwellers cannot be interpreted as the "eternal spirit" of the dearly departed; the poem's division between those who remain ("en verdad") and those who leave ("en realidad") cannot be explained by recurring to the metaphysical distinction between the "real constant world" of the soul/spirit and the "false ephemeral world" of the body. Since these dwellers continue, they change; and since they change, they live in time (in contrast to the eternal spirit/soul). The physical nature of the remainders further belies any "spiritual" interpretation. What remains are "feet," "lips," "eyes" and "the heart"—not the spirit but the body, the body parted.

Established, then, is that one is a true dweller in Vallejo's house only insofar as one leaves the house behind; one is *truly* present only when one has parted. Vallejo, it should be noted, examines this remaining/parting connection in other poems, for example, in "Algo te identifica": "Algo te identifica con el que se aleja de ti, y es la facultad común de volver. . . . Algo te separa del que se queda contigo, y es la esclavitud de partir. . ." (243). Again, we perceive here a relationship between parting and staying: the "you" is identified with that which separates (from) this same "you" ("partir," of course, signifies both "to leave" and "to separate"). A similar idea is developed in "París, Octubre 1936": "mi difunción se va, parte mi cuna / y rodeada de gente, sola, suelta, mi semejanza humana dase vuelta / y despacha sus sombras una a una" (332).

This co-incident of parting and staying allows us to understand why Vallejo, in the final line of "No vive ya nadie en la casa," calls the "somebody who remains" a *subject* ("el sujeto del acto"). This "subject," of course, might appear to be the Cartesian, transcendental subject al-

ready mentioned: the agent capable of acting, of creating its own objects and thus of affirming itself as the first principle of a world-making process. But Vallejo's subject is not such a transcendental subject; nor is it the lost subject, one that Vallejo might be seeking to recover. With this "subject of the act" we are not talking about a subject who was *first* on the scene and who then parted; we are discussing one that is not the "subject of the act" until it parts (or is parted). Vallejo's "subject of the act" is born a-part, it takes up residence on earth by splitting.<sup>2</sup>

These strange ideas are further substantiated by the poem's already mentioned dismissal of memory: "no es el recuerdo de ellos lo que queda." The "subject of the act" slips away from all recall. This is not because this subject is buried too deeply in the American archives; it is because, again, this cut-up subject never *was* otherwise, it has no previous, whole existence (therefore, no nostalgia, no memory is possible). What survives in the house are not the parts of former subjects but the parts *as* those very subjects: feet, lips, eyes and heart, all of which do not stand in for or represent any authentic (whole) self, but which are, *en verdad*, the selves themselves, "ellos mismos."

Yet who, finally, are these "subjects of the act"? What kind of subject is Vallejo putting forth? The answer, I believe, is the paranormal subject, the ghost. For what kind of "subject" roams around and possesses a house after a house has been abandoned if not the ghostly subject, the phantom?

Let us here attempt to comprehend this figure of the ghost or phantom. Typically, ghosts are the specters that remain in a domicile (or return to a domicile) after the actual bodies have departed. The specter is an illusory entity without physical reality, one that stands in relationship, if not in opposition to real, once-living beings. (It is noteworthy, in fact, that the word that Plato uses for false entities is *phantazein*.) Thus the term "phantom," understood in this traditional manner, accurately describes the Latin American self as it has been constructed vis-à-vis the already-discussed paradigm of loss and recovery. In this model modern Latin Americans (for instance, the modern Peruvians of Mariátegui's project) are seen as the colonized, inauthentic specters of who they once were (Mariátegui's Inca), who they really are, and who they can become again. Vallejo's paranormal subjects, however, do not at all fit into this understanding of the phantom. His phantoms are not images or spirits that represent, recall or reflect the true self but haunting pieces that are, *en verdad*, those true selves.

### LEZAMA'S ECSTASIES

Much more needs to be said about Vallejo's paranormal subjects; I shall come back to "Ya no vive nadie en la casa" below. For now, though, I want to turn to Lezama and, more specifically, to two interconnected poems found in the 1949 collection *La fijeza*: "Extasis de la sustancia destruida" and "Resistencia." Both texts examine crucial Lezamian *topoi*: the "demonio de la resistencia" (*Poesía* 191) and "éxtasis de participación en lo homogéneo" (190). Let us begin by examining this second notion: ecstasy within the homogeneous. For Lezama, history develops as an endless substitution or metamorphosis: each instant, each epoch, devours the previous instants/epochs ("la historia se traga a la historia" [*Interrogando* 66]), destroying and substituting for them in the process: "La violenta sustitución seguida de la ráfaga hueca prepara el vacío . . . por donde se sale y entra como originario principal, ahumado y apresuradísimo" (*Poesía* 190). These words describe a process, a system: "violent substitutions" prepare an emptied space by destroying the previous occupants of that space; the emptied space is then filled by these same substitutions; finally, the new occupants—once more, the substitutions—are destroyed and rebuilt by later substitutions, epochs, or instants. A series of metamorphoses in the emptied space is set in motion; the "past" is at once erased, incorporated, and reconstructed by the "present." Hence, as the just-cited line indicates, the emptied space is "*como* [un] originario principal": it is similar to an origin, but it is not one. It is not an origin because it is not an *a priori*; substitution "precedes" it. Yet it is *like* an origin for it is the matrix site ("por donde se sale y entra") of endless historical generations, degenerations and regenerations.

These ideas are supplemented by the fact that Lezamian history is composed not only of entities and substitutions that annihilate and reconstruct themselves in the emptied site (metamorphoses: the endless labor of time upon space and space upon time), of epochs swallowing epochs, but also of resistance, "la perdurable sustancia" (190). In "Extasis de la sustancia destruida" Lezama describes this resistance as a "Frenética autodestrucción que ridiculiza toda metamorfosis para alcanzar el constante germen dentro del ente" (190). This means that within each historical transformation resides a domain that refuses (and ridicules: "ridiculiza") both assimilation and elimination—a time/space that, in defiance of the metamorphoses, never presents itself; a molecular being (a germ) that prefers to destroy itself ("autodestrucción") rather than to "appear": "Comparada con la resistencia la morfología es puro ridículo. Lo que la morfología permite, realización de

una época en un estilo, es muy escaso en comparación con la resistencia eterna de lo no permisible" (191).

This last passage is key. Lezama depicts two distinct modes of history; or rather, he alludes to history's twofold, double nature. On the one hand, history evolves as the series of metamorphosing time/spaces that are articulated in a form, "realized in a style." This is the history of what Lezama calls alternatively *la morfología, el continuo, or lo homogéneo*: the history of what is permitted to appear in history. Yet lodged inside this history are also Lezama's non-permitted resistances or "morphological exceptions":<sup>3</sup> histories that happen within the *homogéneo* but are never given a form (hence they are often dubbed *lo informe*), times that participate in history as an ecstatic flux without a style and without a morphology—or, for that matter, without a "metamorphology" since the exceptions are not "morphs" at all. In short, within Lezama's notion of history more than one time/space is always already occurring: the metamorphoses of the *accepted* and, intertwined with these metamorphoses, the flux of the *excepted*, the movement of a domain of intense refusal.

Let us here examine the roots of these exceptions or resistances. Lezamian history, it was said, simultaneously swallows, destroys, and rebuilds itself. What was not noted is that each destruction/reconstruction leaves behind ruins or ashes, a "coliseo en ruinas, una plaza deshabitada" (Eras 178), as Lezama describes them in the essay "Confluencias."<sup>4</sup> The ruins are the survivors of the annihilated pasts: they are neither what is annihilated nor what is rebuilt, but what lives on, what remains—incorporated, assimilated but never "styled"—after the erasing/rebuilding process takes place. The ruins thus form an ungraspable (but present) "sustancia destruida," a substance that imbeds itself into both the foundation of history and the *emptied* site in which that history takes place. The destroyed substance, to put this in other terms, is a composition of decompositions, of historical leftovers that are "born" from violence: a history of detachments, of ecstatic signs without meaning (since these signs pertain to no culture, they pertain to no semiotics, to no system of signification; Lezama, in fact, often calls them "zumbidos"): an "incesante despierto" (190) that the historical continuum ("lo homogéneo," the All) can destroy, transmute, and carry over from epoch to epoch (from "style" to "style") but cannot get rid of or articulate. Indeed, when Lezama writes that "El demonio de la resistencia no está en ninguna parte," he means that the diabolic resistance is no-thing, the unplaceable, the unspeakable, *lo inasible*.<sup>5</sup>

### THE SUBJECTS OF THE EVENTS

To understand how the above ideas relate to Latin American history let us pick up the single most surprising line—surprising, at least, for those who view Lezama as an orthodox Catholic<sup>6</sup>—of "Resistencia": "No caigamos en lo del paraíso recobrado, que venimos de una resistencia. . ." (191-2). Lezama here is commenting on a passage from Columbus' diary wherein Columbus describes his confrontation with the American "strangers" (resistances) that he could not conceptualize. The "we" in the "we come from a resistance," in other words, is "we Latin Americans." The first part of the quote, then, is easily understood, for it represents Lezama's response to the notion of a Latin American lost wholeness or lost origin. "No caigamos en lo del paraíso recobrado" means: "Let us not fall into the fantasy that we were once whole and unified and that this wholeness can be retrieved, even ideally. Let us not fall into the ideology of the Fall." The second portion of the passage, however, poses special difficulties. "We come from a resistance" could be interpreted to signify that what is authentically "ours" (Latin America's) are those aspects of the indigenous civilizations that pertained to the Americas before the Conquest, and that then resisted both Columbus' "vision" and the West's colonizing activities. This reading implies that "Latin America" was born before the Conquest, and has *maintained* itself through resistance to that Conquest. Yet Lezama does not say "we have kept ourselves alive, maintained ourselves through resistance." He says: "we come from resistance," "we come to life through resistance," "previous to the resistance we were not yet born." What is Lezama suggesting?

"Resistance," as Lezama understands it, presupposes the presence of an imposing, violent force. The force is that of the One, *lo homogéneo*: of the movement of homogeneity and Westernization. "We come from a resistance," therefore, signifies that "we resistant Latin Americans" were brought into being through the Westernization of the Americas, in other words, through the Conquest. There was not first a "Latin American we," then an imposition and then, finally, a resistance. First there was an imposition, and then a "Latin American we," a "we" that is the resistance itself. The Conquest did not *confront* a Latin American resistant collectivity when it threw itself upon the Americas. Instead, it begot one, one that continues to evolve and participate in *lo homogéneo*: "un agente en gerundio," "el sujeto del acto." Such ideas are crucial, for they are the root of an alternative notion (certainly not the only alternative notion) of a Latin American subjectivity, one that I believe that both Vallejo and Lezama are putting forth. Vallejo writes:

"when someone leaves someone remains." During the Conquest, many whole cultures left their "homes" but *left behind* phantoms in pieces. These parts—as modern phantoms—have nothing to do with any of the pre-Columbian indigenous cultures. Indeed, they owe their modern existence, their existence as phantoms, to the fact that they were forced to radically break from their indigenous past, on the one hand; and on the other hand to the fact that they have been radically transformed by their repeated incorporations into various histories, cultures and epochs—so radically, in fact, that they no longer recall or reflect ("No es el recuerdo de ellos lo que queda") who or what they once were. In short, as modern, Western entities, the phantom-parts are now ontologically different from those previous beings. Nonetheless these pieces—not quite descendants of the pre-Columbian worlds and not quite accepted members of the *homogéneo*—belong to Latin America, and they infuse, and thus ecstatically alter (for they are never set) the European structures and institutions that transplanted themselves into the New World. If Vallejo's Spanish is an American Spanish it is because of the fragments of a demolished Quechua language that silently infiltrate his poetry and turn his Spanish away from Spanish, turn Spanish away from itself (fragments that no longer relate to Quechua but that form their own unreadable and detached language on the *verso* of Vallejo's "Spanish"). If the Catholicism that Rigoberta Menchú discusses in her testimony is an American Catholicism it is not because it is a combination of Quiché and Christian principles, but because it is a combination of Christianity, on the one hand, and of traces and fragments of lost Mayan religions that affect that Christianity, on the other. The Churches in Mexico are American not because they were constructed from out of the pre-Aztec pyramids, but because they were constructed from the rubble, the broken stones of the pyramids after the pyramids had lost their sacred status—stones, in other words, that were no longer connected to what they once were. What is essential to Latin America, then, what makes America not merely another Europe, are the parts and phantasms that came to life through the demolitions brought about by the Conquest, the ghost-figures that live on, forever infiltrating, silently inhabiting and uncannily shuffling, parting the Western edifice. It is via these parts that the American "I" signs the West.

It is not strange, then, that in "Resistencia" Lezama claims that the American resistance is a "no yo" that coincides with the "yo más oscuro" (191). How can the "non I" be the "most obscure I"? Because the "non I," the "sustancia destruida," is the "obscure" and essential American force of non-being that defiantly *shifts* Western forms: its repre-

sentations, morphologies and styles. The resistances are the pieced "not-I" that cannot be seen but that sees ("el ojo nos ve" [191]), the scattered, profound "I" of the interred that cannot be grasped but that touches. This "not-I" is an "effector," an actor that, for Vallejo and Lezama (and for Paz) is the real American "I." It is not the "I" that creates and re-presents culture (the "I" of humanism, the Cartesian "I"); nor is it the alienated "I" that seeks and recalls its lost wholeness or ideal origin. It is instead an utterly detached and splintered "I," the cut-up "self" (the cut-up "selves") that marks, occupies and possesses culture after culture marks, occupies and possesses everything: the American subjects of Western events.

#### ● NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The poem, in fact, takes the form of a kind of pseudo-dialogue between two speakers. The first speaker notes how "all have gone" while the second indicates that when "someone leaves someone remains." Unfortunately, in the brief span of this paper I cannot take into account this "dialogical" factor.

<sup>2</sup> Vallejo discusses these issues in a more pessimistic manner in *Trilce* LXXV. Here, he portrays a being that dies without ever having lived, an absolute orphan—one who is orphaned not only from parents but from history itself, "Orfandad de orfandades" (213).

<sup>3</sup> By "morphological exceptions," of course, I am referring to the inundated text, *Súmula, nunca infusa, de excepciones morfológicas*, that appears in the form of an emptied box in *Opiano Licario*.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for Lezama, the ruin is an especially important feature of Latin American history. In one essay, in fact, Lezama suggests that while Rubén Darío's *modernista* project has been misunderstood and has thus become a ruin, it is precisely this ruinous state that makes this project historically relevant. As Lezama writes: "Debe ser una muestra de madurez nuestro saber valorar la ruina" (*Imagen y posibilidad* 54-5).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the relationship of the ruin and the *inasible*, I suggest that the reader consult Lezama's interpretation of Confucianism in *Eras*, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it may seem strange that someone whose most famous work is entitled *Paradiso* would be rejecting the notion of the Fall. In fact, though—and in line with Lezama's very strange Catholicism—Paradise is not for Lezama the lost ideal world. Paradise, rather, is the domain of the sacred remainders that I am describing, the domain of resistance. Lezama makes this point fairly clearly

in "Extasis de la sustancia destruida" as he writes: "Paraíso (éxtasis de participación en lo homogéneo, intemporalidad)" (189).

### ● WORKS CITED

- Lezama Lima, José. *Imagen y posibilidad*. Ed. Ciro Bianchi Ross. La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Interrogando a Lezama Lima*. Ed. Casa de las Américas, Centro de Investigaciones Literarias. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Las eras imaginarias*. Madrid: Fundamentos, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oppiano Licario*. Ed. César López. Madrid: Cátedras, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Poesía completa*. La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1985.
- Paz, Octavio. *El laberinto de la soledad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956.
- Vallejo, César. *Poesía completa*. México: Premia, 1978.

## Creating a Syllabus for French/Francophone Culture: A Re-examination of its Role in the Curriculum

Signe Denbow

Western Michigan University

### 1. INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Although discussions of foreign language pedagogy used to focus almost exclusively on language skills, we are increasingly aware of the impossibility of teaching a language in isolation from the culture it expresses. In the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, for example, an understanding of cultural references is required to attain both *superior* and *distinguished* levels of proficiency for the language skills "reading" and "listening." The AATF's "Syllabus of Competence", which outlines the knowledge and proficiency expected of teachers of French in five areas,<sup>1</sup> devotes one chapter exclusively to "culture."

The awareness that language and culture are inseparable is, of course, far from new. Indeed, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,<sup>2</sup> quite popular earlier in this century, went so far as to state that our language *determines* the way we think and view the world; that our "cultural outlook" is determined by the language we speak and think in. Although the hypothesis in its strongest form later fell into disfavor,<sup>3</sup> it is evident that a language does not exist in isolation but in cultural community. Today's beginning and intermediate-level textbooks reflect the inextricable role of "culture acquisition" in language learning, for they are dotted with cultural notes to explain French society and worldview to American students.

Since any language expresses a culture, we can begin to glimpse the soul of a community by examining its vocabulary, as shown by Lakoff's linguistic analysis of "love" in American culture. He notes that it is "conventionally understood in terms of physical force (there is *attraction, electricity, magnetism*, etc.) or terms of health (is the relationship *healthy, sick, on the mend, dying, on its last legs?*)" and so forth (306).<sup>4</sup> Although it is probable that most Americans would not consciously categorize love under "health" or "physical force," surely our use of these terms subconsciously affects our understanding of the concept.

Indeed, concepts shared by different cultures are not always expressed in identical forms. For instance, the concept "romance," val-