



¿Qué enigma encierra el hombre?: De-Scribing Identity in the Poetry of Juan Gil-Albert

Joseph Kosak and Mahan Ellison
Furman University

Juan Gil-Albert's prolific poetic work spans much of the twentieth century, beginning before the Spanish Civil War and extending through his exile and eventual return to Spain in 1947. In this essay, we analyze poems from representative periods of Gil-Albert's life to better understand how he developed and expressed his sexual identity through his poetry after experiencing periods of trauma. Gil-Albert's identity as a gay man provides an opportunity to consider the construction of gender identity through a period of intense social and personal upheaval during and after the war. Of the scholarship that exists about Gil-Albert, we have found that the question of gender identity in his poetry is a field that still merits examination and critical analysis. Through a holistic approach to Gil-Albert's life and work, we connect the personal identity of the poet with his artistic production to understand how context informed his poetic choices.

The experience of exile gave Gil-Albert the space to explore his sexuality and his identity, allowing him to evolve and changing his poetry (González-Allende 90). His poetic tone and the content of his work altered due to his experiences in exile, such as finding a lover and being unable to integrate into a new society. Gil-Albert

frequently reminisced about his time in exile, writing the poem "Mi Nostalgia" (in *Los homenajes e in promptus* [1976]) and the essay *Heraclés, sobre una manera de ser* (1975), which show how impactful this experience was. Additionally, the Spanish Civil War and the ensuing personal trauma also changed the poetic tone and the content of Gil-Albert's poetry. In this essay, we will use the theoretical lens of *homographesis*—as outlined by Lee Edelman in his 1994 book of the same name—to analyze how Gil-Albert's works reflect his sexual identity before, during, and in exile after the Spanish Civil War.

The concept of *homographesis* as a theoretical and literary tool was articulated by Lee Edelman to classify and critique the dynamics of representation and identity present within specifically gay literature. Edelman describes *homographesis* as the "process whereby the homosexual subject is represented by being, even more than inhabiting, a body that always demands to be read, a body on which his 'sexuality' is already inscribed" (10). As a critical theory that makes a direct connection between sexual identity and the act of writing, it is directly relevant as a tool for analyzing much of Gil-Albert's work.

Homographesis specifically refers to the intersection of the act of writing and the expression of a homosexual identity, and it acknowledges the dual function of these writings to reflect the personal (sexual) identity of the author and also (but not necessarily intentionally) to deconstruct “the binary logic of sexual difference on which symbolic identity is based, effectively disrupt[ing] the cognitive stability that the visual perception of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ would otherwise serve to anchor” (Edelman 12). Edelman’s articulation of homographesis focuses on the ways gay authors “de-cribe” the strict heteronormative identities that are inscribed into society (10), and it analyzes how (homo)sexual identity is expressed through literature. The suffix *-graphesis* refers to the primary subject of the text, while the prefix *homo-*, in this case and according to Edelman, highlights the intersection of homosexual identity and narrative expression. As a theory, homographesis is used to analyze the representation of homosexuality within a body of text, which can be seen through the works of Gil-Albert due to his dual identity as a homosexual man and author.

Juan Gil-Albert was born in 1904 in Alcoy, Valencia, and had a comfortable childhood “próxima a lujo” (Pozuelo 13). He attended the University of Valencia, studying in the department of social and legal sciences in 1920 (Valero Gómez 309). After obtaining his bachelor’s degree, Gil-Albert published his first book, *Fascinación de lo irreal* (1927), followed promptly by *Vibración de estío* in 1928 (Ferris 129). However, both initial works were prose, and Gil-Albert would not publish his first collection of poetry until *Misteriosa presencia* and *Candente horror* in 1936, just before the start of the Spanish Civil War. During the war, Gil-Albert was a secretary in the subsection of literature of the Alliance of Antifascist Artists, and in this role he organized several art spectacles that were intended as antifascist propaganda.

Likewise, he participated in the creation of two notable journals, *El Mono Azul* and *La Hora de España*, which published a notable amount of antifascist literature (Carnero 53). During the Spanish Civil War, his political sympathies were with the Republican side; he was surrounded by many communists, and often acted as a mediating force, identifying as someone who was a “simpatizante no marxista de la causa proletaria” (Carnero 56). Due to Gil-Albert’s political leanings, he was forced into exile after the Republicans lost the Civil War, spending time in an internment camp for Spanish refugees in France until he was eventually allowed to seek refuge in Mexico (Villanueva 45).

At least for the first part of his time in Mexico, Gil-Albert was able to find love and joy. Later in life, he wrote a memoir – *Tobeyo o del amor, homenaje a México* (1989) – detailing his exile there; however, he eventually became homesick and struggled with life in a foreign society. In 1947, when both his brother-in-law and father died, he returned to Spain where he lived in a sort of self-imposed exile, writing but not publishing for twenty-five years (Corral 37). During this period of self-exile, he wrote the essay *Heraclés, sobre una manera de ser* in 1955. However, it was not published until the 1970s (Moreno, “Bajo los árboles sagrados” 57). In 1972, Gil-Albert published *Fuentes de la constancia*, the work that brought him back from the brink of obscurity (Siles 35). Upon the Spanish literary world’s rediscovery of Gil-Albert, he continued to publish written works, culminating with the publishing of *Tobeyo o del amor: homenaje a México* in 1990, two years before his death (Corral 37). After Gil-Albert’s return to prominence, the Institute of Alicantian Studies was renamed the Cultural Institute Juan Gil-Albert in 1984 to give homage to the poet. His writings also experienced a wider distribution and began to receive more significant critical attention and engagement.

The rediscovery of Gil-Albert in the 1970s sparked a wave of literary criticism of his writings, focusing on the poet's literary style, voice, and chronological placement. There have been some critical analyses focused on homosexuality in Gil-Albert's works, namely *Homografesis en misteriosa presencia: sonetos de Juan Gil-Albert*, by Alfredo Martínez,¹ *Amor y homosexualidad en Juan Gil-Albert* by Carmen Peña Ardid, and *Hombres en movimiento* by Iker González-Allende. Martínez's essay provides an excellent representation of how homographesis appeared in Gil-Albert's most important prewar text, *Misteriosa presencia*. Peña Ardid's article from the 1980s focuses on Gil-Albert's essay *Heraclés*, which is the work in which the writer most profoundly discusses his identity as a gay man. González-Allende's book focuses on how the experience of being exiled after the Spanish Civil War affects the masculinity and identity of men, and includes a chapter focusing on Gil-Albert, arguing that he was able to develop his sexual identity and masculinity through the liberty of being in an unknown society. While these studies are all highly valuable in analyzing Gil-Albert's sexuality, in this essay we focus on changes in tone in Gil-Albert's poetry by comparing his prewar writing with later examples from his exile. We have chosen to focus on "Soneto II" and "Soneto XI" from *Misteriosa Presencia* (1936) as examples of his prewar writing and "El leñador" from *El existir medita su corriente* (1949) as an example of his poetry from exile.

As an admirer of Greek traditions, José Ortega y Gasset, and Miguel de Unamuno, Gil-Albert often wrote in the classical style, using nature and metaphors to represent his life and his feelings (Rovira 218). Much of his prewar poetry follows the patterns of classical poetry, with his sonnets mostly

keeping to four stanzas of four lines, with eleven syllables per line. Also, in keeping with the Spanish Romantic poetic genre, he tells a story that is much like a traditional ballad.

Through the oeuvre of his writings, there is some debate as to how to classify the work of Gil-Albert. The early twentieth century saw the innovation and iconoclasm of avant-garde and surrealist artistic strategies, as well as the creativity of the Generation of 27. His early work largely kept to the classical literary style, using nature and leaning heavily on metaphors. While Gil-Albert considered himself a part of the Generation of 27, because of his age and the people who surrounded him, some critics argue that he fits better with the Generation of 36 due to his relatively late arrival to poetry in 1936 (Perieto de Paula 17). Even so, Gil-Albert did partake in the literary styles of the time, writing *Misteriosa presencia* in the *gongorista* and *garcilasista* styles, heavily obscuring the meaning of the text and frequently utilizing polysemy (Ferris 192).²

The poems "Soneto II" and "Soneto XI" illustrate Gil-Albert's use of the *gongorista* metaphors and his strict adherence to the classical literary style, and they highlight the homographesis in his works. Both sonnets are written with hendecasyllabic lines, a classical style of eleven syllables per line, two stanzas of four lines, and two stanzas of three lines. Gil-Albert's choice of the sonnet format is notable when many of his contemporaries were writing in more experimental (avant-garde and surrealist) styles.

Gil-Albert's insistent use of the *gongorista* style and his adherence to a formal poetic structure set him apart from many other authors of the time. "Soneto II" and "Soneto XI" are both erotic poems written to a subject, ostensibly his lover, but without a

¹ Martínez analyzes both "Soneto II" and "Soneto XI" using the homographesis theory; however, we will be taking a unique approach to the analysis by comparing the poems with "El leñador," focusing on the tone and content of the poems.

² For more information about *gongorismo*, see Belén Atienza. For more information about *garcilasismo*, see Juan Pablo Muñoz Covarrubias.

response. Both sonnets have a tone of longing and desire. In structural contrast, “El leñador” is a poem written in free verse, following no consistent rhyme pattern or structure. “El leñador” is more metaphorical and does not construe the meaning of words as done in “Soneto II” and “Soneto XI.” Through their change in tone, content, and message, these three poems demonstrate how Gil-Albert’s life and poetry were affected by exile and the traumas of the Spanish Civil War.

Even though Gil-Albert’s works prior to *Misteriosa presencia* were primarily prose (Ferris 192), José Luis Ferris notes that this collection “es uno de los libros más audaces de la poesía española del siglo XX por su canto al amor subversivo y por lo que entraña de rebelión sexual y erótica” (Ferris 192). For this study, the collection is relevant because of its classical structure and its narration of homosexual love, constructed with a poetic styling that echoes *gongorista* and *garcilasista* influences.

“Soneto II” is a traditional sonnet with fourteen lines divided into four stanzas, using a hendecasyllabic rhythm and an assonant rhyme scheme: ABBA ABBA CCD CCD. The first two stanzas are quartets, while the second two stanzas consist of tercets. The first stanza opens with the word “mancebo” and ostensibly refers to Gil-Albert’s lover, the person to whom the poem was written. Gil-Albert’s use of “mancebo” is shocking in the first line because it sets an assertive yet caring tone, helping the reader to realize the power dynamic that exists between Gil-Albert and the mysterious “tú.” Gil-Albert then develops a loving tone; the poetic voice expresses his “amor por adonarte” and that “quererte fue cosa de mirarte.” The use of “mancebo” here in a caring homosocial/homosexual context enacts Edelman’s concept of homographesis as it “effectively disrupts the cognitive stability” of the term (12), and as Gil-Albert uses it to describe this sought after subject, it simultaneously “de-scrib[es] the identities

that order has so oppressively *inscribed*” (Edelman 10). Through this subtle infusion of nuance, Gil-Albert de-scribes the word, using it as way to address the subject, reclaiming the word and giving it a new definition in opposition to what society inscribed.

At the end of the stanza, the poetic voice further develops the caring and assertive tone by discussing a failure committed by his lover. The second stanza is a hypothetical interrogative that highlights the narrator’s love for the addressee and explains to the reader that the pair has either gotten into a fight and taken some time apart or has ended their relationship. However, the narrator still clings to the love that he and the addressee had and will cling to his love until “encuentro casual que en el ocaso.” This stanza further establishes the poetic tone, adding a sense of longing and developing the caring and loving tones; it diminishes the assertive tone, and the second stanza also highlights Gil-Albert’s subtle use of *gongorismo*. The stanza is constructed with a convoluted sentence structure and complicated wording; this alteration of syntax highlights the possibilities of language, and, through the lens of homographesis, this flexibility functions as an expression of identity. The tortured or alternate syntax of the poem, through a homographesis analysis, connects directly to Gil-Albert’s personal sexual identity, which also did not fit within hegemonic ideals of the time, and further underscores Gil-Albert’s experiences by validating them through the narrator’s flexible use of syntax.

The first tercet of “Soneto II” begins with an informal, second-person command, telling the addressee to go tell “him” that the addressee regrets his actions; contextually the “him” can be interpreted as referring to the narrator. This awkward, third-person self-reference again suggests that Gil-Albert is deliberately using *gongorista* elements to mislead and confuse the reader. The reader can infer that the addressee has wronged the

narrator, or that they feel guilt from the relationship. In using an informal, second-person command, Gil-Albert reestablishes the assertive tone and reminds the reader of the power dynamic between the narrator and the addressee by abruptly reestablishing command. Using a metaphor in the second line, the narrator blames the addressee for being on their “camino inverso.” Gil-Albert’s use of the word “inverso” is important in its connection to the word “invertido,” a derogatory euphemism for homosexuality. Gil-Albert’s suggestion of the pejorative highlights his acute awareness of his position in Spanish society as a gay man: backwards, marginalized, and unrecognized. He then ends the tercet by telling the addressee “que te libre en buen hora de mis alas,” another metaphor for ending their relationship. This line underlines the assertive power dynamics, diminishing the loving and caring tone. The declared agency of the poetic voice clearly establishes the autonomy, the individuality, and the humanity/identity of the speaker. This poetic voice is “autonom[ous] and coheren[t],” and therefore subtly undermines the hegemony of heteronormative “male homosexual identity” over these qualities (Edelman 12). In undermining the heteronormative sexual identity, Gil-Albert is both displaying his identity and critiquing broader society.

In the final tercet, Gil-Albert shifts into a more melancholic tone while sustaining the assertive voice, saying that he fears his role as mentor in their relationship, and that the addressee should free himself. Then, in the first two lines, Gil-Albert flips the sentence structure in *gongorista* fashion, in one instance stating: “Mas atiende, tu juventud temiera,” inverting a more typical syntax of “tu juventud temiera, mas atiende.” Through this alternate sentence structure, Gil-Albert forces the reader to think about

each line carefully in order to understand, inviting the reader to participate in the act of deciphering meaning. Additionally, the final line of the poem—“librarte al mismo tiempo de tus galas”—is polysemantic, with the term “galas” ostensibly referring to fancy clothing, but also suggesting freedom from a danger, a marriage gift, or the most exquisite version of something. The poetic voice here continues to highlight its agency through the manipulation of syntax and meaning. Gil-Albert’s display of the subjective interpretation of language is an act of homographesis that operates within “the realm of *différance*,” demonstrating the subjectivity of language and its interpretation (Edelman 12). In highlighting the subjectivity of language, Gil-Albert creates a powerful, convoluted poem, which is expanded upon by the dialogue.

The content of the poem presents a one-sided conversational dialogue, asking direct questions and commanding the “tú” of the poem; it does not contain a response from the addressee. The use of the *gongorista* style in “Soneto II” is reflected in the choice of words such as “adornarte,” “anhelarte,” and “rumbo,” layering the poem in complexity and flaunting *gongorism*’s poetic excess while simultaneously describing the intimacy of homosexual love. These poetic excesses add complexity to a reading of the poem and, while consociating the poem with the *gongorista* tradition, also open it to a postmodern interpretation of *différance*, as theorized by Jacques Derrida in *Margins of Philosophy* (1982). Derrida’s conceptualization of *différance* offers the theory that language and meaning are highly contextual, and Edelman builds on this contextual creation by associating the act of writing with personal identity, allowing the reader to draw parallels between a poetic work and the author.³ These connections demonstrate how Gil-Albert’s poetry is both a product of

³ For more information about *différance*, see Wilson Baldrige.

classical styles and also an innovative force in twentieth-century (post)modern poetics.

Throughout "Soneto II," Gil-Albert layers metaphors and complex sentence structure to subtly insert his homosexuality, allowing him to pass as a straight man if put to scrutiny. "Soneto II" is representative of Gil-Albert's dichotomic relationship with his sexual identity during this period of his life; never hiding his homosexuality, as seen in his choice to use words like "mancebo" or "inverso," but conversely, being forced to conceal his sexual identity due to societal discrimination and prejudices. At the same time, as Edelman notes about homographesis:

The graphesis, the cultural inscription, of homosexual possibilities, by deconstructing the binary logic of sexual difference on which symbolic identity is based, effectively disrupts the cognitive stability that the visual perception of "sameness" and "difference" would otherwise serve to anchor. (12)

Gil-Albert, therefore, with his subtle play on words, undermines societal expectations of heteronormativity in a way that gives him autonomy. In a Derridean sense, Gil-Albert's poetry plays with language to de-scribe the chains of meaning, re-imagining these words through an altered *différance*.

Much like in "Soneto II," "Soneto XI," from *Misteriosa presencia*, is also written in the *gongorista* style, relying on complex word choice, convoluted sentence structure, and metaphors to convey Gil-Albert's homosexual love experience while also inscribing a level of autonomy for the poetic voice. Where "Soneto II" is a one-sided conversation, "Soneto XI" takes the form of an observation. The poem describes another person, presumably a man, also in the "tú" form. The poem is written in a hendecasyllabic rhythm and is again

structured in the style of a traditional sonnet. "Soneto XI" follows a traditional, assonant rhyme scheme for the first two stanzas, ABBA ABBA, but in the first tercet, the poem departs from the classical scheme with a CDA DAC rhyme. In addition to the differing structure, the tone and content of "Soneto XI" are unique, with individual natures and messages.

"Soneto XI" opens strongly with the line, "convulsión en tu pecho desviado," which clearly sets the tone as erotic and focuses the poem on the mysterious "tú." The use of the word "desviado" highlights the *gongorista* and polysemous elements of the poem. There is an obvious meaning to the word "desviado" ("deviated"), but taken within the context of the poem, Gil-Albert could be characterizing the addressee as a deviant by synecdoche. In the second line, Gil-Albert creates a metaphor, calling the addressee a maverick, asserting that they are a loose storm. However, the line is complex in that it can also be interpreted as the addressee being mentally unwell or having a tumultuous past. The use of words like "tormenta," "convulsión," and "desviado" creates a grim tone, which is carried throughout the rest of the poem. This tonal repetition emphasizes a sense of change and revolution, an undermining of established "raíces."

The third line is another metaphor, calling the reader a "joven árbol poblado de perdices," a confusing or even surreal line, with the word "perdices" referring to either a bird or to intentionally wasting time to delay the resolution of a problem.⁴ Gil-Albert could either be complimenting his lover, calling them a proverbial young tree, full of life, or he could be implying that they procrastinate solving the many problems that surround them. Through metaphor, Gil-Albert simultaneously invokes nature to create a tranquil tone while also criticizing the addressee. These conflicting

⁴ The RAE describes the term "perdices" as a variety of birds, or to "Hacer perder intencionadamente el

tiempo en rodeos o dilaciones que retrasen u obstaculicen la resolución de un problema."

interpretations add complexity by creating conflict between criticism and natural beauty. In addition, the consistent use of nature metaphors demonstrates Gil-Albert's subtle justification of his sexual identity; his poetic identity is underpinned by natural elements. The use of polysemous words undermines strict narratives of identity and opens space for his marginalized affections. This simultaneously criticizes broader societal conceptualizations, while framing his homosexual identity as natural.

Gil-Albert's writings were complex, often representing both sides of a critique, creating a unique and pensive work, consistent with the *gongorista* influence. In his article, Vicente Raga Rosaleny describes Gil-Albert as "feliz e infeliz al mismo tiempo; rico y pobre, provinciano y cosmopolita, presente e invisible, amable y hostil, árido y feraz, pagano y católico" (69). Gil-Albert's multitude of personalities, countryman and cosmopolitan man for example, provides him with the ability to write from a variety of perspectives, and to develop and convey tension in his poetry as he narrates the conflicts within himself. For example, in "Soneto XI," Gil-Albert creates a narrative about the speaker's relationship with another person and uses different perspectives to discuss the subject, as seen through the oscillation in tones from negative to positive. Through the lens of homographesis, Gil-Albert is inserting his homosexual identity into his works by describing his different perspectives in a manner that communicates his feelings, centering his sexuality in the work. Gil-Albert creates tension through the use of multiple perspectives, a consistent strategy that is also seen in the use of nature in "Soneto XI."

Gil-Albert continues to use nature to complicate the poem when, in the third and fourth lines, he writes "Joven árbol poblado de perdices / Sacudido un palor te hizo mi amado." These lines use images of nature while also including ideas of force and

violence. "Sacudido un palor" is open to multiple interpretations but contains aggressive denotations. Gil-Albert's use of nature creates a peaceful and tranquil tone, alongside images of force and punishment. In using nature to describe, Gil-Albert is localizing homosexuality as a natural desire that is complicated when it is disconnected from its roots ("desatada" or "sacudido"). Edelman discusses that "as soon as homosexuality is localized and consequently can be read within the social landscape, it becomes subject to a metonymic dispersal that allows it to be read *into* almost anything" (6). Gil-Albert employs nature to make his sexuality readable through the process of this metonymic dispersal. Aggression, desire, conflict, and change are also natural products, but they emerge as they are removed from their natural source. The metonymic dispersal of sexuality tied to nature is therefore expanded into other human, social interactions, experiencing change but maintaining a semantic chain.

In the second stanza of the poem, Gil-Albert compares the addressee to a deer, invoking a sense of natural beauty, but he immediately criticizes them by saying that they are "adusto con arte apaciguado." In this line, Gil-Albert again employs a word which can have many meanings; "arte" could be interpreted as "gracefully" or as the addressee being an artist. If the narrator is referring to the subject as an artist, the narrator could be upset because of the addressee's involvement with the grimness of pacified art, while the narrator was involved in activist art. With words like "adusto" and "apaciguado," Gil-Albert shifts the tone from one of nature and learned love to a subdued, darker tone.

In the second line this stanza, Gil-Albert uses the word "sumida," which reinvigorates the natural tone but also furthers the dark tone through the connotation of being drowned, thus reinforcing the *gongorista* style and a sense of ominousness by casting doubt and adding complexity to the poem.

Gil-Albert finishes the second stanza with another metaphor, when he says that “las sombras de tus ojos más felices... van cayendo en los cuévanos del hado.” This metaphor develops the baleful tone, while also adding a sense of revenge or retribution to the poem.

In the first tercet of “Soneto XI,” Gil-Albert highlights the duality of signification but also implies a vengeful tone when he uses the word “turbación.” However, the second line returns to a lighter tone, using words like “adolece” and “núbil,” which have childish and youthful connotations. The use of the word “núbil” is especially notable as it is typically used to describe a woman who is at the age to get married. Gil-Albert’s word choice reinforces the idea of an age gap between him and the addressee, while also inspiring an ethereal sense because of the word’s proximity to “nube.” The poem promptly returns to the somber tone when, in the last line of the tercet, the reader encounters a violent phrasing with a double meaning. The use of the word “mutilar” cues the return of the ominous tone. While the line could be a metaphor for the destruction of a young person, as seen in the use of the word “lirio,” the word is open to an interpretation as “lírico.” Gil-Albert creates poetic tension here; the mutilation of the lily—or of the poetic—employs natural metaphors to highlight the power of poetry to de-scribe language and identity.

In addition to his focus on nature, Gil-Albert’s works also contain ethereal and celestial dimensions. This often endows his poetry with a paradoxical sense of both distance and intimacy, as Ferris mentions in his essay, “La obra en prosa de Juan Gil-Albert desde 1939:” “Hay en Juan Gil-Albert este fervor por la materia y esta dimensión celeste, cualidad que no abunda en los poetas de su generación. La inmersión en lo sensible se proyecta hacia lo alto, y no secciona en ningún momento la raíz terrenal, sigue unido a la tierra” (195). As noted in the quote above, Gil-Albert combines the

material with the celestial, creating an ethereal tone while keeping the poem grounded in “la raíz terrenal.” An example of Gil-Albert’s connection between the heavens and the earth is the use of the word “núbil,” which gives the poem a celestial tone, while the word “lirio” connects the poem to earth. This ethereal/earthly tension in his poetry compounds with the other tensions examined above, and it highlights Gil-Albert’s consistent exploration of the enigmas of humanity.

Aside from creating tension, the use of the word “lirio” is placed at a pivotal place in the poem, the exact line in which Gil-Albert departs from the traditional style of the sonnet, changing the rhyme scheme from CCD, CCD to CDA, CAD. In this line, Gil-Albert breaks the fourth wall in suggesting that he is mutilating the lyrics, while also referring to the addressee. The innocence of the youth and the poem’s structure are both mutilated through the metaphor of the lily. Furthermore, Gil-Albert instills a self-critical nuance in addition to his dark tone, as he reveals the self-consciousness of his position as an older man in a relationship with a young man. The innate beauty of the word “lirio,” the self-critical implications, and the dark tone create tension in the contrast, hinting at the narrator’s underlying conflicting emotions. Gil-Albert continues with the theme of an age gap, and his acute awareness of said age gap, in the second tercet.

Keeping with the dark and harsh theme, Gil-Albert accuses the addressee of having an “invasora esencia.” The polysemous word “esencia” is a further representation of *gongorismo* with its varied denotations. In the same line, the poetic voice expresses shock at how the essence of the addressee grew, which could be a euphemism for an erection or a metaphor for personal growth. The use of an expressive phrase like “¡cómo crece!” in conjunction with the word “esencia” shifts the tone from dark and self-critical to a lighter, more ethereal tone. This new tone is

continued in the second line of the tercet when Gil-Albert uses the word “transciende.” The poem concludes with another metaphor describing how the essence “en manos de gloria es vaporosa.” This final line underscores an evolution of the poem’s tone from one of violence and convulsion to a lighter and more ethereal tone.

The evolution of tone in “Soneto XI” is key to understanding the content of the poem. Starting out in a grim yet lauding tone, Gil-Albert continuously reinforces the ominous, through the use of words like “sumida” and “apaciguado,” diminishing the lauding tone. However, he also uses nature to instill a sense of tranquility and beauty, which is carried throughout the poem with the use of words like “ciervo” and “lirio.” By using nature as a mood lightener and existential reference, Gil-Albert creates a light/dark dichotomy. This contrasting tension could be interpreted as a poetic reflection on biblical themes of the battle between light and dark. As the poem progresses, and the tone with it, the poem gradually becomes more sublime, implying that the light won the battle. Gil-Albert employs these dichotomies to create tension and complexity. This poem highlights both thematic and stylistic tensions in Gil-Albert’s work as he builds on traditional poetic structures but introduces contemporary innovations, blending the two into a unified whole.

Unlike “Soneto XI” and “Soneto II,” “El leñador” is written in free verse and represents a shift in the tone, style, and content of Gil-Albert’s works. “El leñador” was written at the end of Gil-Albert’s time in exile, as his homesickness became overpowering, diminishing his enjoyment. While Gil-Albert initially found great joy when he first went into exile, due to a newfound sense of freedom and autonomy, he later began to struggle with being away from his country and family, leading him to take on a nostalgic and more reflective tone, as seen in

the poem “El Mediterráneo” (Moreno, “El sentido” 122). While the poem “El leñador” does not show much nostalgia for Gil-Albert’s Mediterranean home, it is written in a reflexive tone, in the second person, and is addressed to an unnamed “tú.” “El leñador” is also representative of Gil-Albert’s shift from his prewar poetics, which typically followed an established, formal style, as noted in the poems analyzed above. There is no rhyme scheme or poetic rhythm; the poems are written in free-verse and primarily focus on developing a narrative. The content of the poem focuses on Gil-Albert’s experiences, which are told in the second person, employing a character that reflects his perspective on masculinity.

“El leñador” starts with the hypothetical interrogative, “¿Qué enigma encierra el hombre?” which sets a tone of deep reflection by both questioning masculinity and demonstrating a distance from masculine paradigms. By initiating the poem with a question, Gil-Albert invites the reader to consider the enigma surrounding men throughout the text. The poem continues to question masculinity as it discusses the routine of work, employing a lumberjack as a metonym for the typical gender role of men of the period. The poem challenges pre-conceived norms of masculinity as seen in calling the working man’s labor “su crimen,” which they must repeat daily. Men’s labor is a “destino” and a “crimen” in these lines, and these descriptors undermine hegemonic understandings of masculinity and gender roles in society. By creating a discussion around the meaning of work and traditional masculine gender roles, Gil-Albert subtly subverts heteronormativity, and he is effectively “deconstructing the binary logic of sexual differences on which symbolic identity is based” by disrupting the heteronormative methods used to classify “sameness” and “difference” (Edelman 12).

Gil-Albert continues the poem in his convoluted style, employing words which are open to polysemous interpretation, for

example, in the fourth line, he uses the word “jubiloso,” referring either to joy or retirement. In the same line, Gil-Albert chooses the word “fuerza,” which establishes a fiery and masculine tone in its context. This tone is sustained in the fifth line, when he writes the phrase “enclavado en los montes,” which refers to a remote dwelling that was forcefully created, supporting the image of a rugged masculinity. While Gil-Albert uses nature to instill a sense of peace and serenity into the poem, he also creates tension by contrasting masculine images with the beauty of nature. The clash of masculinity and nature is the main conflict of the poem, spurning thoughts about the nature of men and their masculinity through a juxtaposition of the two concepts. This opposition functions to critique Spanish society by making ideas of masculinity seem unnatural through their comparison to nature. By making hegemonic masculinity appear in contrast to nature, Gil-Albert subtly inscribes homosexuality into nature. In effect, Gil-Albert forces a critical examination of masculinity. Edelman notes:

the historical positing of the category of “the homosexual” textualizes male identity as such, subjecting it to the alienating requirement that it be “read,” and threatening, in consequence, to strip “masculinity” of its privileged status as the self-authenticating paradigm of the natural or the self-evident itself. Now it must *perform* its self-evidence, must represent its own difference from the derivative and artificial “masculinity” of the gay man. (12)

Through inscribing homosexuality into nature and describing a typical, masculine man, Gil-Albert allows for criticism of masculinity by stripping masculinity of its privileged status.

In lines six through twelve, Gil-Albert continues to create tension through the juxtaposition of words such as “fuego,”

“Plácido descanso,” and “tosco.” The choice to use these words creates a contrast to the content of lines six through eight, furthering the already existing tension in the poem. In line six, the poem states that the subject “arde un seguro fuego en sus entrañas,” which develops the fiery and masculine tone, and then is immediately juxtaposed with a contrasting image of “Plácido descanso.” Gil-Albert continues to create tension in calling the lumberjack an “ignoto peregrino,” invoking a religious tone and implying that the subject has an existential need to quench their thirst. The poem inserts religious imagery into the portrayal of masculinity, developing the tensions present in the poem and forcing the reader to question the dynamics at play within heteronormative society.

While lines six through twelve establish the tension and tone of the poem, they also reveal an important discussion on markers of masculinity. The fire in the stomach of the lumberjack implies that he thirsts for alcohol and has gone to a bar to quench his thirst. Gil-Albert also employs a professional tool described through simile to undermine its stereotypical masculinity when he writes “el hacha como flor se balancea,” comparing the lumberjack’s axe to how a flower balances. Furthermore, the use of the word “hacha” is of note because of its multiple denotations, potentially implying that the lumberjack is good at his job, or adding a romantic flair to the line. The tension here initiates a pattern that is continued throughout the poem. In this section, Gil-Albert again analyzes the performance of masculinity by placing masculine roles apart from the “self-authenticating paradigm of the natural or self-evident itself” (Edelman 12). Through the juxtaposition of the axe and flower, Gil-Albert breaks the perceived link between nature and masculinity, thus allowing the reader to critique masculinity.

Gil-Albert further creates tension in lines thirteen through twenty-six, where the poem changes tone, becoming darker and more

pensive before returning to a lighter tone later. He establishes the darker tone using words like “ocultase” and “manaza” through line nineteen, after which the poem’s tone changes in line twenty when it says, “los árboles, la vida de su vida.” Through the imagery of trees and discussions of life, the tone shifts to become lighter, and is expanded upon by images of gazelles, developing more contrast through the juxtaposition with the darker tone of the previous lines. “El leñador” is structured on the opposition of images and words; “sobresalto” and “reverdecen” in lines twenty-one and twenty-three emphasize this change and growth.

A key aspect in Gil-Albert’s creation of tension is the juxtaposition between nature and society, as seen in the contrast between the lumberjack and nature throughout “El leñador.” Gil-Albert creates tension by contrasting the lumberjack with imagery of nature, as seen in the lines thirteen through twenty-six, which, in turn, is key in creating the tone of the poem through the tension created by the contrast. As María Paz Moreno discusses, nature holds a key place in the works of Gil-Albert, not only with aesthetic purposes but also to make cultural references and reflect about himself: “la compleja relación entre naturaleza y cultura ocupa un lugar central en los poemas de este autor, mostrando que el entorno natural era para el poeta de Alcoy mucho más que un motivo estético o un vehículo para la referencia culturalista” (49). Gil-Albert plays on the conflict between nature and culture to further add tension to his works, adding another layer of complexity, but also incorporating his personal reflections on culture into the poem—reflections which were often critical. Gil-Albert employs nature as a tool to illustrate his societal critique through contrast. Furthermore, Gil-Albert breaks the link between nature and masculinity, which, as seen in homo-graphesis, invalidates the heteronormative construction of masculine identity by

countering masculinity’s “self-authenticating paradigm” (Edelman 12).

The narrative of lines thirteen through twenty-six also fosters a sense of tension; the lumberjack returns to what is possibly his house, or the forest, rife with descriptions of his surroundings, such as “ecos forestales.” Upon the lumberjack’s return to his abode, he recognizes his mortality—“descubriendo mortal”—which instigates his rebirth through a self-realization that he will die: “ha de morir ceñidas de promesas / sus ramas tiernas.” This reflection on mortality is tinged with love. Gil-Albert breaks the line, creating a pause which draws attention to image and highlights the caring element that is found in death. This is a maternal or caring image that departs from the previous tones of the poem, which are largely dark or masculine. This softer vision of death signals the end point of any rigid or rugged conceptualization of heteronormative masculinity, undermining its potential enduring power. Gil-Albert effects what Edelman describes as reading into masculinity by contrasting heteronormative masculinity with homosexuality, inscribed into nature (Edelman 12).

The tender tone continues to change in lines twenty-six through thirty-six. These lines offer a rhetorical question and shift the perspective to an explicit focus on the narrator’s thoughts about the lumberjack. The narrator refers to the lumberjack as both “amigo” and “amante,” which heightens the caring tone and diminishes the harsher imagery from the beginning. However, the narrator accuses the lumberjack of being “ése es quien les hiera.” The change in perspective about the lumberjack also shifts the poem back to a darker tone, creating a new tension between the narrator and the lumberjack. The optimism remains as there is hope there is memory of “la amistad infinita” in “el fondo de su pecho,” but there is also despair as “El hombre va matando / su espontáneo tesoro.” Gil-Albert builds contrasting images of intimacy, care, and

careless destruction in this image of the lumberjack as the poem explores the enigma of identity and connection.

The narrator's yearning, almost vengeful tone continues in lines thirty-seven through forty-two as the narrator takes on an aggressive tone and continues to use contrast to create tension. In lines thirty-seven through thirty-nine, the narrator implies that the darkness has found its way to "las alas rosas, el canto y la esperanza / de bienestar," suggesting that the narrator cared for the addressee, but despair eroded the narrator's sense of care. This line is followed by the destructive observation that "El hombre va matando su espontáneo tesoro." Gil-Albert critiques masculinity in noting the self-destructive tendencies of this masculine image.

The poem concludes with a dark, critical tone, while providing an unsatisfactory ending to the narrative. The lumberjack returns to his cabin in the night and finds himself alone, surrounded by "sombras indescifrables." Gil-Albert employs words like "ocultas," "solitario," and "sombras" to create a somber, depressing tone and to highlight solitude and ambiguity. The line, "voces ocultas suelen requerirle," offers a suggestion about the enigmas that inhabit this man; he is alone, but at the mercy of hidden voices and forces. Through the metaphor of these hidden voices, Gil-Albert is able to critique the influence of societal gender norms that both demand obedience and are "indescifrables." The lumberjack is caught between his solitude in nature and the expectations of society.

With "El leñador" Gil-Albert demonstrates that his strategy for constructing a poetic narrative through contrast remains consistent, even when he abandons more fixed, classical poetic structures. The themes touched upon in "El leñador" are like the themes presented in earlier works by Gil-Albert, and he employs

many of the same methods to convey these themes. The poetry of Gil-Albert communicates struggle and complex emotions through the manipulation of tones and tension. In his early poetry, as seen in "Soneto II" and "Soneto XI," Gil-Albert generally follows a preestablished poetic style, unless he is explicitly/experimentally breaking the theme, as in the second half of "Soneto XI." In "Soneto XI" and "El leñador," Gil-Albert employs distinct poetic genres but engages with the theme of nature as a tool to critique societal expectations.⁵ While Gil-Albert's style and form evolved during his lifetime, the themes of his poetry maintained a significant consistency.

Gil-Albert's body of work effectively creates a complex narrative as he experimented with a variety of techniques and evolved from his pre-exile works to his return to Spain. His themes range from the deeply personal and intimate to broader societal critiques and often focused on the conflicts between personal identity and societal expectations. In the selected poems, Gil-Albert uses similar devices to convey similar themes, but there are notable differences in the word choice, sentence complexity, and style of poetry.

Through the theoretical lens of homographesis, we can see the evolution of Gil-Albert's literary style as a reflection of his personal trauma. While in exile, he mostly wrote in free verse, creating long narratives including "El mediterráneo," "A un monasterio griego," and "Los valsas a bordo." All three poems were published in the collection *Las ilusiones con los poemas de El convaleciente* (1945). On the other hand, in his works before exile, Gil-Albert wrote mostly in classical styles, as seen in *Mi voz comprometida* (1939), which was Gil-Albert's compilation of works during the Spanish Civil War. Additionally, Gil-Albert's poetry from his exile employed less complex word choice and sentence structure, distancing

⁵ See Antonio Moreno, "El sentido de la fidelidad en Juan Gil-Albert."

himself from the *gongorista* style and his surrealist contemporaries. However, in “El leñador,” Gil-Albert did not employ complex sentence structure or word choice, instead choosing to rely more heavily on juxtaposition and contrast to construct the narrative. Through an analysis using *homographesis*, Gil-Albert’s poetry critiques heteronormative societal understandings of masculinity, undermining these harmful ideas and inscribing homosexual characteristics onto nature. This is a powerful act of defiance and a declaration of identity that refused to be ignored. Gil-Albert’s identity as a gay man is essential to understanding his body of work and his writing is a powerful reflection on nature, identity, and the power of poetry to explore the enigma of human experience.

Works Cited

- Atienza, Belén. *El loco en el Espejo: Locura y melancolía en la España de Lope de Vega*. Rodopi, 2009.
- Baldrige, Wilson. "The Language of Difference in Derrida's 'How to Name: Effects of the Like / As Dyad.'" *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2020, pp. 105-31.
- Carnero, Guillermo. "Juan Gil-Albert en la Valencia de la guerra civil," *Actas del Congreso "Juan Gil-Albert, la memoria y el mito:" Alicante, Aula de Cultura de la CAM & Instituto Juan Gil-Albert de la Excma. Diputación, 8 a 12 de noviembre de 2004*, Alicante, Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 2007, pp. 51-65.
- Corral, Rose. "La experiencia mexicana de Juan Gil-Albert." *Los Refugiados Españoles y La Cultura Mexicana: Actas de Las Segundas Jornadas Celebradas En El Colegio de México En Noviembre de 1996*, Colegio de Mexico, 1999, pp. 35-46.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, U Chicago P, 1982.
- Edelman, Lee. *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literature and Cultural Theory*. Psychology Press, 1994.
- Ferris, José Luis. "La obra en prosa de Juan Gil-Albert desde 1939." *Actas del Congreso "Juan Gil-Albert, la memoria y el mito:" Alicante, Aula de Cultura de la CAM & Instituto Juan Gil-Albert de la Excma. Diputación, 8 a 12 de noviembre de 2004*, Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 2007, pp. 191-206.
- Gago Martín, Claudia. *La Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura: trayectorias para la definición del intelectual antifascista y aproximación al análisis ideológico del grupo a través del estudio de "El Mono Azul."* 2022. U Rey Juan Carlos (Spain), PhD Dissertation.
- Gil-Albert, Juan. *Candente horror*. Nueva Cultura, 1936.
- . *El existir medita su corriente*. Librería Clan, 1949.
- . *Fascinación de lo irreal*. Tipografía "La Gutenberg," 1927.
- . *Heraclés, sobre una manera de ser*. Instituto de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 1975.
- . *Las ilusiones con los poemas de el convaleciente*. Imán, 1945.
- . *Los homenajes e in promptus*. Institución Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (C.S.I.C.), Diputación Provincial, 1976.
- . *Misteriosa Presencia: Sonetos*. Héroe, 1936.
- . *Mi voz comprometida*. Laia, 1939.
- . *Tobeyo o del amor, homenaje a México*. Pre-Textos, 1989.
- . *Vibración de estío*. Tipografía "La Gutenberg," 1928.
- Gil-Albert, Juan, and José Carlos Rovira. *Fuentes de La Constancia*. Cátedra, 1984.
- González-Allende, Iker. *Hombres en movimiento: masculinidades españolas en los exilios y emigraciones, 1939-1999*. Purdue UP, 2018.
- Martínez, Alfredo. "Homografesis en *Misteriosa Presencia: Sonetos* (1936) de Juan Gil-Albert." *Actas del XIV Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Nueva York, 16-21 de julio de 2001*, edited by Isaías Lerner et al., vol. 3, 2004, pp. 373-385.
- Moreno, Antonio. "El sentido de la fidelidad en Juan Gil-Albert." *Canelobre*, no. 33-34, 1996, pp. 114-124.
- Moreno, María Paz. "Bajo los árboles sagrados. Hacia una lectura ecocrítica de la poesía gilalbertiana." *Pasado y presente en los estudios sobre Juan Gil-Albert*, 2021, pp. 49-62.
- . "Homenaje a Juan Gil-Albert." *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, 1999, p. 255.

- Muñoz Covarrubias, Juan Pablo. *Garcilaso De La Vega y la Generación del 27: Luis Cernuda, Manuel, Altolaguirre y Pedro Salinas*. Colegio de México, 2008.
- Peña Ardid, Carmen. "Amor y homosexualidad en Juan Gil-Albert." *Cuadernos de investigación filológica*, 14, 1988, pp. 21-39.
- "Perdiz." *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Real Academia Española, 2024, <https://dle.rae.es/perdiz>. Accessed 13 July 2025.
- Perieto de Paula, Angel Louis. "El lugar de Juan Gil-Albert en la historia de la poesía española." *Canelobre*, no. 33-34, 1996, pp. 132-138.
- Pozuelo, Manuel Parra. "Cuatro poemarios emblemáticos y diversos: 'Perito en lunas, El rayo que no cesa, Candente horror y Misteriosa presencia.'" *Auca: revista literaria y artística*, no. 28, 2013, pp. 13-25.
- Raga Rosaleny, Vicente. "Juan Gil-Albert: Realidad en la ficción" *Pasajes: Revista de pensamiento contemporáneo*, 21-22, pp. 63-73.
- Rovira, José Carlos. "La recuperación de Juan Gil-Albert y su lugar en la literatura española." *Actas del Congreso "Juan Gil-Albert, la memoria y el mito:" Alicante, Aula de Cultura de la CAM & Instituto Juan Gil-Albert de la Excma. Diputación, 8 a 12 de noviembre de 2004*, Alicante, Instituto Alicantino de Cultura "Juan Gil-Albert," 2007, pp. 207-220.
- Siles, Jaime. "Juan Gil-Albert en la soledad anterior a su recuperación y descubrimiento." *Juan Gil-Albert al borde de un agua inesperada: cincuenta años de "Fuentes de la constancia."* Edited by Manuel Valero Gómez, U Alicante, 2022, pp. 29-44.
- Valero Gómez, Manuel. *La presencia de Juan Gil-Albert en la poesía española del siglo XX*. U Granada, 2014.
- Villanueva, Santos Sanz. Review of *Las confesiones de Juan Gil-Albert*, by Juan Gil-Albert. *Revista de Libros de La Fundación Caja Madrid*, no. 97, 2005, pp. 45-46.