

Transcendent Synesthetic Poetry of Octavio Paz

by

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Abstract

During his life and even after, the poetry of Mexican poet and 1990 Nobel Prize winner, Octavio Paz, has provided academic fodder for many critics, teachers and students. The lyrical nature and open structures of poetry lend themselves to a myriad of interpretations and theories, and Paz's poetry is no exception. Paz encouraged this diversity of understanding. The writing styles and poetics of Paz challenge commonplace interpretations of what is perceived in the physical world and the navigation thereof. He often blends contrasting images and ideas, and even fuses the senses to dissuade the reader from a single interpretation, thus encouraging a plurality of approaches to a poem. This crossing of the senses is a literary device known as poetic synesthesia. Frequently (prominently in the Baroque and Modernist eras), writers employ synesthesia in lyrical poetry to call the reader's attention through sensorial destabilization of the object described. However, Paz takes synesthesia a step further and uses it for a deeper purpose, one that encapsulates his poetics. Paz believes that poetry could lead a reader to a perceptual and spiritual transcendence. By bending perception and manipulating the senses, Paz invites his readers to experience poetic transcendence with him.

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INTRODUCTION

During his life and even after, the poetry of Octavio Paz has provided academic fodder for countless critics, teachers and students. The lyrical nature and open structures of poetry lend themselves to a myriad of interpretations and theories, and Paz's poetry is no exception. Paz encouraged this diversity of understanding. The writing styles and poetics of Paz challenge commonplace interpretations of what is perceived in the physical world and the navigation thereof. He often blends contrasting images and ideas, and even fuses the senses to dissuade the reader from a single interpretation, thus encouraging a plurality of approaches to a poem. This crossing of the senses is a literary device known as poetic synesthesia. Frequently (prominently in the Baroque and Modernist eras), writers employ synesthesia in lyrical poetry to call the reader's attention through sensorial destabilization of the object described. However, Paz takes synesthesia a step further and uses it for a deeper purpose, one that encapsulates his poetic philosophy, or poetics.

So much of Paz's poetry emphasizes the primitive human ability to sense the surrounding world. This accentuation of the senses is the product of Octavio Paz's poetic philosophy, and engenders the use of lyrical synesthesia. This recurrent feature in Paz's poetry initiates the reader's journey toward a greater poetic ideal by undermining his or her sensorial truth and prompting a reconsideration of physical reality. For Paz, the replacement of one sense for another is the catalyst for changing one's objective worldview for a more subjective one, and in turn creates a synesthetic worldview that crosses the perception of both the material world and poetry. This characteristic of Paz's poetry and its relationship to transcendence will be the focus of my analysis, and will ultimately support the following thesis statement.

This thesis explores the use of synesthesia in the lyrical creations of Octavio Paz as the manipulation of senses that invites the reader to experience poetry as a means of attaining transcendence. For Paz, language unlocks transcendence. He writes, “El lugar de los dioses o de cualquier otra entidad o realidad externa, lo ocupa ahora la palabra” (*Corrientes alternas* 5). Though all language possesses divine quality, in Paz’s estimation, only poetic language exemplifies primacy, and he frequently pits poetic language against mundane, everyday language. It is poetry that acts as a savior to language and only lyrical language has the capacity to provide linguistic transcendence.

Poetry distinguishes itself in two ways. First, poetry grants its reader the ability to see multiple worldviews simultaneously. A perceptually transcendent person can see universal existence more completely, and is not limited by spatial boundaries or chronological constraints. For example, seeing multiple worldviews at one time includes the ability to consider the thoughts of the ancients from civilizations long past. In his poetry, Paz often fuses the ancient world with the modern one in an effort to reunite modern humanity to its primal existence as a part of the connected universe. In his well known poems, “Himno entre ruinas” (211), and “Piedra del sol” (237), both from his collection, *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), Paz makes use of ancient imagery such as the Aztec pyramids, their circular calendar, and the remnants of their language, and translates them into a modern setting thus transcending time. This blending of chronological scenarios is a synthesis of temporal perceptions, and thereby encourages the reader to look beyond the scope of singular reality. This exemplifies Paz’s use of poetry to lead his reader to a perceptual transcendence, granting he or she with a bird’s-eye-view of the world and its history. Second, poetry leads readers to a transcendent worldview by providing a sensorial kaleidoscope that is the result of multiple sensory modalities joining together to create a euphoric moment of

lucidity. The overall effect is the same as perceptual transcendence in that Paz grants his reader the ability to see things more holistically and clearly, but instead of adjusting what one sees in the world, a sensorial transcendence affects *how* one perceives the world. Ultimately then, the theme of transcendence is the golden thread of the selected texts, and poetically binds together both Paz's poetics and his poetry.

The poetic analysis of this project includes two poems from *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949). These poems from his early work help establish and define some of the foundational ideas for this thesis within the framework of Paz's poetry, namely the general distortion of the senses, his subjective worldview and his desire for others to share said outlook. The poems selected from this collection are "La Rama" (47) and "Niña" (36). Also from his earlier works, I will address the topoema, "Palma del viajero," (*Poemas* 499) originally published in a collection of poems known as *Topoemas* (1971). Although this poem does not contain a specific example of synesthesia, the nature of Paz's sense-altering approach can be seen in the structure and word picture created by this poem.

The poetry the latter half of his prolific career will include poems from *Vuelta* (1969-1975), and *Árbol adentro* (1976-1988). The entries selected from this period present a more crystallized use of synesthesia as they come from a more mature philosophy. From the collection entitled, *Vuelta*, the poem "La arboleda" (15) demonstrates both a synesthetic nature and offers specific examples. And finally, attention will be given to a pair of poems from *Árbol adentro*. The titles under consideration from this collection are "Decir:Hacer" (11) from the section entitled, "Gavilla," as well as the title poem of this collection, "Árbol adentro" (137). All of these poems will be analyzed individually and cohesively within the entirety of Paz's *oeuvre*.

The opening chapter of this project provides a biographical sketch of Mexican poet, Octavio Paz. The chronological events that shaped this poet are considered through the lenses of friends, companions and personal interviews. Literary criticism concerning Paz from scholars and writers such as Ivar Ivask, José Quiroga, Jason Wilson, Ramón Xirau, Pere Gimferrer, Elena Poniatowska, Ilan Stavans and Harold Bloom will provide further insight into the mind and life of the Mexican poet, and will ultimately create a critical overview of important influences and movements that cast the literary opus of Octavio Paz.

The second chapter is dedicated to synesthesia as both a psychobiological phenomenon and a literary trope. First, the scientific side of synesthesia as a means of perception builds a solid foundation for further conversation about the lyrical renderings of this phenomenon. Scholastic attention from researchers such as Richard Cytowic, M.D. and David M. Eagleman, Ph.D, as well as Rafael Redondo Barba and Juan Sanz will shed light on the physiological aspects of personal synesthesia. Second, the physical and mental blending of the senses is considered in light of literary synesthesia. The critical contribution of scholars such as Allen Phillips, Ursula Kraus, Ning Yu, and Yeshayahu Shen will provide insight into the history and use of synesthesia in literature, and will represent the current academic trends within the study of this literary feature. At the conclusion of this chapter, a poetic analysis of “Palma del viajero,” “La Rama,” and “Decir:Hacer” provide examples of Paz employing synesthetic activity in the verses of his poetry. Each of these poems represents a different collection and provides examples of synesthesia from these various collections. In these poems Paz not only plays the role of a synesthete as he demonstrates a lyrically manipulated perception, but this sensorial fusion becomes an invitation to view the world differently.

The final chapter follows the golden thread of transcendence through the closing analysis of this project. The poems “Niña,” “La arboleda” and “Árbol adentro” provides lyrical connections to theories about the poetics and personal philosophy of Octavio Paz. Each of these poems comes from a different collection and represents the tone of Paz’s poetics in different eras. In these poems Paz challenges a conventional worldview and common perceptions, and ultimately invites his readers to experience transcendence with him through poetry.

During Paz’s extensive career, he witnesses the rise and fall of many prominent movements. He sees *La Vanguardia* depart from 19th century *Modernismo*. He rubbed elbows with the great poets of Surrealism, and witnessed post-modernism rise, flourish and diminish. Yet Paz belonged to none of these movements. What separated Paz from many poets is that he did not want his reader to only sympathize with the way he saw the world, or change their mind about a particular issue. Instead, he attempts to draw in his audience and persuade them to be a part of his transcendent world and experience poetry the way he did, but in their own way. Paz perpetually seeks to grow personally, and tries to encourage his reader to grow with him. One of the devices that he chose to employ to accomplish this goal was poetic synesthesia. Through the use of synesthesia in his poetry, Paz invites the reader into his utopian vision of the physical world and the world of poetry, and makes the words and sounds of his poetic representations take on a tangible, visible existence. In this way, synesthesia becomes a defining character in the poetry of Paz not only as a literary device, but also as a transcendent worldview. Just as synesthesia blends sensory perceptions, Paz blends the physical reality of this world with the poetry he loves, and defined one by the other. At times he sees poetry in terms of this world, and at times he sees the world in terms of poetry -- a synesthetic worldview that is defined by transcendence.

CHAPTER 1: OCTAVIO PAZ, A LIFE OF POETRY

Early Life

Born into a Catholic home with a literary legacy (Stavans 11; “Octavio Paz Biography”), Octavio Paz entered this world on March 31, 1914. His grandfather, Ireneo Paz, was a journalist during the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship (Tuck), and “was a prominent liberal intellectual and one of the first authors to write a novel with an expressly Indian¹ theme” (“O.P. Biography”). Paz’s father, Octavio Paz Solórzano, followed the footsteps of his father and was known for his “notable contributions in the area of agrarian reform” (Tuck). Paz himself confirms these facts, but also emphasizes his deeply Mexican roots describing his own family as “a mestizo family”:

My paternal grandfather was a Mexican with markedly Indian features. My mother’s parents were Andalusians and my mother was born in Mexico. So that my family is European on one side and Indian on the other. My paternal grandfather was a well-known journalist and writer. He campaigned against French intervention and was a supporter of Porfirio Díaz, although at the end of his life he opposed the old dictator. My father took part in the Mexican Revolution and represented Zapata in the United States. He was one of the founders of agrarian reform. (Guibert 25)

The influence of Paz’s paternal role models goes beyond their personal literary achievements. Several critics attest to the extensive library that his grandfather had collected (“O.P. Biography”; Tuck; Stavans 12), so Paz was exposed to literature at a young age and remained an avid reader his entire life. Stavans comments on Paz’s relationship with this library as “a place where the future poet found escape and early solace, a place that for a while he perceived as a

¹ The word *Indian* in this section should be understood as the Latin American indigenous population.

map of the universe” (13). The relationship between Paz and literature established in this library manifests itself in the Paz’s writings, and becomes a permanent aspect of his personal philosophy.

During Paz’s childhood, Mexican history was being written as the revolution of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa grew in strength. Paz comments on his grandfather’s and father’s political involvement in his poem from *Ladera Este* (1962-1968) entitled “Intermitencias del oeste (2)”:

Mi abuelo, al tomar el café,
Me hablaba de Juárez y de Porfirio,
Los zuavos y los planteados,
Y el mantel olía a pólvora.

Mi padre, al tomar la copa,
Me hablaba de Zapata y de Villa,
Soto y Gama y los Flores Magón.

Y el mantel olía a pólvora. (*Obra poética I* 373)

The revolution directly affected Paz: “When he was only a few months old, his father joined Zapata’s forces while his mother took refuge, with him, in Mixcoac, in the house of his paternal grandfather” (Stavans 11). Paz recounts personal memories of that house in an interview:

We lived in a large house with a garden. Our family had been impoverished by the revolution and the civil war. Our house, full of antique furniture, books, and other objects, was gradually crumbling to bits. As rooms collapsed we moved the furniture into another. I remember that for a long time I lived in a spacious room

with part of one of the walls missing. Some magnificent screens protected me inadequately from wind and rain. (Guibert 25)

This house becomes his childhood home, and Mixcoac, his hometown. In later years, Paz would learn that Mixcoac was the birthplace and permanent residence of one of his literary heroes, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695). Stavans comments on this point of connection:

This geographical link between Paz and Sor Juana nurtured his view of Mexican history as a pyramid: each person, each epoch, he believed, established its own identity by finding its place on top of proceeding generations. The present, then, is a sum of pasts eternally recycled, and every contemporary citizen a continuation, a reincarnation of those alive before. And so Sor Juana lives *in* and *through* Paz.(63-64)

Though Sor Juana was one of Paz's literary luminaries, he himself was not a religious person, even as a child: "Paz spent much of his childhood and adolescence in that house in Mixcoac. When he was a schoolboy it was obligatory to attend mass, but Paz's temperament was not a religious one" (Stavans 12) In a personal interview, Paz himself confirms this accusation and expounds. In response to a question concerning his upbringing, he answers:

I went astray out of boredom. It's the devil's most powerful weapon, you know...Going to Mass was compulsory, and Mass was held in a very beautiful chapel--the school was a hacienda of the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century. The Mass was long, the sermons tedious, and my faith began to grow cold. I was bored and that was blasphemy because I realized I was bored. Also I was thinking about girls. The Church became a purveyor of ever more

indecent erotic daydreams; and those dreams made me more and more doubtful, and my doubts nourished my anger against God. (Guibert 26)

In the same interview, Paz later admits to becoming a quiet yet “belligerent” atheist (26). Having abandoned the faith of his youth, Paz began to feel stifled and would soon leave his hometown.

Away from home

Searching for answers, Paz’s first step away from home was to enroll in the Colegio de San Ildefonso, a national preparatory school located in Mexico City, but he soon dropped out and decided to leave home (Stavans 17). In 1937, Paz was offered a job as a teacher in Mérida, a small town in the Yucatán peninsula (Stavans 17). This position in life served as a hub to Europe where he would meet a host of influential people including Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo and Luis Buñuel (Stavans 17). This community of brilliant artists serve as both companions and mentors in the early life of Paz, and become globally recognized for their individual contributions. In 1943, Paz was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and moved to the United States (“O.P. - Biography”; Stavans 30). During this time he primarily lived in California and New York and was “immersed in Anglo-American Modernist poetry” (“O.P. Biography”). Tuck writes, “In 1945 Paz joined Mexico's diplomatic corps and served at posts in France, Japan, and Switzerland, among others.” During this time period, the rise of Fidel Castro’s revolution in Cuba gained tremendous support from a myriad of intellectuals, including Paz. Stavans explains: “In spite of his innate skepticism, Paz believed in Castro. He trusted that a more hopeful direction had to be taken to solve the problems of Hispanic society” (37). The attraction to Castro’s socialism went beyond political interests and into the realm of ideology. An inevitable correlation was made between the surrealist utopia and the socialist dream for society. However with time, the hope of an Edenic existence crumbled, and Paz develops a “progressive

disenchantment with ideological utopias” (Stavans 38). This “disenchantment” bleeds into his poetics and consequently, into his poetry. This time of political involvement mirrors his poetry. As in his poetry, Paz does not become combative or dogmatic, and he is not terribly concerned with momentary disturbances in the political scene -- except when political action threatens basic human rights. A prime example of Paz’s political concerns corresponds with his resignation from his post as ambassador to India in 1968. The tragic events that now distinguish Tlatelolco Square deeply affected Paz. On October 2, 1968, the massacre of hundreds of students, peaceful protestors and innocent bystanders forever changed the identity of the section of Mexico City known as Tlatelolco. Stavans comments are both telling and emotionally moving:

Tlatelolco. The word itself is painful. The volcano of animosity and dissent brought about by the incident it stands for made Paz a cause célèbre in 1968, when he resigned his post as ambassador to India in protest against a shameless act of repression by the Mexican government... Paz understood the challenge of the times: he denounced the regime, and thus became a voice of conscience. Intellectuals worldwide greeted the resignation with enthusiasm... With courage and conviction, he distanced himself from the atrocities and their perpetrators, but he refused to be a mere bystander. (41-42)

In criticism of the attempted cover up, Paz pens these verses in “Intermitencias del oeste (3) (México: Olimpiada de 1968)”:

(Los empleados
municipales lavan la sangre
en la Plaza de los Sacrificios.)
Mira ahora,

manchada
antes de haber dicho algo
que valga la pena,
la limpidez. (*Obra poética I* 374)

These verses reveal a very pointed accusation against the government as well as Paz's personal sentiments concerning the tragic event. In response to this calamity, Paz continues to write prolifically in an attempt not only to denounce the atrocious actions, but to foster a change for the better (Stavans 42-43).

Though his tenure as ambassador was cut short by his resignation, the time was well spent: "The voyage allowed him to embark on a study of Eastern mysticism and philosophy that intensified while he was, for six years, ambassador to India. His diplomatic duties allowed him to visit Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Burma, Thailand, Singapore, and Cambodia" (Stavans 25). While in India, Paz was able to satisfy his curiosities about local traditions and philosophies and experience them first hand (Guibert 29; Stavans 35). However, clarification on Hindu culture was not the only thing Paz found on this trip. Paz's trip to India would forever change his life because it was then that he met and fell in love with Marie José Tramini.

Paz and Love

When commenting on his life with Marie José, Paz says, "After being born, that's the most important thing that has happened to me" (Guibert 29). At this point, Paz had already been married to and divorced from Elena Garro, who Elena Poniatowska describes as "siempre alerta y original" (30). Poniatowska is not only a contemporary of Paz, but a close friend and highly successful Mexican writer. In the year that Paz died, she publishes a book entitled, *Octavio Paz: Las palabras del árbol* (1998). This book is not only about Paz, but it is written *to* him, as though

they are having a long conversation together about the accomplishments of his life. The platonic intimacy shared between these two Mexican writers makes Poniadowska an authority on many aspects of his personal life. Commenting on the relationship that Paz had with Elena Garro, Poniadowska suggests that Paz had a stronger relationship with Elena Garro's father than with her (28). Elena was the author of *Recuerdos del porvenir*, which Stavans calls a "classic" (19), and her father, José Antonio Garro, was described as, "español, teósofo, orientalista...que según Octavio escribió uno de los poemas más grandes: 'A los pies del maestro'" (Poniadowska 28). It is apparent that Paz had a tremendous amount of respect for José Garro, and a genuine kinship with Elena; however, their marriage does not last. Elena and Octavio had a child together whom they named, Laura Elena (or as some called her, Helena) (Poniadowska 37). Poniadowska describes the early relationship between Paz and his daughter in tender compassionate terms (38); however, Stavans reports that Paz remained distant from his daughter most of his life (19). The details of what happened are not clear, but whatever happened in the relationships that Paz had with his daughter and ex-wife, it is profoundly overshadowed by his relationship with his second wife, Marie José.

Marie José Tramini was a French artist with whom Paz absolutely fell in love. Not long after they met, Paz and Marie José married under a tree in India. About this experience, Paz says, "En la India, en 1964, nos casamos debajo de un gran árbol, un *nim* muy frondoso. Los testigos fueron muchos mirlos, varias ardillas y tres amigos" (qtd. in Poniadowska 86). Paz also speaks fondly of this tree and the garden in which he and his wife spent copious amounts of time together while in India (Guibert 29-30). They were a genuinely happy couple that others described as "unusually close" (Jordan). Their happiness was noticeable and seemingly infectious. Commenting on their relationship, Poniadowska tenderly writes, "Cuando volviste de

la India, ya casado con Marie-Jo, te veías mucho más joven...Feliz. Felices. Nunca te había visto tan feliz” (87), and again, “Hace años que Marie-Jo completa tu pensamiento, termina tus frases, jamás se aleja. Asida de tu mano, no pajarea, enraizada, respira el mismo aire” (218). The union this couple experienced undoubtedly influenced the life and works of Octavio Paz. Not everyone finds the level of happiness that Paz seemed to enjoy with Marie José, and the love between them only makes him more intriguing as an individual and successful as a writer. Nevertheless, as much as Paz loved Marie José, she was not his only love.

Paz and Poetry

Though madly in love with this second wife, Octavio Paz himself admits that poetry and writing poetry “was and is my first love” (Guibert 28). Paz had abandoned his childhood religion at an early age, yet he still yearned for meaning and transcendence. He found them in poetry. Poetry was a religious experience with the potential for salvation (Wilson, *Octavio Paz* 44; Stavans 4), and “an act of transformation -- for himself as poet, of the poem’s reader, of the world itself” (Stavans 5). His faith in poetry and theories of poetics eventually became his philosophy and worldview. This only became magnified as Paz is introduced to Structuralism, providing a new lens for poetry. In Paz’s estimation, the world had become incorrectly identified by the corruption of modern everyday language, but poetry could save it. In *Mono gramático*, Paz writes:

El paraíso está regido por una gramática ontológica: las cosas y los seres son sus nombres y cada nombre es propio...El poeta no es el que nombra las cosas, sino el que disuelve sus nombres, el que descubre que las cosas no tienen nombre y que los nombres con que las llamamos no son suyos (95-96).

For Paz, poetry is the ultimate structure by which all things could be correctly perceived and understood, and everyday language was flimsy at best. Paz masterfully demonstrates this conviction in his poem, “Tumba del poeta,” from *Ladera este* (1962-1968), in which describes this suffocating enclosure in which a poet lives:

El libro
 el vaso
el verde obscuramente tallo
 el disco
lecho de la bella durmiente la música
las cosas anegadas en sus nombres
decirlas con los ojos
 en un allá no sé donde
clavarlas
 lámpara lápiz retrato
esto que veo
 clavarlo
como un templo vivo
 plantarlo
como un árbol
 un dios
coronarlo
 con un nombre
 inmortal

irrisoria corona de espinas

¡Lenguaje! (*Obra poética I* 376-377)

The conviction against language demonstrated in this poem not only applies to his personal worldview, but Paz believes it will become a shared worldview. As Jason Wilson explains, “After the failure of the sciences, the collapse of organized religions and philosophy and metaphysics, 20th century man ‘buscará una Poética’ (*Corrientes alternas* 125). This ‘poetics’...is the new wisdom” (*Octavio Paz* 28-29). Paz is persistent in his criticism of language, and repeatedly demonstrates this sentiment in later collections. For example, in his poem, “Noche en claro,” published in *Salamandra* (1962), Paz shows his view of language again, this time framing it in warfare terminology:

Nos dispersamos en la noche
lis amigos se alejan
llevo sus palabras como un tesoro ardiendo
Pelean el río y el viento del otoño
Pelea el otoño contra las casas negras
Año de hueso
pila de años muertos y escupidos
estaciones violadas
siglo tallado en un aullido
pirámide de sangre
horas royendo el día el año el siglo el hueso
Hemos perdidos todas las batallas
Todos los días ganamos una

Poesía (59)

What has been lost in language is gained in poetics, and his use of the first person singular in the last few verses verifies that Paz globally wants humanity to participate in this worldview.

In his prolific career, Paz produces twenty-five collections of poetry, and then later reedit them to produce two hefty volumes entitled *Obra poética I y II* (1996). These two volumes are part of a greater collection entitled, *Obras completas*, in which Paz collects and reedits his life's work into fourteen large volumes that rivals the size of a detailed set of encyclopedias. Stavans comments on this enormous collection saying, "His complete oeuvre -- some 150 titles, which he edited himself and which were released simultaneously in Spain and Mexico as *Obras Completas* in more than a dozen hefty volumes -- is a blueprint, an atlas to that most turbulent century" (3). Paz's work is justifiably compared to a template -- a template to poetry, poetics, and ultimately, transcendence.

Philosophical Criticism: Generations and Movements

The literary reviews of Octavio Paz's poetry cannot be generalized or categorized chronologically without ignoring or misplacing some studies simply because of the diversity of scholastic attention throughout the past few decades. However, trends have emerged that create two general approaches to the work of Octavio Paz. Especially prevalent early on in Paz's career up to the late 1970s, there was a tendency to assess the underpinning of Paz's work, specifically trying to define his relationship to a certain movement or literary thought. Some examples of this type of approach include Angel Flores's work, *Aproximaciones a Octavio Paz* (1974), "Claves filosóficas de Octavio Paz," (Benavides 1979), Jose Quiroga's *Understanding Octavio Paz* (1999), *The poetic modes of Octavio Paz* (Phillips 1972), and Pere Gimferrer's compilation title, *Octavio Paz* (1989). Most critics associated Paz with some combination of four major themes:

Surrealism, utopianism, eroticism or Structuralism. Interestingly, none would ever claim Paz *belonged* to a particular movement, but rather critics respected and acknowledged his transcendence of any one faction. For example, Wilson, writing in the late seventies, describes Paz as follows:

Paz embodies twentieth century man's anguished quest for meaning, for relating himself to a whole...This justifies Paz's much criticized eclectic approach, sieving through Marxism, surrealism, structuralism, Buddhism, tantra and other things for 'nuggets.' Paz pursues an elusive salvation. (*Octavio Paz* 6)

Similarly, Phillips begins her book, published in 1972, stating "the startling diversity of his production in prose and poetry makes any generalization suspect" (1). Later in her book, the tone of this remark has less to do with an analytical generalization of Paz's work, and more about generalizing his work into a certain movement (58). Nevertheless, though Paz may not classifiably belong to any one group, he demonstrates characteristics of each of them.

Many of Paz's critics, including Wilson and Phillips, emphasize the influence that the Baroque era of Spanish literature had on Paz. As noted earlier, Paz researches and writes extensively about Sor Juana, a Baroque writer, and as will be noted later, even the structure of some of his poetry reflects the influence that she had on his writing. Another influential Baroque figure for Paz is Luis de Góngora. Throughout his prose, specifically in *Corrientes alternas* (1982), Paz comments and criticizes the poetry of Góngora for its trademark characteristics of *Culteranismo* ("Spanish Literature"). Even though Paz almost always has negative commentary about Góngora's style of writing, it is indisputable that Paz was well acquainted with his poetry and spent much time considering it. In contrast to the extravagant language and complexity of Góngora's *Culteranismo* ("Culteranismo"), Paz more closely identifies with the Baroque style of

Conceptismo, a style largely associated with Francisco Gomez de Quevedo (“Conceptismo”). The direct, simple vocabulary of this stylistic movement is typical of Paz’s poetry as well as the movement’s emphasis on concepts as opposed to the ornate language of Góngora. These characteristics of *Conceptismo* play an important role in the poetic journey of Paz, and provide a foundation for understanding his style.

Another major movement associated with Paz is the Surrealist movement. Paz indeed had a longstanding relationship with both the tenets of Surrealism and its members. Paz describes his first encounter with the Surrealists, as thus:

I didn’t really know what surrealism was at the time, though I felt a lot of sympathy for them. My experiences in Spain confirmed by revolutionary ardor, but at the same time made me mistrust revolutionary theories. This brought me closer to the political attitude of the surrealists. And the more I saw them, the more I realized how much we agreed. (Guibert 27)

His association with the Surrealists is further magnified by his close relationship with one of the movement’s leaders, Andre Breton (1896-1966). This friendship was so substantial that Wilson relates Paz’s affiliation with the movement through the chronological history of Paz’s ties with Breton (8-33). Nevertheless, though Paz adopts many aspects of what Surrealism was, he later distanced himself from the dying movement (Wilson, *Octavio Paz* 33), having never become a full-fledged member (Phillips 58). Paz’s affiliation with the movement is indisputable. A good example of his surrealism poetry is one that he calls “Poema circulatorio (Para la desorientación general)” from his collection, *Vuelta* (57). The poem reads as though Paz is in a free association session, writing whatever comes to mind about surrealism – a psychoanalytical tactic used by Freud and revered by surrealists. This poetic style make it almost impossible to cite a verse or a

set of verses, but the direct references to Surrealism and its members within the poem, coupled with the title that correctly identifies the general tone, categorically place this lyrical creation among those poems that were influenced by Surrealism. He often references Surrealism respectfully in his prose and uses Surrealist tactics in his poetry, but neither of these elements define him. Still, two major elements of Surrealism do function as recurring motifs throughout Paz's *oeuvre*, and have been a fixture in philosophical criticism concerning his work.

Within the framework of Surrealism, one major theme commonly associated with Paz was utopianism. In both his prose and poetry, Paz directly referenced the idea of a utopia, or lyrically implied it. The theme of utopia seemingly was a part of Paz's identity even as a child who found refuge from the world in his grandfather's library (Stavans 13). As an adult, his encounters with the Surrealists only enhanced that childhood desire for solace, and thus manifest itself in his literary work. For example, in *Corriente Alterna*, Paz comments on the Surrealists' need for utopian ideas: "El pensamiento del surrealismo, crítico y utópico, fue tan importante como las creaciones de sus poetas y pintores" (169). Quotes like this coupled with poetic descriptions of a utopian existence led critics to paint Paz within utopianism. Guillermo Sucre, for example, makes this connection. Sucre first introduces the introductory question from Paz's *El arco y la lira* (1956): "Wouldn't it be better to turn life into poetry rather than to make poetry from life? And cannot poetry have as its primary objective, rather than the creation of poems, the creation of poetic moments?" (Ivask 8). Here is what Sucre takes from this quote: "With that question, what Paz is actually formulating is the same utopia as the surrealists" (8). Wilson interpreted Paz's writings similarly. In Harold Bloom's book, *Octavio Paz* (2002), Wilson comments on the failure of the Mexican Revolution and makes this statement: "But Paz is utopian, in that his 'society' is rooted in myth, outside evil and history, obeying a poetic

wisdom” (54). It is important to note that although Bloom’s insistence upon the establishment of a *Western Canon* (1994) is highly controversial, this respected critic considers Paz to be of “international importance” (463), includes Paz in his canon, and then writes a book about the Mexican writer (2002). In Wilson’s own book, his introduction prepares readers by explaining, “The tension of Paz’s writings stems from this utopian intention, for actual history is a ‘nightmare’” (5). Others continue on the theme of utopia as well, but these examples serve well to demonstrate this critical trend of the time.

The difficulty with a utopian motif in our current era of criticism is a question of space. Within recent years a resurgence of the question and study of literary space has flooded current academic thought. When considering the theme of utopia in the works of Octavio Paz, especially in connection to the Surrealist movement, identifying a space becomes difficult. Was Paz’s utopia a literal space that Paz saw snippets of in this current world? Was it a futurist dream of what might become? Was it really a space at all? At the outset of this current project, I tried to frame synesthesia within the context of Paz’s utopia, but could not reconcile the idea of utopia with the current academic emphasis on space. This forced a reconsideration of all things, and eventually led me to the theme of transcendence that goes beyond spatial and chronological terminology, and maintains concordance with Paz’s wide-angle worldview. Utopian descriptions may exist within the body of work that Paz has created, but these references seldom (if ever) exist without being coupled with a readjustment of consciousness. This being said, what was once considered utopian discourse in Paz’s poetry may be understood in terms of transcendence.

The second facet of Surrealism that has characterized the poetry of Octavio Paz is eroticism. The theme of transcendent love in Paz’s poetry has been a rich resource of academic critique, and justifiably so. Paz perpetually returns to the theme of love in both his prose and

poetry, and as was the case with the motif of utopia, the theme of eroticism influenced the writer even from an early age (Guibert 26). Once again, Surrealism provides Paz with a conduit by which to connect to this deep seated desire and freedom to express it -- and the critics noticed. In the third chapter of her book, Phillips repeatedly returns to the erotic motif as she explains what she has named, "The semiotic mode," of Paz's literature (83-117), and does the same in the next chapter, "Modes in harmony: passion and paradox" (118-151). Within his chapter, "The Nature Myth," Jason Wilson dedicates several sections to the sensualistic poetry of Paz (*Octavio Paz* 112-126) including a section entitled "Eroticism" where he explains, "Paz's eroticism is a return to nature through fusion with the 'other'; his 'videncia erótica' (erotic prophecy) turns the opaque body transparent (through imagination and desire) revealing truth as always beyond, a *más allá/ailleurs* that is extra-literary and experimental" (*Octavio Paz* 117). The philosophical assignment placed onto eroticism is a perfect example of philosophical criticism that was popular in this era. However, it was certainly not the only method used to approach the poetry of Paz. Elemental criticism was just as popular as its philosophical cohort.

Elemental Criticism

The other half of literary criticism concerning Paz's work hones in on the components of Paz's work and creates theories based on these elements (much like the focus of this thesis). This elemental criticism cannot be chronologically categorized, but it is highly prevalent in recent academic trends. For example, the only other work I have encountered that concerns itself mainly with synesthesia in the work of Octavio Paz is a published work entitled, *Metáfora y sinestesia en "Ladera este" de Octavio Paz* (Arcelus Ulibarrena 1982). In the second half this work, Juana Arcelus Ulibarrena walks her readers through the 42 examples of synesthesia that she selected from Paz's work, *Ladera este*, and categorizes them according to the items involved

in the metaphor (341-375). Another example of this kind of academic attention is the work of Vicente Salinas. In his article, “El árbol ejemplifical de Octavio Paz” (1987), Salinas isolates the poem, “Árbol adentro,” and makes his observations based on the title image of the poem. Even in Poniatowska’s informal book, she makes the following observational criticism,

En tu *Obra Poética* de 1935 a 1988, de 313 poemas, así, a vuelo de pájaro, la palabra “árbol aparece 165 veces...además de árbol, árboles, arboleda, también son una constante fresno, sauce, pino, chopo, eucalipto entre follajes, hojas, ramas, enredadera, jardines” (149-150).

This elemental approach dominates the critical discussions of Paz’s work in the later half of his life, but can also be found in earlier criticism (i.e., Ivask 1973; Xirau 1972).

Another trend of criticism that surfaces after his death (1998) compares Paz’s work to the work of other more recent writers. A host of titles including that of newer critics like Danielle Lamb (2010), Adriana Novoa (2010), and Oliver Kozlarek (2009), all compare the works of Octavio Paz to another in an effort to establish whatever point of connection is seen between the two. Regrettably, critical attention of Paz’s poetry has slowed tremendously since his death, and there exists only a relatively small amount of scholastic material about Paz that has been published since 2000, and most of it is comparative, pairing or pitting the works of Paz to the work of another writer.

Surprisingly, there is very little written concerning synesthesia in the works of Octavio Paz. I came across a dissertation entitled *Modernity and the temporal archetype in Octavio Paz*, written in 1992, by Sharon Lynn Sieber of Indiana University. Her dissertation contains a chapter which includes general references to synesthesia in the works of Octavio Paz, though it is not the major focus of the overall dissertation. In her chapter entitled “Simultaneity, Mysticism, Poetry

and Narration” Sieber loosely refers to synesthesia throughout, but does not give it any specific attention. In her composition, synesthesia is one of many tools used to demonstrate her position on simultaneity within the works of Octavio Paz. It is also worth mentioning that since the publication of her dissertation, Sieber has not published any additional work on Paz and has given no supplemental attention to synesthesia. Still, what is provided in her dissertation is very helpful, and I look forward to further investigation of her research about this topic. Apart from this dissertation however, I have only found one other article that addresses this literary trope in the poetry of Paz (Arcelus Ulibarrena 1982), much less anything that addresses the use of synesthesia as an invitation to Paz’s idea of transcendence.

Paz, Honored and Remembered

Octavio Paz’s accolades vary in size and importance, but three are indicative of the great influence of this Mexican writer. After decades of publishing and academic attention, in 1981, Paz receives the most coveted award in Hispanic literature, *el premio Cervantes* (“Biografía española. Octavio Paz”). This award crystallizes his fame throughout Hispanic literary circles, and he is now honorably recognized as a Mexican literary giant. Eight years later, Paz is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and his notoriety is acknowledged on an international level (“O.P. Biography”). Interestingly, Stavans points out the following:

In 1990, as the announcement of the Nobel Prize awarded to him spread nationwide, Mexico’s newspaper headlines were divided; many applauded the prize, but a handful claimed the honor was a gift from President Salinas...Suspensions were fortified by the fact that the award coincided with the multimillion-dollar exhibit *México: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York...Since Paz happened to be in

Manhattan when he received the phone call from Stockholm, some conjectured about an illicit monetary deal... (77-78).

Whether or not an illicit deal was struck on Paz's behalf does not undermine the immense international success that Paz's literature has enjoyed. The Nobel Prize merely anchored his success and awarded what was already established. A third honor was bestowed upon Paz *post mortum* as the *Biblioteca del Instituto Cervantes de Paris* was named in his honor in 2005 ("Rutas Cervantes"). This gesture once again demonstrates his international prestige and further commemorates his brilliance.

Octavio Paz went the way of all humanity on April 19, 1998 ("O.P. Biography") as he succumbed to cancer at the age of 84. The poetic words of Stavans represent the sentiment of many concerning the loss of this great poet: "Without him, it somehow feels -- momentarily, at least -- bereft of hope...the moment he died, the world felt suddenly empty" (81-82).

Nevertheless, the emptiness experienced from the loss of this great Mexican poet can be filled with the abundance of literary gems he left behind. Though his death separates humanity from the great works that might have been, his legacy immortalizes him for generations to come.

Conclusion

Considering the biographical background of Octavio Paz, the movements with which he chose to identify make sense. The surrealist movement, more than any other, was something with which Paz found companionship. Therefore, he was able to make use of the tenets and convictions of Surrealism to express his thoughts and desires concerning a refuge (utopia) and sexual redemption (eroticism). His profound relationship with Marie José made him even more aware of what constituted love, and because of this deep understanding of its concepts, he was able to produce such beautiful commentary on its components and transcendent climax.

Throughout the decades, many critics have noticed and written on these topics in a variety of ways, mostly from either a philosophical approach or a focused look at specific components. However, of the many topics available for academic consideration, very few have commented on Paz's use of synesthesia, and even fewer have made it the priority of their study.

With the golden thread of transcendence stitching together both surrealistic utopia and regenerative eroticism, synesthesia is a natural point of conversation. The blending of perception that leads to utopian existence and the culmination of senses building to a climatic euphoria have both given Paz ample opportunity to communicate synesthetically. Whether he chooses to employ actual synesthetic metaphors or not, the essence of synesthesia is ever present within the poetry of Paz. Therefore, in this work, synesthesia and one of its functions in the poetry of Octavio Paz will be addressed.

CHAPTER 2: SYNESTHESIA AND PAZ

The perceptual transcendence that fascinates and motivates Octavio Paz was something that he believes the entire world can experience. The problem lies not within a person's capability to experience this enlightenment, but in his or her obliviousness to his or her own potential. Paz believes that this is where synesthesia can help. Throughout his poetry, Paz incorporates this lyrical trope to encourage his reader to participate in a multi-perceptual worldview and to experience a blending of senses. For example, in his poem, "Conversar," Paz writes:

El espíritu baja
y desata las lenguas
pero no habla palabras:
habla lumbre... (*Árbol adentro* 83)

The final verse presented here demonstrates a synesthetic description of words (an audible element) as light (visual). Again, in the same poem, Paz uses synesthesia describing an audible syllable as burnt: "es una profecía / de llamas y un desplome / de sílabas quemadas" (13-15). However, both of these examples go beyond a simple literary device, and possess profound connections to his poetics: poetic language as a saving, unifying light; and, poetic language as a destroyer of common language. Both of these elements will be explored in greater detail in this chapter, but it is the synesthesia that demands attention here. What was it about synesthesia that Paz found so useful? Paz once wrote, "Hay más de una semejanza entre la poesía moderna y la ciencia...El poeta procede con las palabras como el hombre de ciencia con las células, los átomos y otras partículas materiales..." (*Corrientes alternas* 79). A look at the science of

synesthesia will show this connection between poetry and science to be very strong, and will provide insight into the literary trope utilized by Paz.

A Study of the Senses

Though the word *synesthesia* may not be commonplace in conversational circles, or even in many academic circles, it is gaining more and more awareness. The resurgence of this pre-Enlightenment discovery is largely attributed to the work of two doctors, Dr. Richard Cytowic, M.D., and Dr. David Eagleman, Ph.D. who have not only revived interest in this fascinating topic but have also given the study of synesthesia a sturdy scientific foundation. Both doctors work in the field of neurology -- Dr. Cytowic, a neurologist and Dr. Eagleman a neuroscientist. In their most recent collaborative work, *Wednesday is Indigo Blue* (2009), these authors paint a concise and relatable portrait of what defines synesthesia, why it is important to study, and how it has been approached scientifically. The two authors give a simple definition of synesthesia that compare the word to its more familiar etymological relative, "anesthesia" (literally meaning "without senses"), and define synesthesia as "joined senses" (1). Though recently made prominent in the United States, the study of synesthesia goes beyond this region. Rafael Redondo Barba, a hispanic scholar, provides a more detailed definition:

Un criterio generalizado considera a la sinestesia como un cúmulo de asociaciones de diferente y diversa naturaleza perceptual, un enlace asociativo entre varias zonas sensoriales, unidas como si las impresiones de una pasaran a la otra, *unificación persistente de sensaciones de distinto origen* que cuestiona de modo radical la posibilidad de un conocimiento "objetivo". (13)

Both definitions satisfy a description of what is commonly diagnosed as synesthesia. The blending of senses is a bio-psychological occurrence among some people that seems to be

hereditary, and mostly manifests itself in childhood (Cytowic and Eagleman 9-13). Some children lose their synesthetic abilities as they become adults, but occasionally some people experience the phenomenon their entire life (Cytowic and Eagleman 11). Another important characteristic is highlighted by Cytowic and Eagleman: “It is important to emphasize that synesthetes do not substitute or confuse one sense for another...Rather they perceive both sensations simultaneously” (14). This simultaneous perception is what Paz highlights in so many of his poems. Both in content and structure, Paz’s poetry challenges singular perception. For example, in his poem, “Cara al tiempo,” in his collection *Vuelta*, Paz writes these lines: “El ojo piensa, / el pensamiento ve, / la mirada toca” (9-11). The blending of perceptive activities exemplifies the a host of other poems that present similar synesthetic concepts and examples.

Of the many ways in which synesthesia manifests in a person, the most common crossover involves time units and colors. This version of synesthesia occurs when a person associates, or perceives, a certain fixed color with a certain day of the week, or a month, or even a decade (Cytowic and Eagleman 8, 70-71). The title of Cytowic and Eagleman's book exemplifies said phenomenon: *Wednesday is Indigo Blue*. One component that makes synesthetic studies so difficult is its subjective nature, and yet this is what Paz accentuated in his poetry. Take for example the *labrynth* poem structure referenced earlier. Poems structured in this way can be interpreted three different ways, depending on your personal, subjective perception of the poem. However, this individuality makes synesthesia difficult to measure. Whereas one person may see an indigo blue when they think about Wednesday, or see it on a calendar, another person may associate a shade of red with the same day (Cytowic and Eagleman 4-5). What has been established is that when a person has a color association with either a time unit, a number, or a letter, the association does not change (Cytowic and Eagleman 5-6, 12). If the letter “A” has a

green association for a synesthete, it is likely that the synesthete has associated those two things since childhood, and he or she will continue to have the association their entire life.

Although chromatic association is a common type of synesthesia, color pairings are by far not the only forms in existence. In the opening pages of their book, Cytowic and Eagleman build on the work of Cytowic's earlier book, *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (2003), and tell of a case study in which a person experiences exactly what the title purports. Michael Watson, the book's subject, describes his own synesthesia in the following way: "With an intense flavor the feeling sweeps down my arm into my hand and I feel shape, weight, texture, and temperature as if I'm actually grasping something" (qtd. in Cytowic and Eagleman 3). This unique form of synesthesia is just one of many ways in which synesthesia manifests. Just about every imaginable combination of senses has been documented, and as the topic gains more awareness and credibility, more and more people are testifying to their own unique experiences (Cytowic and Eagleman 13-21). Redondo Barba points out, "La existencia de estas interconexiones unificadas como, por ejemplo, la pintura y la música, sólo demuestran la elasticidad de la mente humana y su capacidad" (16). As Redondo Barba implies, this exciting field of research not only helps humanity understand the inner workings of the brain, but may also reveal some insightful knowledge for the future. It is this capacity for change that created hope in Paz for a more poetic future.

Nevertheless, the idea of blending senses is foreign to most, and there is a disconnect between these two means of perception. Those who experience synesthesia on a regular basis are often surprised to learn that others do not see things the way they do (Cytowic and Eagleman 1). In contrast, those who do not have synesthesia sometimes have a more hostile reaction when learning about this poly-sensorial phenomenon. In the scientific community, the topic of crossing

senses has garnered some skepticism about its legitimacy. Cytowic and Eagleman explain that when Dr. Cytowic took an interest in the topic of synesthesia, his colleagues warned him and insisted that, "synesthesia could not be a real perceptual phenomenon because it contradicted standard notions of separate sensory channels in the brain" (4). Furthermore, the doctors explain:

For a long time, though, it was typical to dismiss synesthesia with glib or even hostile assertions. "They're just imagining it," skeptics claimed, writing synesthetes off as needy exhibitionists with overactive imaginations who simply want to call attention to themselves. (Cytowic and Eagleman 4)

In response, one of the primary focuses of *Wednesday is Indigo Blue* is to defend both the real presence of synesthesia in people, and its validity as a topic for scientific research and discussion.

Universal Synesthesia

Another fascinating idea associated with synesthesia is that, to some extent, it may be possible for everyone to experience the joining of senses. One extreme example of this phenomenon is drug-induced synesthesia. Though they in no way condone illegal use or abuse of hallucinatory drugs, Cytowic and Eagleman admit that synesthesia can occur with certain drugs such as LSD, though they also clarify that this form of synesthesia is different from the "naturally occurring kind" (4-5). This may not be the intended effect of such drugs, but a synesthetic experience can occur. Paz associates the affect that certain drugs can have on a poet, and associates it with inspiration. In *Corrientes alternas*, he first makes this observation: "No deja de ser turbador que la desaparición de las potencias divinas coincida con la aparición de las drogas como donadoras de la visión poética" (81). For Paz, the replacement of the supernatural

muse is the synesthetic experience that drugs can provide. Building on this idea, Paz then describes the revelatory power of hallucinatory drugs:

La droga provoca la visión de la correspondencia universal, suscita la analogía, pone en movimiento a los objetos, hace del mundo un vasto poema hecho de ritmos y rimas. La droga arranca al paciente de la realidad cotidiana, enmaraña nuestra percepción, altera las sensaciones y, en fin, pone en entredicho al universo. (82)

This direct correlation between the effects of drugs and the alteration of both perception and the senses is extraordinary in that it provides commentary on Paz's synesthetic poetics and demonstrates its universality. Paz finishes this section with a justification for the use of drugs as a mystic experience that connects humanity to its primordial innocence and to the supernatural (82-83), and thereby encourages this potential for sensorial alteration.

Another less controversial means of experiencing synesthesia is very commonplace, but potentially profound. In his book, *El lenguaje del color* (2009), Sanz uses one's perception of the light produced by a light bulb to demonstrate that synesthesia may be more familiar to people than they realize. He explains that a person may interpret one type of light as warm while another type of light as cool (Sanz 13). In perceiving light bulb energy in this way, a person is synesthetically describing what he or she is experiencing, blending the sense of sight with a textile description. Furthermore, Sanz suggests the following: "Los objetos no 'tienen' sensaciones, los objetos devuelvan una cierta cantidad de energía" (14). With this declaration, Sanz develops the possibility that all things perceived are a form of energy, and that perhaps those who experience synesthesia are more open to a variety of energy given by a single object instead of the mono-perceptive norm to which most are accustomed (14-15). If this is how

perception works, it may be possible for anyone to adapt and begin to perceive things synesthetically.

Some may already experience synesthesia without their own awareness of the phenomenon. Cytowic and Eagleman dedicate a section of their book to synesthetic orgasms (157-159). At the core of this theory is the idea that when a person reaches sexual climax, they may have a synthetic episode accompany the chemical surge. The authors explain:

If ordinary emotional valence can induce color, shape, and texture, then what about the most intense and paroxysmal emotional experience, the orgasm?

Though we have not systematically queried individuals about what happens during sex, a fair number have volunteered comments that orgasm indeed causes color, shape, texture, movement, and taste. (157)

In the moment of orgasm, it is entirely possible for those who are not synesthetic to have a synesthetic reaction and experience. In theory, if synesthesia can be experienced by those who are not classified as a synesthete, then it seems possible that the manner in which we receive energy can be altered, and this may have been the hope of Octavio Paz.

Erotic Synesthesia and Paz

Among the many facets of Octavio Paz's poetry, one theme among his poems was that of eroticism. In *Corrientes alternas*, Paz states, "Se ha comparado la poesía con la mística y con el erotismo" (5). However, as noted in the previous chapter, Paz's erotic poetry was far more than just an ode to sexual encounters, but rather was themed in transcendence. Again, in *Corrientes alternas*, Paz explains:

Sólo que el 'yo mismo' que nos presenta la droga -- como el de la poesía y el del erotismo -- es un desconocido y su aparición es semejante al de la resurrección de

alguien que habíamos enterrado hace mucho. El enterrado está vivo y su regreso nos aterra. (95)

Paz viewed the ecstatic moment of orgasm almost as a portal to a utopia, or perhaps (as noted in the second quote) an unrecognizable higher sense of self. For example, his poem entitled, “Sonetos,” presents elements of eroticism. This poem is a collection of 5 sonnets under one title, and structurally demonstrates the Baroque tactic of *engaño* frequently utilized in Baroque Spanish sonnet. In this poem, Paz uses the form of a traditional Petrarchan sonnet, and in the first of two tercets in the final sonnet, he writes:

Vértigo inmóvil, avidez primera,
Aire de amor que nos exalta y libra:
Danzan los cuerpos su quietud ociosa, (*Libertad* 16)

Paz captures the moment of orgasm in the first verse of this tercet, and immediately follows it with a sentiment of exaltation and freedom, that is a higher level of existence. In this place or state of being, one’s perception has changed. At that moment, the senses are heightened, and everything is intensified. This globally common experience is universally identifiable. Paz saw the opportunity to establish a point of connection with all humanity that could transform their singular tunnel-vision worldview to a multidimensional state of perception, that is, a state of transcendence. Synesthesia was not just an accessory to eroticism, but rather a universal bridge to higher awareness.

The world that a synesthete perceives through multiple sensory receptors is still the same world that those who do not have this ability experience in their own way. One’s world vision may be less popular than the other’s, but the world itself has not changed. However, what if one could see the physical world the way someone else saw it? What if one’s perception was

suddenly more broad and she or he could simultaneously process the multiplicity of energies that are available? Fortunately, the world does not have to wait for science to research and develop a method for humanity to universally become synesthetes. Literature has already made this possible.

The Blending of Senses in Literary History

The hope that someone can change another's point of view is what has fueled literature for centuries. However, changing someone's mind through an influential piece of literature is very different from changing the way someone perceives the surrounding world. This is the task of literary synesthesia. By crossing the senses and blending sensorial descriptions in a poem or a work of prose, the author, in effect, is allowing the reader to participate in the poly-sensorial world of the synesthete.

For ages, the manipulation of senses has emphasized an action, a place, a person, or any other fixture in the natural world, but it has not always been received well. In his presentation of the history of synesthesia in Spanish, Italian and French literature, Schrader opens his tome with this example:

En el año 1846 publicó el filólogo clásico Chr. Augustus Lobeck una serie de estudios gramaticales bajo el título de *PHMATIKON*. Al final del volumen se encuentra el tratado...en el que Lobeck arremete, en algunos pasajes con verdadera vehemencia, contra una serie de <<solecismos>> en la literatura griega y latina. (13)

Schrader goes on to show just how vehemently the philologist attacked this literary trope on the following page (14). The transgression against literature that Lobeck was protesting is now named synesthesia. Though his work delivered a scathing critique of synesthesia, Schrader points

out that Lobeck's contribution to the study of this literary trope is immeasurable. Lobeck's research contributes in this way: [N]os ofrece un catálogo comprensivo de lugares de la literatura clásica, y porque demuestra, si bien con más de un signo negativo, la edad venerable de las sinestias literarias" (Schrader 15-16). Because of Lobeck's work in classics, it can be stated with all confidence, then, that the use of synesthesia in literature goes at least as far back as classical literature.

In Hispanic literature, one of the most notable movements to make prominent use of synesthesia was the *Modernista* movement (late 19th - early 20th century). This movement is perhaps best known for its use of color associations, and other Symbolist techniques that set their literature apart from other Hispanic movements. This feature alone provides ample opportunity for synesthesia to appear. In an article titled, "El color en la literatura del modernismo," José Luis Bernal Muñoz dedicates the first section to what he calls "Sinestias (El color de la música)" (172). This first section takes up half of his twenty-page article, and details the various synesthetic uses of colors in *Modernismo* (172-181). Similarly, in his article, "Sobre la sinestesia en el modernismo hispanico," Allen Phillips details and analyzes several examples of synesthesia from the writers that defined the Modernista movement. In his article, examples from writers such as José Martí, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Ruben Darío, Enrique González Martínez, and Manuel González Prada demonstrate the abundant use of this trope during this movement, as he thematically compares one writer to another. In summary of his article, Phillips defines why synesthesia was particularly apropos in the *Modernista* movement: "Pienso, por último, que el principio de la sinestesia era muy saludable para romper con el limitado concepto realista del arte que dominaba en el siglo XIX. Esto en cuanto al pasado; pero también la sinestesia preludia en cierto sentido la vanguardia..." (384). This assessment rings true in a variety of ways as the

presence of synesthesia breaks the mold for what is considered *normal*, and thus provides a powerful tool for these movements that were striving to do just that. Not too long after the *Modernista* movement faded, the Surrealists step into the limelight and had similar goals of questioning that which was *normal*, by embracing the bizarre and questioning reality.

Commenting on Surrealism in comparison to Cubism, Paz writes:

El cubismo había sido un análisis del objeto y una tentativa por mostrarlo en su totalidad; de uno y otro modo, analítico o sintético, fue una crítica de la *apariciencia*. El surrealismo trasmutó al objeto y fue la irrupción de la *aparición*: una nueva figuración --una verdadera transfiguración. (*Corrientes alternas* 34)

His commentary of what defined surrealism is insightful in that Paz himself exemplified aspects of this movement in this work. Within the parameters of surrealism, synesthesia exaggerates sensorial experiences, and Paz would often do just that. Jarring metaphors such as “Mis ojos tienen sed” (*Pasado en claro* 121) and “el agua, aunque potable, no se bebe: se lee” (*Pasado en claro* 122), pit unusual sensorial pairings against one another and thereby magnify both senses. Surrealist techniques such as his use of synesthesia affiliate him with the movement and contribute to the history of this literary trope.

The components of a synesthetic metaphor

While articles like that of Phillips are a good example of one way to present the elements of synesthesia and the effect they have had on literature, another very different method exists. In his book, Schrader attributes the word, “synesthesia,” to a pivotal study directed by Stephen Ullmann (14). Other critics respect Ullmann as the first to study synesthesia in a way that now has become commonplace (Shen 170; Yu 21-22). In Ullmann’s “seminal study” (Shen 170), Shen relates that “Ullmann sampled over 2000 synaesthetic metaphors extracted from the poetry

of 12 nineteenth-century poets from three different European literary sources: English, French and Hungarian poetry” (170). This extensive study paved the way for future studies, creating a hierarchy of senses and a pattern to which most synesthetic examples are faithful. The hierarchy follows a scale of proximity:

The five sensory domains have been traditionally described as constituting a scale, starting from the lowest sense, the tactile, followed by the gustatory, olfactory, auditory and the visual, the highest sensory domain. This can be described as an immediacy scale: the lower sensory domains such as touch and taste, require the most proximate contact of the perceiver and the perceived object, smell less so, and sound and sight require the least direct contact. (Shen 170)

This hierarchy is the foundation for many research efforts about the use of synesthesia in literature. Furthermore, Ullmann’s findings concerning a pattern of direction finds support in additional studies. Before reporting his findings in his own study of Chinese synesthetic examples, Ning Yu describes the building blocks of his research:

Empirical studies in various languages and literatures (e.g., Ullmann 1959/1951; Williams 1976; Yu 1992; Shen 1997) have shown that synesthetic metaphors are quite selective in terms of directionality of their transfers...Specifically, Ullmann discovered three overall tendencies (1959: 276-284). The first tendency, which he calls “hierarchical distribution”, is that synesthetic transfers tend to go from the “lower” to the “higher” sensory modes, namely, touch → taste → smell → sound → sight. (21)

Shen agrees with this observation, but adds, “The only exception to this generalization relates to the two highest modalities, sight and sound. In the sight-sound mapping, each sense is equally likely to be either target or source” (170). The jargon of synesthetic studies like *mapping* and *target* or *source* that Shen uses here only describe more precisely the transfer of one sense onto another. For example, Yu expounds upon his first example of synesthesia in the work of Mo Yan, a Chinese poet:

The first synesthetic metaphor in (1) has touch as its source domain, and smell as its target domain. “(1) The house was full of *bubbling-hot stench*, like a dead chicken or duck being scalded by boiling water” (*Ball-Shaped Lightning*). In this sentence, the “stench,” a bad smell, is as “hot” as boiling water that is “bubbling”...This extraordinary image, however, is grounded in the basic synesthetic transfer TOUCH → SMELL that conforms to the “low to high” mapping direction. (24)

In Yu’s example, all three jargon terms appear and are described. The *target* is the actual sense that is being used in the metaphor, and the *source* sense is that which is being placed on top of the primary sense, or *mapped* onto the sense. The direction of mapping can become somewhat confusing when tracing the direction of a synesthetic metaphor in a language, like Spanish, that places its adjectives differently than other languages. For a Spanish example of synesthetic mapping, consider a Spanish translation of the French Symbolist, Arthur Rimbaud. According to Bernal Muñoz, Rimbaud wrote, “Entre los colores y los sonidos hay una gran relación. El cornetín de pistón produce sonidos amarillos; la flauta suele tener sonidos azules y anaranjados...” (175). Here, the sound produced by the instruments is the target modality, while the colors are the source modality that is being mapped onto sound. The established pattern is

broken here as a lower sense (sound) is the target while a higher sense (vision) is the source, yet it still supports the theory of Ullmann, as Shen has pointed out, because the two higher senses are interchangeable within the ranking system.

As will be presented in the next chapter, this interchange of senses (sight mapped onto sound) is the multi-sensory metaphor that Octavio Paz uses the most. Take for example a snippet of his prose. Paz gives a very straightforward example of synesthesia as he gives a guideline for poetic interpretation. Paz writes, “Comprender un poema quiere decir, en primer término, oírlo...Leer un poema es oírlo con los ojos; oírlo, es verlo con los oídos. (*Corrientes alternas* 71). The target and source here are exchanged from one line to the next. In the first synesthetic line, the action of the sentence (reading) dictates that the act of seeing is the target modality and the source modality mapped onto it is hearing. The exact opposite is true in the second line beginning with a new action: hearing. The interchangeability of these two senses is perfectly demonstrated here in this prose example, as well as Paz’s emphasis on these two sensorial activities. A lyrical equivalent to this idea can be seen in the extensive poem, “Pasado en claro.” In the final stanza, Paz begins to conclude his poem with these verses:

Estoy en donde estuve:

Voy detrás del murmullo

Pasos dentro de mí, oídos con los ojos, (43-44)

In the second verse presented, the target seems to be hearing and the source modality, seeing. The companionship of these two senses, presented in such a direct manner, provides further testimony to both Ullmann’s theory and Paz’s focus on them. Therefore, in this chapter it is important to note two ideas. First, the synesthetic metaphors most commonly used by Paz do coincide with the established pattern defined by Ullmann; academically then, Paz supports the

theory of Ullmann, and contributes to the pool of poets and writers who have used synesthesia systematically. Second, Paz chooses to employ synesthesia through the two highest sensory modalities (sound and sight). With this observation, the theme of transcendence subtly reveals itself even in the choice of sense that Octavio Paz highlights in the act of blending senses. These two higher sense are the most commonly identified modality associated with worldview and perception. Even the words *worldview*, *perception*, *point of view*, and others like them, inherently refer to the sense of sight. This adjustment to the act of seeing by crossing it with a sound accomplishes the underlying goal of changing consciousness and achieving transcendence.

Furthermore, within the vein of synesthesia, if this sight-sound combination is considered through the lens of eroticism, it is the tactile sense (the lowest sense) that functions as a trigger that allows these higher senses to emerge synesthetically. Therefore, the whole scale of modalities is under consideration as a potential point of transcendence. In other words, synesthesia, in all its possible sensory relationships, stands as a gate for anyone to experience transcendence. By studying both its scientific background and literary history, we are better situated to consider the blending of senses in the poetry of Octavio Paz, as it creates a bridge to a higher point of view.

Topoemas: Palma del Viajero

In a discussion about Octavio Paz and his use of synesthesia, a foundational collection for such a discussion would be *Topoemas* (1968). Meyer-Minneman reports the history of this collection:

En el año 1968 Octavio Paz publica en la *Revista de la Universidad de México* seis poemas visuales con el título de *Topoemas*. Los poemas vuelven a imprimirse

en edición separada en 1971 y se incluyen también en amplia compilación de los *Poemas (1935-1975)* de 1979. (1113)

The intriguing title of this collection of poems identifies its contents as anomalous, and garners curiosity and suspicion. Upon opening the pages of this small pamphlet-like book, suspicions are verified -- the poems are extraordinary. Many of the poems seem as though they are drawn onto the page, and all the entries are poems whose words take on a shape that in some way enhances or depicts the main aspect of the poem. In his own commentary, Paz describes the title and nature of these poems in simple yet powerful words: “Topoema = topos + poemas. Poesía espacial, por oposición a la poesía temporal, discursiva. Recurso contra el discurso” (*Poemas* 693). Meyer-Minneman helpfully adds the following: “La voz griega τοπος significa en la acepción aquí actualizada: ‘lugar,’ ‘posición.’ Un topoema es, por lo tanto, un poema, en el cual ‘el lugar,’ ‘la posición’ de las palabras, adquiere un valor semántico” (1113). As noted earlier, Paz firmly believed that poetry should be read aloud and heard (*Corrientes alternas* 71). However, these poems are not designed only to be read aloud. Instead, they are intended to be heard and seen. It is important to note that these entities are still poems, thus implying an auditory element that cannot be fully supplanted by the visual aspect. Again, Paz focuses on the two higher modalities, and blends them. As a consequence, those who engage this text take on the role of a reader / observer, having to decipher not only the words of the poem, but also their orientation on the page and the design they create (Meyer-Minneman 1115-1116). The synthesis of roles found in topoemas forces its participants to partake in a synesthetic experience and is precisely why this collection belongs in a discussion about Octavio Paz’s implementation of synesthesia. There are not explicit examples of synesthesia among the topoemas. There are no metaphors that blend the senses or actions that cross modalities. Instead, the synesthetic element

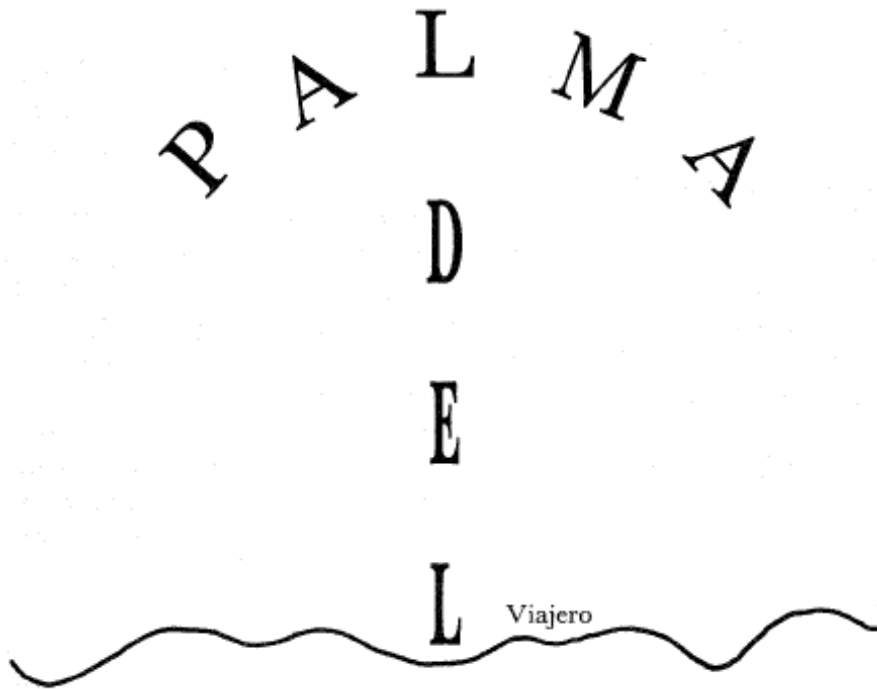
of these poems are latent within the structures themselves and the potential effect they have on the reader. By coining the title, *topoema*, and using this method of presentation, Paz blends the two modalities of sight and sound, and embodies the essence of synesthesia. This cognitive synesthesia is the essence of perceptual synesthesia manifested in a completely poetic context.

One example of the *topoemas* is the first of the collection, entitled, “Palma del viajero” (*Poemas* 499). Interestingly, in his own commentary about the poem, Paz gives an English definition of the actual plant for which the poem is named:

Palma del viajero (*Ravenala madagascariensis*): <<A tree whose leaves are arranged in a particular fanlike shape. The sheathing leaf-based form receptacles in which considerable quantities of water are stored and hence the name>> (Guía de los *Royal Botanical Gardens* de Paradeniya, Kandy). (*Poemas* 693)

If one were to start with the notes that Paz has provided for this poem, one important point of interest could be discussed before even seeing the *topoema*. The theme of *viajero* is strongly emphasized by the blending of cultures found in this note. Here is a plant that bears a Hispanic name, categorized by its Latin name and then described (somewhat awkwardly) in the English language from a source designed to provide insight for visitors to the Royal Botanical Gardens of the ancient, sacred, Sri Lankan city of Kandy. The overlapping cultures encourages the image of a traveller, or tourist. The question is, what is so important about this wanderer?

The poem itself is simple. A basic picture of a tree is created by the word “palma” arching symmetrically over the upright presentation of the word “del.” The word “viajero” is proportionately smaller, as it rests under the foliage of the word “palma.”



Once the topoema is examined, the theme of solace and shelter reveals itself. In connection to the explanation provided by Paz, the plant effortlessly becomes a source of life and refreshment. The traveller is in need of replenishment, and finds regenerative substance and shelter in the plant known for its hospitality. Nevertheless, with only a simple explanation to a simply presented poem, the reader is left wondering if there is something more to this topoema. Consider what Meyer-Minneman surmised:

Tomando en cuenta el género gramatical de “palma” es posible ver en la palmera del poema un símbolo de la mujer, así como en “viajero” un símbolo del hombre en búsqueda de alivio, en el sentido de una redención de los infortunios. Tal interpretación concordaría con la exaltación surrealista de lo femenino...El poner a descubierto, o, por lo menos, el intento de insinuar sentido oculto de una expresión familiar, era uno de los objetivos favoritos de la actividad surrealista.

(1118)

Three critical points from this quote are key to this topoema, and will develop a point of connection to a previously established concept of synesthesia. First, the observation that the “palma” could represent a woman, or in general, the feminine, is substantiated by commentary of this same poem by Octavio Paz. In the eleventh volume of his comprehensive, self-edited collection, *Obras Completas*, Paz affirms the following: “Los seis topoemas son signos (sinos) hacia: Marie José, *Palma del viajero...*” (*Obra Poética I* 553). With this declaration, an important feminine presence (Marie José is the wife of Octavio) is directly associated with the feminine representative of the poem, the “palma.” Second, the size of the “viajero” in comparison to the “palma” indicates the traveller’s inferiority and dependence on the plant. However, whereas Meyer-Minneman sees a man looking for redemption in this poem, the underlying tone of eroticism can also lead a reader to the theme of transcendence.

Though the theme of redemption is commonplace in the works of Octavio Paz, the strong presence (strength inferred from the relative size of the plant in the topoema) of a feminine entity coupled with a masculine entity, suggests eroticism. In Wilson’s estimation, Paz “did hold that erotic love was regenerative; that woman was the answer to the riddle or mediatrix” (24). Therefore, it stands to reason that the man in the poem has come to the palm to find solace and redemption through regenerative love. In the utopian place, or state of being caused by erotic love, humanity finds transcendence, and thus we see the weary traveller resting peacefully under the palm. Third, the theme of erotic love is further solidified by Meyer-Minneman’s observation concerning the exaltation of women within the Surrealist movement. Paz’s association with the movement is well documented, as is his high estimation of women in the context of erotic rejuvenation. Paz was in tune with sexual equality, both parties needing the other. This is

evidenced in some of his poetry including a poem from *Salamandra* entitled, “Complementarios.” This short poem consists of one four-verse stanza:

En mi cuerpo tú buscas al monte,
A su sol enterrado en el bosque.
En tu cuerpo yo busco la barca
En mitad de la noche perdida. (86)

In this erotic poem, both parties are looking for each other, and each is just as necessary as the other. The separation of the “palma” from the “viajero” stresses the presence of two characters in a singular title, and thus adds to the potential for an erotic interpretation.

Because of this association, it is not excessively speculative to interpret this poem erotically, neither is it too speculative to point out that even the shape of the palm could represent the feminine reproductive organs. Consider the general shape of each in the drawings below:



Palma del viajero



Feminine reproductive organs

In the context of the poem’s lack of lifelike representation, even Meyer-Minneman admits, “Con todo, no se trata exactamente de la palmera mencionada en el comentario” (1118). Assuming the unrealistic representation is inconsequential, Meyer-Minneman goes on to explain that the intended image may have been more akin conventional idea of a palm tree (1118). This seems unlikely. As a poet who exemplified Structuralism, Paz is notoriously concerned with the importance of language and meaning. More attention will be spent demonstrating this idea later, but for now a few quotes should suffice. In a personal interview with Paz, he confirmed to his

interviewer, Rita Guibert, that his favorite book is the dictionary (qtd. in Ivask 33). Not a book of poetry or a life-changing novel -- a dictionary. Specifically, his favorite book is *Diccionario etimológico de la lengua española*, and while describing it Paz declares, “I read it every day. It’s my adviser, my elder brother... The truth about the world ought to be found in the dictionary, since its pages contain all the nouns in the world” (Ivask 33). Octavio Paz was very dedicated to the evolution of meaning. Furthermore, when commenting on the corruption of a society, Paz is quoted as saying, “When a society becomes corrupted, the first thing that deteriorates is its language” (qtd. in Ivask 12). If Paz was this concerned about language, specifically, poetic language, it only makes sense that Paz would dedicate just as much attention to the presentation of his poetry. In a the above presented side by side comparison, the overall image of the topoema, “Palma del viajero,” looks much more like a representation of the female reproductive system than the actual plant named *palma del viajero*. This interpretation takes into consideration Paz’s view of eroticism, women and regenerative love, and thus it is reasonable to deduce that Paz had an erotic interpretation in mind when creating “Palma del viajero.”

In conclusion, drawing from the erotic undertone of this poem, a third synesthetic element emerges. The sexual tactile sensations associated with erotic love become a blended element along with the already established auditory and visual components. In rapid succession then, with only fragments of a second separating this experience from that of natural synesthesia, a reader equipped with all the factors recently discussed could have a near synesthetic experience when exposed to this poem. The fusion of auditory, visual, and tactile perceptions usher in the utopian tranquility of transcendence as the “viajero” takes a moment to relax under the shade of “la palma.”

A Word of Synesthesia in “La rama”

The short poem, “La rama” (*Libertad* 114) is one of Paz’s beautiful synesthetic illusions. The poem can be found in Paz’s collection entitled, *Libertad bajo palabra* (1935-1944) in the first section of the book, “Bajo tu clara sombra.” Its simplicity and brevity are misleading to the point of potential disappointment. However, this poem is far from simple. Written in four enclosed tercets of consonant and assonant rhyme in octosyllabic form, the arrangement of this poem emphasizes a purposed structure which may be an indirect reference to the Structuralism / Formalism ideas that it advocates. The rhyme pattern follows an ABA CDC structure with the middle verse consonantly rhyming with its bookend verses. For example, the second stanza reads:

Se yergue, flecha, en la rama,
se desvanece entre alas
y en música se derrama. (114)

In this stanza, the first and third verses share assonant rhyme between "rama" and "derrama." The middle verse also rhymes with the others, but replaces consonant rhyme with an assonant one (a__a). The rhyming strategy affects the visual perspective of this poem as the verses within a stanza at first glance appear to all rhyme perfectly, but ultimately spurs the reader to take a second look and reassess the rhyme scheme, an act that also resonates within the Structuralist and Formalist movements.

The first tercet sets the stage. Paz introduces the two characters of the poem, the bird, and the branch for which the poem is named:

Canta en la punta del pino
un pájaro detenido,
trémulo, sobre su trino. (114)

The opening stanza gives little attention to the branch, but the bird enjoys two descriptive moments. First, the bird is presented as timid, then as trembling. The verb “trémulo” does double duty as it first refers to the action of the bird, and second, could also apply to the call that the bird produces. The reader’s first encounter with the main character of the poem paints a portrait of a timid bird. The apprehensive nature of this fledgling does not carry the connotation of weakness or fearfulness, but timidity in its truest sense. It is also of importance to note that the bird is simply described as just that. It is not a lark, an eagle or a nightingale; it is a nondescript bird (Wilson 108). This flies in the face of poetic tradition that has made use of avian symbols such as the Romantic swallow and the *Modernista* swan, and thus emphasizes the generalized image of a bird. This is the first clue to the latent message of the poem. In Wilson’s opinion, “subtle clues indicate that the bird, seemingly ‘real’ (i.e. the word points to a real bird) is really just a word in the poem” (108). The vague avian reference deters the reader's ability to create an exact mental image of a bird, thus making the transition between *bird* and *word* somewhat smoother. This thought sets up the rest of the poem, and gives the reader a filter by which to interpret "La rama."

At the end of the third tercet, Paz incorporates a basic synesthetic metaphor: “una nota amarilla.” Paz writes:

El pájaro es una astilla
que canta y se quema viva
en una nota amarilla. (*Libertad* 114)

The target modality is auditory and the source is visual, represented by the description “amarilla.” The color here may refer to the sun (Wilson 108), and point to the solar assassin as the culprit. Yet again, Paz highlights the two highest faculties, and compels the reader to entertain the idea of a synesthetic experience. This is also an example of Paz’s aggressive

invitational use of synesthesia. Paz wants the reader to transcend the mono-perceptual worldview that is commonplace, and perceive the world through poetry and its kaleidoscope filter. The implementation of synesthesia here in a poem about redefining perception is equivalent to a parent throwing a young child into a swimming pool with the aspirations of teaching the child to swim. Paz does not gently lead his reader into the waters of synesthesia, he drowns the participant in a moment of sensorial confusion in an effort to jar the reader momentarily, and yet ultimately provide a lifesaver: the broadening of one's worldview. The effects of such a stunt are similar to that of the swimming pool example: either the person will immediately feel uncomfortable and reject the possibility of perceiving the world in such a way, or the person will adapt, and begin to see the world differently.

Also in the third stanza, not only does a synesthetic metaphor appear, but the linguistic interpretation becomes more discernible. The destruction of the bird (which represents language) is not surprising. Paz saw in poetry a destructive element, and describes poetry as: “un lenguaje más allá del lenguaje o la destrucción del lenguaje por medio del lenguaje” (*Corrientes alternas* 72-73), and again describing poetry, Paz writes, “Por eso es, a un tiempo, destrucción y creación del lenguaje. Destrucción de las palabras y de los significados, reino del silencio...” (*Corrientes alternas* 7). Paz does not want to destroy language and replace it. For Paz, the idea of destruction is inherent in the nature of poetry in that poetry forces its reader to reconsider how words are used, and what they actually mean. This aspect of Paz's philosophy is rooted in Structuralism. Again, briefly stated, Structuralism “is the notion that language doesn't just reflect or record the world: rather, it shapes it, so that *how* we see is *what* we see” (Berry 59), and one of its major characteristics is “the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation -- they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are a part of (hence the term ‘structuralism’)” (Berry

38). Paz himself wrote: “El poema no tiene objeto o referencia exterior... Así, el problema de la significación de la poesía se esclarece apenas se repara en que el sentido no está fuera sino dentro del poema” (*Corrientes alternas* 5). Likewise, the destruction of the bird can be better understood in the greater context of the poem as the final stanza ties it all together.

The poem ends with the sudden perspective shift as the omniscient narrative view slides into a poetic “yo” posture. Paz writes:

Alzo los ojos: no hay nada.
Silencio sobre la rama,
sobre la rama quebrada. (114)

As the poetic “yo” recounts what he or she is seeing, the burnt remains of the branch indicate that something has indeed happened. A bird was there, it was singing, it was burned up (perhaps by the sun), and now all that is left is silence. Wilson comments on these events, “The poem burns up its individual words, as fire purifies... Nothing is left on the branch but silence, that silence of experience that poetry articulates. Not to enrich the reading with analogy would be to read literally (the prime reading): the realists’ illusion” (108). Here we see a glimpse of the Formalist influence. One of the major efforts of Formalism was “making the familiar world appear new” (Barry 155). In “La rama,” Paz transforms what seems to be a simple poem about a bird in a tree (a familiar scenic portrait that Wilson named the “realists’ illusion”), and converts it into a poem about poetry and its consumption of words. The poem’s title indicates the true focus of the poem. The poem mislead’s its reader into believing that the bird (or language) is more important, but in the end, the tree is what remains (poetry). Therefore, the singular synesthetic example does not stand alone in this poem as Paz’s poetry embodies the essence of synesthesia as two modes of perception are blended into one poem.

Synesthesia in “Decir: Hacer”

The synesthetic components of the next poem are both structural and semantic. In the chapter entitled, “Gavilla,” in his collection *Árbol adentro* (1976-1988), Octavio Paz dedicates his poem, “Decir:Hacer,” (11) to Roman Jakobson, a linguist whose accomplishments are historically significant. Influenced by the father of Structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure (Barry 40), the popularization of the theory is attributed to Jakobson (Percival). He also has a notable impact on prominent figures such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Zellig Harris (Percival). Though esteemed as an “eminent linguist” (Quiroga 169), Jakobson also related his theories to poetics (“Biografía de de Roman Jakobson;” Pecival), and perhaps this is the strongest connection between Jakobson and Paz. According to Quiroga, Paz makes mention of some of his personal encounters with Jakobson (169-170), but apart from this interaction, there is not much else linking the two. Therefore, this poem seems to be dedicated to Jakobson not because of a personal relationship these two shared, but because of Paz’s appreciation for Jakobson’s work and his affiliation with Structuralism. With the presence of this dedication, then, a reader who understands the history of Jakobson can expect to see something about poetics and structuralism in “Decir:Hacer.”

The poem itself does not follow any traditional form, but that it has visible structure is undeniable. Paz divides the poem into two numbered sections, and creates his own verbally-driven structure. There is no distinct rhyme pattern or syllabic consistency, but Paz arranges almost all the verses in opposing orientations from one verse to the next. As will be noted later, Paz employs this manner of presentation in other poems, and it consistently plays into the interpretation of the poem. The following excerpt demonstrates this arrangement:

la poesía.

Se desliza
entre el sí y el no:
dice
lo que callo,
calla
lo que digo,
sueña
lo que olvido.

No es un decir:
es un hacer. (11)

The purposed placement of these verses emphasizes the presence of structure. A distinct line is created that separates the poem into two separate columns. More so in this poem than others, each side of the poem could stand isolated from the other and exist as its own poem. With this point, it is important to remember that one of the major tenets of Structuralism is that everything should be understood within its own context (Barry 38-39). Because of the orientation of the words in this poem, the poem itself takes on three different structures in which to understand the words provided: first, the poem as a whole; second, the poem on the left; and third, the poem on the right. Each column can stand alone within the context of their structure. This structure is akin to the *laberinto* structure created and implemented by none other than Sor Juana de la Cruz. In his book entitled, *Aproximaciones a Sor Juana* (2005), Sandra Lorenzano comments on Sor Juana's poem, "Laberinto," describing it as: "un poema que se puede leer de tres maneras, con endecasílabos, con octosílabos, o con exasílabos" (141). Similarly then, Paz is playing with the idea of perception by simply placing words in a peculiar manner. At the outset of this analysis,

then, Paz's poetics and his philosophy materialize in the structure of "Decir:Hacer." Paz is encouraging multiple interpretations of his poem, and thus acknowledging and highlighting the underlying tone of multiple perceptions that is latent within poetry. The very structure of this poem is a commentary on Paz's poetics and reflects the multi-perceptual nature of his worldview.

The content of this poem is just as telling as the framework that holds it all in. In the second section labeled, 2, Paz uses a string of synesthetic thoughts that create a barrage of sensory interactions. This synesthetic paragraph emphasizes the multi-perception structure of the poem, and highlights both the multiplicity of potential stimuli and the possibility of simultaneous perception. This section of the poem is split in two by a set of verses that have a traditional orientation, and do not follow the staggered arrangement. In the first half of this section, the first three lines demonstrate synesthetic activity:

Idea palpable,

palabra

impalpable: (11)

At first glance, the first verse of this section may not seem synesthetic. However, when considering some of the documented cases of personal perceptual synesthesia, these two cases seem more reasonable. For example, the two most common forms of personal synesthesia are a joining of time units or graphemes, and colors (Cytowic and Eagleman 4-5). The act of identifying a grapheme (i.e., a number or a letter), is a cognitive act of recognition, yet when the visual act of associating a color combines with the cognitive act of recognizing a grapheme, that activity is considered synesthesia. The same logic applies to the time-unit / color association form of synesthesia. Identifying a time unit (i.e. a day of the week) is a cognitive activity and,

separately, seeing a color is a visual activity. These two activities joined together form a synesthetic experience. With in mind, although the cognitive element does not have a place in the hierarchy of senses established by Ullmann, verses like this one that involve the joining of cognitive activities with sensorial actions can be considered synesthetic by virtue of the established examples experienced among actual synesthetes. For the reasons stated above, these examples merit consideration in this conversation.

The verses break up into two similar examples of synesthesia. First, “Idea palpable” (25), and second “palabra / impalpable” (26-27). The first example maps a gustatory sensation (source) onto a cognitive element (target). The second also maps a gustatory modality (source) onto another, but the target in this example is auditory (“palabra”). With the overarching theme of poetics in consideration, Paz references the creative process as these contrasting gustatory elements pit ideas against words. The influence of Structuralism surfaces in these examples as Paz looks for a transcendent manner of communication in poetry and in the formation thereof. It is important to note that, in poetry, Paz not only sought to find transcendence, but wanted to provide blueprints for others to follow. Though Wilson frames the idea of universal transcendence in a utopian vocabulary, the point still resonates when he writes, “All Paz’s writings envisage some *act* of communion beyond words, a faith that poetry changes the poet and the reader, ushering in the poetic society based o love, liberty and desire, the waking dream lived in broad daylight” (5). As noted earlier, one guide to this utopian existence was synesthesia.

A second strand of synesthetic interactions begins in the middle of the poem and continues to the end:

Los ojos hablan,

las palabras miran,
las miradas piensan.
Oír
los pensamientos,
ver
lo que decimos,
tocar
el cuerpo de la idea.
Los ojos
se cierran,
las palabras se abren. (11)

Whereas in the poem, “La rama” (*Libertad* 114), one synesthetic example served to immerse the reader into a world of multiple sensory experience, this string of perceptual confusions magnifies the same effect. Not every verse of this excerpt is synesthetic, but all of them evoke a sensorial response. It is also worth mentioning that the structure of this section also plays into the theme of blending perceptions. Paz funnels the right side of the poem towards the left side so that by the time both sides reach the verse, “el cuerpo de la idea,” the terminating punctuation applies to both sides. This manipulation of structures blends the constructs of both sides, and thus produces the structural equivalent to synesthesia: the joining of perceptions.

The first clearly synesthetic example occurs in the first line of this section, “Los ojos hablan.” A second is similar in nature and appears in the next verse, “las palabras miran.” These first two instances of sensorial interactions only consist of three words each, yet they are complex in nature. Curiously, both examples anthropomorphize an element that is human in

nature. Paz accomplishes this literary acrobatic by assigning elements of human behavior to objects associated with humans that cannot perform the human behavior that has been attributed to them. For example, the eyes of this verse contextually represent the eyes of a person, and yet they are given the ability to do something human that is outside their realm of capability, that is, speaking. Speaking is categorically a human behavior, but it is not the behavior of the eyes. Similarly, words are the product of the human body, and sensorily belong to the auditory classification. However, in this verse, words (a human element) “look,” a different human activity classified as a visual sensory action. Generalized, Paz is writing about mechanical human features performing human activities, yet the arrangement of which human members are doing certain human functions categorize these examples as anthropomorphisms. He is anthropomorphizing physical anthropological parts. Furthermore, because these components reflect sensorial elements, the joining of the senses also categorize these verse as synesthetic interactions. A third point of interest arises when noticing what senses are being blended. Paz remains faithful to his two preferred sensory modalities, and makes use of the higher senses: sight and sound. Though arguing a point of transcendence would be difficult here, it is certainly a point in his poetics and thus may be subtly referenced with every example that blends these two senses.

The second set of synesthetic examples in this excerpt present three back to back verses that all start with a sensorial verb. The bookend examples of this set of three verses are similar to the first example of section 2, and may not immediately strike a reader as an example of synesthesia because they involve the joining of a perceptual action with a cognitive one. Nevertheless, for the same reasons stated above, these two examples are included here. Consider

the following verses: “Oír / los pensamientos” (40-41), “ver / lo que decimos” (42-43), and “tocar / el cuerpo de la idea” (44-45). The first and third examples are similar in that they map a cognitive action (source) onto a sensorial verb (target). The middle example blends the two higher elements mapping an auditory modality (source) onto a visual modality (target). By structurally isolating the infinitive verbs of each example, Paz places tremendous emphasis on sensorial actions. In the context of a poem about his poetics, the idea of multi-sensory perception takes on an important role that culminates in the final verses “Los ojos / se cierran, / las palabras se abren” (46-48). In this poem, Paz implies that poetry, and its creative process, should open the mind to a variety of perceptive possibilities, and thus encourages transcendence by implementing a series of violent synesthetic interactions and emphasizing a variety of sensational possibilities. For Paz, poetry is a philosophy of life, and it happens to be a synesthete.

Conclusion

One aspect of transcendence is a plurality of perception. The poetry of Octavio Paz explores the various aspects of perception and encourages its reader to not only participate in transcendence, but to assimilate its ideas as a permanent worldview. In an effort to accomplish this goal, Paz forces his readers to engage in a multi-sensorial experience by implementing a variety of synesthetic tools that include both structural and semantic tactics. A study of personal perceptual synesthesia emphasizes the reality of this phenomenon and provides yet another anchor for Paz’s philosophy and worldview. The realignment of both the orientation of a poem and basic concepts of perception effectively mimic the essence of the scientific occurrence of synesthesia and demonstrate the poet’s unique ability and conviction: Synesthesia is a gateway to transcendence, and by experiencing multiple sensations at once, a person enters the gate.

CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY IN POETRY

Paz's Poetics

Poetry can be challenging, but the powerful simplicity of Octavio Paz's poetry is both enticing and profound. His straightforward language tangled with subtle double meanings builds a playground of perceptions with which Paz can lead his audience wherever he wills.

Furthermore, when reading his poetry, an overwhelming feeling of importance brews within as his undeniable conviction and hope reveal themselves through imagery, allegory and metaphor. He tends to steer away from outbursts of emotion. Instead, he chooses to write about his observations, philosophies and hopes of what will become of our planet and human race.

The natural realm inspired Paz profoundly, and his poetry shows it. When referencing nature, Paz often promotes the connectivity of all things natural, as he himself feels a deep bond to the world. Paz is quoted as saying that when he spent time with nature, he gained "a feeling of brotherhood for plants and animals. We are all part of the same unity" (Guibert 30). He poetically demonstrates this sense of universal unity in his extensive poem, *Pasado en Claro* (1978), writing, "Animales y cosas se hacen lenguas, / a través de nosotros habla consigo mismo / el universo..." (464-466). Of the many components in the organic world about which Paz writes, he felt a strong connection to trees. Elena Poniatowska, a personal friend and adherent of Paz, took notice of his love of trees and spends a considerable amount of time explaining this in her book, *Octavio Paz: Las palabras del árbol* (1998). Among the many references she makes, she spends 6 pages describing several of his poetic references to trees (150-156), and closes this section with this testimony: "Este amor tuyo por los árboles, su tronco, y su follaje, sus ramas y sus hojas, completan el jardín que llevas dentro. Tu pasión por ellos te hace convertirlos en poesía, despliegas árboles sobre la página blanca y los devuelves a su origen

y les das la vida eterna” (156-157). Even in his personal life, trees are noticeably important. For example, he and his second wife chose to hold their wedding ceremony under a tree (Guibert 29), and he fondly describes this romantic moment as follows: “En la India, en 1964, nos casamos debajo de un gran árbol, un *nim* muy frondoso. Los testigos fueron muchos mirlos, varias ardillas y tres amigos” (Poniatowska 86). Not surprisingly then, of the many ecological icons he employs, the image of a tree resurfaces frequently. Though he often uses this motif in passing, there are several poems in which Paz uses arboreal references as a central part of an important stanza or the entire poem, and in these poems the reader will often find an association between the symbol of a tree and the poetics of Paz.

The poësis of Paz centers on three independent yet intertwined components: the first, a philosophy of perception; the second, a philosophy of definition; and the third, a philosophy of unity. All three elements of Paz’s poësis stand autonomously from, and yet dependent on, one another. One of the cohesive aspects of all three philosophies is synesthesia, or the blending of senses. Paz both infuses his poetics with the idea of synesthesia, and incorporates synesthetic metaphors as a tool throughout his lyrical corpus. In this chapter, three poems that integrate arboreal imagery will help shape the components of Paz’s philosophy, and will also demonstrate his assimilation of synesthesia as a trope and an invitation into a transcendent worldview. The first poem, “Niña,” comes from his book entitled *Libertad bajo palabra*, published in 1960 (Paz 36). The second, “La arboleda,” was first published in 1969 in his book, *Vuelta* (Paz 15). The third is the title poem, “Árbol adentro,” from his collection published in 1990 (Paz 137). These three poems have very little representation, if any, in academia. In part, this is attributed to the fact that two of the poems under consideration here have a direct prose counterpart. The presence of his own prose about a poem dissuades some from offering critical writings about them. The

lack of critical publications concerning these texts could also be attributed to the sheer plentitude of Paz's work. Octavio Paz was extremely prolific, and many of his great contributions are simply overlooked. For this reason, background information and a poetic analysis for each poem will accompany the research that defines the study at hand.

Philosophy of Perception: "Niña"

The poem, "Nombras el árbol, niña" (36), also known simply as "Niña," appears in the section entitled "Bajo tu clara sombra," within the book *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949). A dedication to his only child, Laura Elena, explains the tenderness of the language in the poem, and comfortably allows for its didactic tone. The name of his daughter stands as testimony to Paz's love for trees. The name Laura comes from the same root from which the English language gets its word, laurel -- a tree with deep roots in classical literature. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines *laurel* as a "bay tree," and further comments: "3. The foliage of a bay tree woven into a wreath or crown and worn on the head as an emblem of victory or make of honor in classical times." Another natural feature that presents itself in this poem that also corresponds to Laura Elena is the sun. The name Elena is the Spanish variation of Helen, which is a derivative of the Greek word for sun. Again, in the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, the entry for Helios (or, *ηλιος*), reads: "the sun personified as a god...generally represented as a charioteer driving ...across the sky." Both of his daughter's names are represented in this poem making its dedication even more personal.

In the poem, "Niña," both consonant and assonant rhyme are sprinkled throughout, but no consistent rhyme pattern exists. Take, for example, the first two stanzas:

Nombras el árbol, niña.

Y el árbol crece, lento,

alto deslumbramiento,
hasta volvernos verde la mirada.
Nombras el cielo, niña.
Y las nubes pelean con el viento
y el espacio se vuelve
un transparente campo de batalla. (*Libertad* 36)

In the first stanza, consonant rhyme appears in the second and third verses between the words “lento” and “deslumbramiento.” Curiously, in later publishings of the same poem, Paz edits the second verse twice, seemingly to give preference to meaning rather than rhyme. In a 1960 reprint, Paz adds the words “y pleno” to verse 2, and in a later collective printing of his poetry that he himself edited, Paz changes “lento” to “sin moverse” (*Obra Poetica I* 46). Both of these changes disrupt the original consonant rhyme while placing greater emphasis on meaning.

Within the second stanza, the rhyme is even less constrained, but there are rhyming correlations with the first stanza. Paz continues the “-iento” rhyme with the word “viento,” and an assonant rhyme arises in each stanza’s final verse by the repetition of the vowel *a* in words like “mirada” and “batalla.” Rhyming occasions like these prevail throughout the poem; however, no pattern is established. Though a rhyming scheme may be absent from this poem, a metric awareness is evident.

The overall structure of “Niña” presents its own element of importance. There are a total of four stanzas, all of which begin by addressing a young girl as “niña.” The first three stanzas have four verses each, but the last has seven. By this structural decision, Paz gives prominence to the last stanza in comparison to the others and sets it apart for the reader to identify its import. The pattern of content within the verses of “Niña” also presents another organizational aspect

worthy of attention. Each stanza begins with an emphasis on language and then transitions to the natural realm. This structure sets up a correlative relationship between language and reality -- a major theme of this poem and the poetics of Paz.

In the third verse of "Niña" (*Libertad* 36), Paz describes a mature tree as “alto deslumbramiento.” The concept of tall confusion suggests an association between the foliage of a tree and the human condition of befuddlement. This example is not an isolated occurrence, as the interrelation of these two components becomes a motif that is repeated in all poems under consideration in this chapter. Therefore, its meaning and connotations merit significant attention. Paz finds companionship, or perhaps inspiration for this notion in the poetry of Sor Juana de la Cruz. In her extensive poem *Acusa la hidropesía de mucha ciencia, que teme inútil aun para saber y nociva para vivir*, she makes the same comparison when she produces these verses:

Si culta mano no impide
crecer al árbol copado,
quita la substancia al fruto
la locura de los ramos. (qtd. in Foster 179)

This is significant in light of Paz’s extensive study on her poetry (*Las trampas* 1982). Though it is not difficult to determine who wrote this idea first, it is more difficult to determine when the thought came to Paz. He publishes "Niña" in 1949, and his study on Sor Juana does not get published until 1982. This would seem to lead many to believe that his use of this comparison was original to him, and not directly inspired by Sor Juana. Nevertheless, it also seems highly probable that Paz had come across Sor Juana's poem before publishing his study, and may have encountered these verses before penning his own version of the correlation. The timeline is

difficult to establish, but in either case, the parallel between Paz's and Sor Juana's reference to trees and confusion is worth mentioning.

Just as the confusion theme plays on the concepts of perception, the structure of "Niña" also demonstrates a perceptual emphasis. Syntactical parallelism among the three stanzas fosters a didactic tone as the poetic voice begins with the verb "Nombras." Every stanza reveals a different ecological feature that the "niña" should name, and the stanza develops as it describes that natural attribute in relationship to her and humanity. For example, after the first stanza highlights a tree, and the second, the sky, the third stanza reads as follows:

Nombras el agua, niña.
Y el agua brota, no sé dónde,
brilla en las hojas, habla entre las piedras
y en húmedos vapores nos convierte. (*Libertad* 36)

In this stanza, the tender humility of the poetic voice shows itself in the tenth verse: "no sé dónde." This gentle phrase underlines the opening directive of this poem ("a Laura Elena") and paints the tone of this poem as loving advice from a father. Since the poem is publicly distributed and not personally limited to his daughter, it has a universal message that goes beyond the audience of the poet's daughter, but the paternal love for his child is unmistakable.

The first three stanzas all share the same first line with the exception of the natural component that is named. Each first verse begins with the same verb, ends with the same noun, and is capped by the same punctuation, a period. The period interrupts enjambment and momentarily stops the flow of the stanza, thus separating the act of naming something from the description of that thing. This noteworthy point gains stronger import when coupled with this quote from Paz:

El poeta no es el que nombra las cosas, sino el que disuelve sus nombres, el que descubre que las cosas no tienen nombre y que los nombres con que las llamamos no son suyos. La crítica del paraíso se llama lenguaje: abolición de los nombres propios; la crítica del lenguaje se llama poesía: los nombres se adelgazan hasta la transparencia, la evaporación. En el primer caso, el mundo se vuelve lenguaje; en el segundo el lenguaje se convierte en mundo. Gracias al poeta el mundo se queda sin nombres. Entonces, por un instante, podemos verlo tal cual es -- en *azul adorable*. (*Mono gramático* 96)

With this commentary, Paz draws attention to the act of naming something to emphasize his philosophy of perception. This philosophy of designation stands in contrast to Vicente Huidobro's poetic of *creacionismo* which he establishes and presents in his poem, "Arte poética," (*Espejo de Agua* 1916) with these famous verses:

Por qué cantáis a la rosa, ¡oh Poetas!
Hacédla florecer en el poema:
Sólo para nosotros
Viven todas las cosas bajo el Sol.

El poeta es un pequeño Dios. (*Antología poética Huidobro* 17)

Whereas Huidobro held that the poet creates something new, Paz believes the poet names what already exists. Paz says, "El hombre no inventa al universo. El hombre traduce al universo" (qtd. in Poniatowska 111). It is also worth mentioning that Huidobro has another poem that promotes his *creacionismo* poetics entitled, "Niño" (*Poemas árticos* 1972), which makes Paz's poem, "Niña," seem more like a direct criticism of *creacionismo*. In "Niña," Paz encourages the girl to

poetically name things and by doing so, form a new perception of that thing. This approach to language demonstrates strong associations with the idea of defamiliarisation that comes from the formalist movement. Barry comments of this movement, sometimes referred to as the Russian Formalist Criticism, and describes it within the context of Marxist criticism:

Their ideas included the need for close formal analysis of literature (hence the name), the belief that the language of literature has its own characteristic procedures and effects, and is not just a version of ordinary language...one of the chief effects of literary language is that of making the familiar world appear new to us, as if we were seeing it for the first time, and thus laying it open to reprisal...As with the concept of defamiliarisation, there is a careful distinction here between reality itself and its verbal representation in a work of literature, so that we are steered away from any notion that literature simply mirrors reality in a documentary way. (155)

Though not limited to the tenets of formalism, Paz set out to accomplish many of the same goals as is evidenced by this poem. The connection between the poem and this quote, and the previous one from *Mono gramático*, intensifies when considering the final stanza of "Niña":

No dices nada, niña.
Y la ola amarilla,
la marea del sol,
en su cresta nos alza,
en los cuatro horizontes nos dispersa
y nos devuelve, intactos,
en el centro del día, a ser nosotros" (*Libertad* 36).

The juxtaposition of the final stanza created by its comparatively unique first verse inherently implies its contrast to the first three stanzas. This stanza begins with the child's silence, and unfolds with a description of the sun -- a celestial being that affects the entirety of the planet, including the previously mentioned three natural features. Both the content and structure of this stanza emphasize its distinctiveness, and draw attention to the absence of words in the face of Nature's powerful expressive silence. Commenting on this final stanza, Bravo de la Varga beautifully explains:

La estrofa final nos habla del silencio, pero no como antítesis de la palabra. El silencio también es palabra, infinitas palabras, es la palabra original... Cuando la niña calla no sobreviene el silencio como negación, por el contrario, siente (sentimos) que la rodean muchas cosas, que todo vive en torno a ella, se hace patente que el mundo entero respira y se mueve. (“Octavio Paz”)

Though silence stands in contrast to what is spoken, it does not negate or contradict what is spoken. Instead, it allows the girl to stand in wonderment among terrestrial beauty, and as Paz said, “verlo tal cual es -- en *azul adorable*.” The repeated theme of contrast in this stanza accentuates the general tone of the poem: a change in consciousness. In all interpretations, the poetic voice encourages the child to shift her worldview and perception of the things that surround her by taking a poetic approach to naming or not naming natural elements. Whether by verbalizing a name for each item, or simply by saying nothing, the pedagogic realignment of perception is the core issue of this poem, and perfectly reflects one aspect of Paz’s poetics: a philosophy of perception that encourages humanity to see things differently. Paz extends his patriarchal role past the audience of *la niña*, and encourages his readers to take on a synesthetic worldview. In Paz's estimation, perception was never intended to be singular, and should

embrace a variety of views, or, at the very least, a revitalized view of one's surroundings. In Paz's own words: "Cada lector es otro poeta; cada poema, otro poema" (*Corrientes alternas* 71).

The world and its constituents may not change, but one can always change his or her perception.

Philosophy of Definition: "La arboleda"

The poem, "La arboleda," appears in Paz's collection named *Vuelta* (1969-75) (15).

Again Paz employs the *silva* form to another botanical poem which is even more appropriate here as this poem more constantly makes use of tree imagery in the form of a grove. This poem also has a counterpart in the eighteenth chapter of *Mono gramático* (19). The poem in *Mono gramático* is a poem written in prose, a literary creation that Paz later names "proema" (*Árbol adentro* 2). The chapter of *Mono gramático* coincides with both the content and theme of the poem "La arboleda," and both play a role in the interpretation of the other. Though not specifically mentioned, this shared identity leads one to believe that there was a single event that functions as the source of inspiration for these two compositions and connects them even at a conceptual level.

The form of "La arboleda" follows the same structure seen in Paz's poem, "Decir:Hacer," where some verses are purposefully positioned in opposing orientations like footsteps: one verse on the right and the next on the left with some grouping of verses on either side. This style of formatting occurs in other Paz poems like the individually published extensive poem, *Blanco* (1967), and another lengthy poem entitled, "Nocturno de San Ildefonso" (*Vuelta* 69). The first four verses of "La arboleda" demonstrate this structure:

Enorme y sólida
pero oscilante,
golpeada por el viento

pero encadenada... (*Vuelta* 15)

Thus begins the poem with an oscillating structure that creates a back-and-forth motion. As opposing characteristics stand against each other (emphasized by the conjunction “pero”), the motion of the poem is enhanced. The movement of the descriptions and the structure itself create the sense of swaying that one would experience while standing in a grove while the breeze blows through the trees. All of these factors play into the verbal experience that Paz is creating and drive home the overall point of these opening verses: the trees are alive with movement. Even with the structure of this poem, Paz begins to define its arboreal symbols, and blend perceptions.

Just under the title line, a simple dedication to Pere Gimferrer leads the reader to look out for some element within the poem that the Spanish poet and critic would have noted and appreciated. Gimferrer was one of the nine original *Novísimos* named by J.M. Castellet in his anthology, *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles* (1970). As evidenced by the collection of letters to Pere Gimferrer published shortly after Paz’s death (*Memorias y palabras: cartas a Pere Gimferrer, 1967-1997* 1999), Paz had an intimate friendship with Gimferrer and confided in him in his later years. Gimferrer thought highly of Paz and edited a collection of monographs titled after his Mexican colleague (1982) in which he referred to Paz’s work as “la alta palabra poética” (10). He also won the Premio de Poesía y Ensayo Octavio Paz in 2007 (Tejeda). A defining characteristic of Gimferrer’s poetry is the incorporation and utilization of metapoetry, and it is exactly this characteristic that connects this particular poem, “La arboleda,” to Pere Gimferrer. As the word suggests, metapoetry is “poetry about poetry, especially self-conscious poems that pun on objects or items associated with writing or creating poetry” (*Literary Terms*). Curiously, the image of leaves surfaces frequently as one of the favorite puns from Enlightenment and Romantic poetry (*Literary Terms*). Though a distinctive pun does not appear

in this arboreal poem, other metapoetic properties materialize throughout as the trees take on a poetic double meaning.

“La arboleda” begins with a violent battle between some trees of a grove, and a fire (*Mono gramático* 95). The trees protest, but soon become silent as the animalistic fire consumes them: “el animal iracundo y rápido” (17). As dusk approaches, the poetic voice shifts its attention from the fire in the grove, hallmarked by a plume of smoke and the burnt remains of trees, to the setting sun which is described as a fire covering the entire arboleda, raging in the West and leaving complete darkness in the Southeast (27-33). Night creeps in closer and closer and begins to cover the commonplace items on the porch such as a trash can and a planter with no plant until they disappear into the night: “ya no son” (50). Paz previously played with the theme of consuming darkness as a change of identity in his earlier collection, *Ladera este* (1962-1968). In a short poem entitled, “Un anochecer,” Paz ends the poem with these stanzas:

Para recibir la noche
se caminan las arboledas
en callados surtidores.

Cae un pájaro, la yerba
Ensombrece, los confines
Se borran, la cal es negra,
El mundo es menos creíble. (*Obra poética I* 379)

This precursor to “La arboleda” shows that by the time Paz publishes “La arboleda” (1969-1975), he has already been contemplating this theme for several years. The character changing word, “borrar,” is indicative of the deconstructionism that Paz elaborates in “La arboleda.” For

example, in “La arboleda” as darkness covers everything, Paz writes, “asi perfecciona su realidad” (47), and as the poem ends, the final phrase reads, “Poco a poco se petrifican los nombres.” The overall effect of these two phrases creates a portrait of linguistic deconstructionism and provides insight into how Paz interprets the definition of material objects. All of these verses help solidify Paz’s philosophy of definition, but a more comprehensive understanding becomes more clear when the other components are considered.

There are two more verses that stand out as particularly relevant and foundational to the study of this poem: “Motín de arboles, / oleaje de sonidos verdinegros” (“La arboleda” 7-8). In the first of these two verses, the already established bewilderment motif surfaces again. However, this example in “La arboleda” implies a much more aggressive tone. The entry for “motín” in *Real Academia Española* reads: “(Del fr. *mutin*, insumiso, rebelde). Movimiento desordenado de una muchedumbre, por lo común contra la autoridad constituida.” This choice of vocabulary produces an image of violence and desperation. It is an image of mass confusion. Here again, a correlation between the foliage of a tree and confusion emerges, but in this image the confusion is more agitated. It is an act of rebellion. It is a chaotic raging against a communal enemy. It is an arboreal riot. So then, a logical question arises: against what do the trees revolt? Naturally, they are rebelling against the destructive fire, but a deeper sentiment surfaces when one considers the cosmological idea of existence: the trees unite together to violently protest against a redefinition.

Nestled within the eight verse of this poem (quoted above), the reader finds a synesthetic metaphor. Though this chapter is not dedicated to the demonstration of synesthetic occurrences, this example demands attention. As noted in chapter 2, the components of a synesthetic metaphor include the source modality and the target modality. In this example, the source modality is

auditory (“sonidos”) and its target is visual (“verdinegros”). This instance of synesthesia follows the expected pattern of mapping higher senses onto lower senses, and is typical of Paz, who tends to use this formula for synesthesia (auditory to visual) most frequently. Though the mapping direction may be standard, the color choice in this example is not, and therefore the chromatic feature in this synesthetic metaphor demands more emphasis.

Two important quotes from *Mono Gramático* are pivotal here. In the words of Pere Gimferrer, “*El mono gramático* es un poema filosófico,” and as such, it provides valuable insight into the philosophy of “La arboleda” (42). The first quote is a fragment of the quote mentioned earlier, and is essential to the interpretation of this poem. Paz writes, “La crítica del paraíso se llama lenguaje: abolición de los nombres propios; la crítica del lenguaje se llama poesía: los nombres se adelgazan hasta la transparencia, la evaporación” (*Mono gramático* 96) Language seeks to define the elements of this world and gives them a name. To Paz, those names are artificial and build a deterrent between humanity and the true nature of the entity being named. Take for example another poem that more directly shows Paz’s discontentment with the names provided by everyday language:

Una sonaja de semillas secas
las letras rotas de los nombres:
hemos quebrantado a los nombres,
hemos dispersado a los nombres,
hemos deshonorado a los nombres. (*Pasado en claro* 42)

One may call a tree a tree, but that is only a name humanity has given this botanical giant in an attempt to understand and catalog it for everyday use, but this name does not fully define the tree's being. This sentiment mirrors that of structuralism and its previously mentioned successor,

deconstructionism. Both movements emphasize the meaning of words and play with the idea of definition (Barry 38-63). For Paz, “La arboleda es intraducible: es ella y sólo ella. No se parece a las otras cosas ni a las otras arboledas; tampoco se parece a ella misma: cada instante es otra” (*Mono gramático* 95). The grove's existence transcends its name. It is not defined by the name humankind has given it, but rather it defines itself every moment of its existence. Furthermore, in Paz's philosophy of definition, poetry is the critique of language (“la crítica del lenguaje”), and deteriorates the barriers created between the natural realm as it really is, and the alternate reality created through language. It is poetry that dissolves the pseudonyms of the universe and reunites humanity to its surroundings.

Another quote from the Eighteenth Chapter of *Mono Gramático* runs parallel to the previous, but is more cosmological in nature as it speaks of destruction, creation and existence. Towards the end of this chapter, Paz reflects further on the tree-language connection:

Por la escritura abolimos las cosas, las convertimos en sentido: por la nombre y estos árboles no son signos: son árboles. Son reales y son ilegibles...No dicen, no significan: están allí, nada más están. Yo los puedo derribar, quemar, cortar... - pero estos árboles, estos que señalo y que están más allá, siempre más allá, de mis signos y de mis palabras, intocables inalcanzables impenetrables, son lo que son y ningún nombre, ninguna combinación de signos los dice. Y son irrepetibles: nunca volverán a ser lo que ahora mismo son (*Mono gramático* 97-98).

In Paz's philosophy, language can destroy an object by virtue of replacement. In one's mind, when a person thinks of a word that represents an object, to that person, the object no longer exists except by the representation of that word. In turn, if poetry is to language what language is to reality, then poetry is the abolition of language. It is important to note here that

Paz does not think of language negatively, but rather, as something that has gotten out of hand and become dangerous (*Mono gramático* 25-26), but can be redeemed, namely, through poetry. Paz identifies his goal as follows: “hacer del lenguaje una transparencia” (*Mono gramático* 97). This idea unlocks the substance of this poem, unveils the metapoetic characteristics thereof, and returns our attention to the original topic: the color blend of black and green.

Returning to verse eight of “La arboleda,” the color choice represents a splicing of important imagery, and provides a foreshadowing glimpse into the rest of the poem. There is a two fold reference in each of the colors portrayed in the chromatic adjective “verdinegro.” First, “verdi-,” which corresponds to “verde,” immediately represents the trees of the arboleda. However, the trope does not stop here as the tree image in this poem also represents language. This is not the only instance in which Paz analogizes language and trees. In the poem, “Piel / Sonido del mundo” Paz describes an “árbol semántico” (*Vuelta* 51), and another example of this imagery surfaces in the poem *Pasado en claro* (133-144). The second color, “negro,” is very popular in his poetry. Throughout Paz’s body of work, and especially in this collection of poems (*Vuelta*), Paz often uses the color, black (“negro”), in the context of writing poetry and uses it to refer to ink on paper. For example, in the same poem referenced above “Piel del mundo, Sonido del mundo” which is about poetics and the physical act of writing poetry, Paz uses such phrases such as “gruesas gotas negras” (51), “los hachazos del negro” (52) and more subtle references such as the opening verse “Negro sobre blanco.” In the context of this poem, all of these phrases refer to ink in one way or another. In some poems, if understood as metonymy, black as ink is then equal to poetry, and this is the case for the use of black in “La arboleda.”

Combining all three components of the synesthetic metaphor, the “sonidos verdinegros” combination unveils an image that corresponds with the two quotes presented earlier from *Mono*

Gramático. In their battle against the fire, the trees of the arboleda produce a verdinegro sound - the sound of their leaves burning: some still green, some charred black. If green represents the tree which in turn represents language, then the black left by the fire represents the destructive element that poetry has on language. This synesthetic example unlocks the metapoetic aspect of this poem: this is a poem about the relationship between language and poetry -- one as natural as a tree in the forest. Two sections of this poem further support this idea. First, verses 27-33 read as follows:

En la región central
gruesas gotas de tinta
esparcidas
sobre un papel que el poniente inflama
negro casi enteramente allá
en el extremo sudeste
donde se derrumba el horizonte. (*Vuelta* 15)

The poetic voice transitions from the localized fire within the grove and applies the same consequential aspect of the fire onto the setting of the sun as the west wind blows the flame, leaving the southeast in complete darkness. The “gruesas gotas de tinta” represent both the charred remains of trees burnt by the actual fire, and the trees that are covered with darkness from the setting sun (*Mono gramático* 95-96). The only thing the fire and the sunset have in common is the aftermath that results in darkness, one that corresponds to poetry. The telling choice of imagery (“gotas de tinta...sobre un papel”) in these verses bring cohesion to the example of synesthesia in verse eight, and the final verses of this poem (42-56):

Encienden luces en las casas.

El cielo se acumula en la ventana.

El patio,

encerrado en sus cuatro muros,

se aísla más y más.

Así perfecciona su realidad.

El bote de basura,

la maceta sin planta,

ya no son,

sobre el opaco cemento,

sino sacos de sombras.

Sobre sí mismo

el espacio

se cierra.

Poco a poco se petrifican los nombres. (*Vuelta 15*)

The corresponding poem in prose from *Mono Gramático* sheds a great deal of light onto the comprehension of these final verses. As dusk turns to twilight, Paz describes the moment:

...instante de incandescencia de la materia antes de despeñarse en su ceguera - en su realidad. Veo, oigo, toco la paulatina petrificación del lenguaje que ya no significa que sólo dice: <<mesa>>, <<bote de basura>>, sin decirlos realmente, mientras la mesa y el bote desaparecen en el patio completamente a oscuras...La noche me salva. No podemos ver sin peligro ahí frente a nosotros, el vacío de los nombres, la falta de medida del mundo, su mudez esencial. Y a medida que la noche se acumula en mi ventana, yo siento que no soy de aquí, sino de allá, de ese

mundo que acaba de borrarse y aguarda la resurrección del alba. De allá vengo, de allá venimos todos y allá hemos de volver. Fascinación por el otro lado, seducción por la vertiente no humana del universo: perder el nombre, perder la medida. Cada individuo, cada cosa, cada instante: una realidad única, incomparable, inconmensurable. Volver al mundo de los nombres propios (99-100).

There are several points of connection between the poem, “La arboleda” and this section of *Mono Gramático*. Nightfall allows objects to perfect their reality, and darkness is an agent of liberation and salvation where proper names dissolve, and are not blurred by everyday language. The blackness corrects the definition of things, returning them to a primordial existence. Paz’s philosophy of definition is a search for unity between language and reality, not to name things as we dictate, but to define them as they are -- beyond everyday language and yet paradoxically through pure poetic language. In Paz’s realm, the only thing that could accomplish this goal is poetry. It is the agent of darkness that liberates and saves.

For Paz, poetry is more than words on a page. In his own words, from his often-anthologized poem, “Nocturno de San Ildefonso,” Paz insists:

La poesía no es la verdad:
es la resurrección de las presencias,
la historia
transfigurada en la verdad del tiempo no fechado. (*Vuelta* 79)

Poetry is the salvation of the present moment. In the words of Jason Wilson, Paz believes poetry “was an event, a faith that borders on the religious experience. Poetry involves salvation and grants meaning” (44). Paz seeks freedom from the harsh realities of the world, and he finds it in poetry (Wilson 45). Paz’s book, *Libertad bajo palabra*, is telling of his worldview. Summarized

concisely, Wilson comments on this collection. For him, the collection “expresses a dual action: first, the word liberates language; second, language in the poem liberates the reader” (45). However, concerning liberty, Wilson also explains: “Liberty is an elusive possibility given epiphanic reality through the poem. Here also is the seed of utopian poetics; the momentary glimpse of this liberty is projected into a society living this liberty as a daily experience” (46). For Wilson and many critics from his era, liberty needs a location in which to exist. This locative necessity exists strongly in surrealism in the form of utopianism.

The idea of an Edenic space that Paz shares with the surrealists was described by Sucre as a space “to practice poetry, to have poetry govern man’s experience in this world, which would not be possible if the world itself does not recover its original plentitude, i.e., its unity...Vivacity in Paz would be this extreme point of universal reconciliation” (8). This universal coexistence is the foundation for the utopia of Paz’s poetry. In an essay concerning “The universalism of Octavio Paz,” Gullón observes, “the function of poetry becomes a fundamental restoration of a community as a communion, a restoration of the participation in a relationship that originates in recognition” (83). Gullón later describes the central theme of *A la orilla del mundo* (1942) as “a world that for Paz is total reality, the universe in its diverseness and complexity with the underground currents which nurture that reality” (84). The space of Paz’s utopia is complex in that it bears the characteristics of a physical world through Paz’s vision of his reality presently in real time. Because of this complexity, the question of location becomes problematic. As noted in the biographical chapter, a utopia that does not occupy a specified locale raises questions within the modern studies of literary space. Instead, here again the golden thread of transcendence is less difficult to reconcile and still fits comfortably within the texts that may otherwise have been perceived through the lens of utopia.

Philosophy of Unity: "Árbol adentro"

The poem, "El árbol adentro" (137), is part of the collection of poems that bears the same name and was published in 1990. Almost all of the verses of this poem have seven syllables, with one verse that could be seen as a "broken foot," containing roughly half of the syllables used in the other verses. There is no consistent rhyme, but the lack of a pattern here could emphasize the diversity within humanity. The concise content of this poem reflects a strategy from a matured Paz in which he presents expansive ideas that grow in concentric circles to include an ever-broadening scope. Even within this chapter, three circles of inclusion surface. The first circle is very intimate in that the poem, "Niña," is dedicated to his daughter. The second circle expands as the dedication of "La arboleda" identifies a trusted friend, poet and critic. The third poem under consideration in this section does not begin with a formal dedication, but instead suggests a universal application - the largest possible audience. Similarly, Paz builds these concentric circles within the structure of a single poem.

In an analysis of the poetic voices of this poem (both the first and second persons of the poem are represented by possessive pronouns) the core element in "Árbol adentro" describes a romantic relationship between lovers that creates a small circle of two people. The relatively short poem could be understood as nothing more than the amorous relationship within this small confine. However, further research into the images of this study reveals a larger circle. As the poem develops, the relationships expand to include the realms of religions and philosophies, and ultimately include the entirety of humanity. In the context of the arboreal symbol and its significance through a spectrum of religious philosophies, Vicente Cervera Salinas concludes:

Ninguna imagen más afortunada para representar esta escala de direcciones
contrarias que la proporcionada por el árbol...Árbol como vida y como unificación

material de los opuestos; árbol como posibilidad no condenada de una «ciencia» para el hombre; árbol como crecimiento en el hombre hacia dentro. (246)

The universal identity of a tree prevails throughout many religious cultures, but the growing circumference of this poem is also unlocked by an insightful understanding of the first two verses: "Creció en mi frente un árbol, / Creció hacia dentro" ("Árbol adentro" 1-2).

The whole of Salinas's article, "El árbol ejemplifical de Octavio Paz," rests on an interpretation of the above two verses as an allusion to an inverted tree. His research indicates that this ancient symbol is central to many cultures and religions and thus widens the sphere of this poem immensely. If these verses do imply a greater image, then the tree may represent the idea of unity through diversity. Different cultures and religions use an inverted tree in a variety of ways within their own cultures. Nevertheless, they still use the same icon of an inverted tree, making the tree a point of unification. In the verses of this poem, Cervera Salinas sees a plea for universal unity, and as noted above, that is well within the philosophical leanings of Paz. His prosaic book entitled *Conjunciones y disyunciones* (1969) specifically hones in on religious unity and as Gullón states, the book "concludes by drawing a parallel between Christian and Oriental religions" (75). Cervera Salinas' article is very convincing and well researched; however, it is difficult to see the image of an inverted tree in this poem because of the orientation presented in verse 5 ("sus confusos follajes pensamientos"). Just as he has done in the previous poems, "Niña" and "La arboleda," Paz links the idea of confusion to human thoughts. Regionally then, a strong association is made between the foliage of a tree and the head of a man. It is well within the realm of possibility that this icon is present in this poem, but if the tree were intended to be inverted, how should the orientation of the tree within the body be understood in light of the marriage of thoughts (mind) to foliage (top of tree) in this verse? Perhaps the ancient view of

one's mind corresponding to the heart could answer part of this dilemma, but because of verse 5, it seems the tree has more reason to be seen in an upright posture than an inverted one.

Nevertheless, the connotative force of the image that Cervera Salinas sees in this poem is still present within the verses of "Árbol adentro," and thus expands the circumference of this poem.

In verse six, a singular synesthetic idea ignites a series of passionate verses with these words: "tus miradas lo encienden." The blending of senses is subtle here, but notice that a tactile sensation of heat is mapped onto the perceptive modality of sight. With a single verse, Paz unites the two sensorial focal points of this poem: sensual contact and universal perception. Again, as seen in "Palma del viajero," Paz leads his reader to perceptual transcendence by way of eroticism. Erotic transcendence roots itself in synesthetic activity as the senses unite to create a fleeting euphoria. In *La llama doble* (1993), Paz accentuates the connection between synesthesia and the erotic: "El abrazo carnal es el apogeo del cuerpo y la pérdida de la identidad: dispersión de las formas en mil sensaciones y visiones, caída en una substancia oceánica, evaporación de la esencia" (205). Paz defines erotic love with synesthesia, and transcendence is its natural product.

Within the successive chain of erotic ideas beginning in verse six, another correlation from a previously analyzed poem is the use of black as a reference to poetry in verse seven:

Tus miradas lo encienden
y sus frutos de sombras
son naranjas de sangre,
son granadas de lumbre. (*Árbol adentro* 137)

The fruit of darkness (poetry) are life-giving fruits ("naranjas de sangre" 8) like pomegranates of light ("granadas de lumbre" 9) illuminating perception and the senses. This last phrase contains explosive undertones as the word "granadas" has a double meaning in Spanish - the forbidden

fruit associated with lasciviousness, or the explosive weapon. The Spanish language allows both possibilities and here they coexist, thus imbuing poetry with an evangelistic capacity, exploding light to the world, and infinite knowledge as temptation. In Paz's poetry, the idea of *light* possesses a powerful connotation that further anchors the theme of unity in this poem. According to Wilson, Paz's poetics utilizes *light* as its central symbol for unity (76). Wilson explains: "Light is an image of Eden and infinity; it inaugurates 'un reinado dichoso'...in its formless perfection" (77). Therefore, the phrasing in verse 9 illuminates Paz's poetic philosophy of unity. The explosive pomegranates of light transcend this physical plain and metaphorically cover the broadest of audiences, uniting them by this symbol of light. In a matter of three lines, Paz builds a pyramid of images that begins with a synesthetic reference that leads to eroticism, poetry, and ultimately, universality.

The sexual tones of these verses are deliberate as Paz "did hold that erotic love was regenerative" (Wilson 24), and he was known to be "an erotic poet" (Gullón 76). However, as is common with Paz's erotic poetry, these graphic images are part of a larger metaphor. In this poem, the tree of humanity is seduced and saved by poetry, and ultimately produces its own speech ("el árbol habla"). It is as if the seducer plays not only the role of lover, but also that of muse, and inspires creative composition. According to Paz, humanity searches for a poetic philosophy: "buscará una Poética" (*Corrientes alternas* 125). So when poetry finds humanity, it not only gives pleasure, but awakens the new world view for which humanity was looking. Furthermore, not only does the poem include the whole of humanity as audience, but we also have a direct individual invitation from the poetic voice to partake in this climactic ecstasy.

The poetic voice of this poem accepts his humanity, is saved by poetry and produces his own. He finishes the poem with these alluring verses: "el árbol habla. / Acércate, ¿lo oyes?"

("Árbol adentro" 13-14). From this direct invitation, we gain a new level of inclusion that the speaker extends to the reader, thus creating an emphatic appeal to participate in the experience. He wants to share with others. He not only wants to unify language and poetry, but for the world to unite through the poetic experience. Moreover, he is not just wanting his audience to enjoy the realm of poetry with him; rather, he wants to generate the potential for transcendence. To accomplish this, Paz directs his readers to the sense modalities of visual perception and tactile eroticism, and joining the two creates a perceptual transcendence.

Conclusion

Three philosophical ideas have surfaced from these three arboreal poems of Paz. First, the philosophy of perception as seen in "La niña." The comparison between the thoughts of a person (and even humanity as a whole) with the foliage of a tree demonstrates this philosophy well. The complex limb structures and plethora of leaves on a tree are a fitting illustration for the thoughts we have daily or within a lifetime. As are our thoughts, the beautiful confusion of leaves can be overwhelming, yet Paz encourages the girl (and indirectly, his audience) to embrace the variety of perceptions and see the world synesthetically. Second, a philosophy of definition develops in the metapoetic poem, "La arboleda," as a metonymic, chromatic metaphor shows poetry to be a destructive yet saving hero, returning things to their proper names. Poetry is also capable of giving and sustaining life just like the lover from "Árbol adentro." The relationship between speaker and reader is as intimate as these lover's union, and lends itself to the comfortable direct invitation of "Árbol adentro." Paz's invitation draws his readers, not just into his poetry, but into the realm of a poetic worldview, which in turn defines his philosophy of unity, a unity that can only be attained through perceptual transcendence.

CONCLUSION

Paz held that one's ability to feel defines, haunts and unites him or her to the rest of humanity. In the concluding chapter of his book, *La llama doble*, he expresses this sentiment with these poetic words: "Los sentidos nos comunican con el mundo y, simultáneamente, nos encierran en nosotros mismos: las sensaciones son subjetivas e indecibles" (203-204). In the second half of the twentieth century, humanity fell to the very thing that inspired the modernist rebellion, and gradually became more and more plastic, and less and less human. Paz witnesses this transformation, and sees a redemptive hope in poetry. To combat the stagnation of human interaction and the cold metallic grip of technology, Paz's poetry emphasizes the primitive elements of our existence and attempts to waken the senses by reminding humanity of the glorious possibilities that surround humankind in his or her environment. From the initial introduction of a singular synesthetic experience, to the baptism of sensations that lead to sensorial and perceptual transcendence, Paz wants his reader to be ever mindful of those textile, gustatory, olfactory, auditory and ocular machinations that connect him or her to this world and to others. Thus, the major components of his poetic efforts include a host of perceptive tools. These tools include the bio-psychological phenomenon of synesthesia, a structural/deconstructive poetic, and the golden thread of erotic transcendence.

In the first chapter of this project, the life of Octavio Paz and literary criticisms about his *oeuvre* provide a foundation for the present analysis of his work. Quotes from personal interviews, friends and academics all help paint a picture of who Paz was and what things were important to him. The second chapter dove into a study of synesthesia that provided both scientific and literary insight into the lyrical trope that Paz employs in several different poems. This preliminary half of the chapter sets the stage for a more informed analysis of synesthesia in

specific poems of Octavio Paz, namely, “Palma del viajero” from his illustrative collection, *Topoemas* (1971), “La Rama” from *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), and ultimately “Decir:Hacer” from his book, *Árbol adentro* (1987). The first of these poems, “Palma del viajero” demonstrates the essence of synesthesia as it blurs the lines of perception and unexpectedly bridges the emotions and regenerative sensations of eroticism and the tranquility and rejuvenation of rest under a tree. “La Rama” draws in the Structuralist / Deconstructionist themes of definition and meaning while providing a synesthetic example that achieves the same goal of redefining perception. The theme of Structuralism and Deconstructionism continues into the poem, “Decir:Hacer” as a barrage of synesthetic pairings blend a variety of senses forcing the reader to reconsider how they perceive the world. All three poems, then, contribute to the overall goal of encouraging the reader of Paz’s poetry to reach a higher level of perception -- a transcendent worldview that embodies the principles of synesthesia.

The final chapter of this thesis highlights three aspects of Paz’s poetics: a philosophy of perception, a philosophy of definition, and a philosophy of unity. All three of these components are explained within the framework of a poem. Paz’s philosophy of perception is explained in an analysis of the poem, “Nombres el árbol, niña,” from his early collection, *Libertad bajo palabra*. A philosophy of definition emerges through the analysis of Paz’s poem, “La arboleda,” from his book, *Vuelta*, and finally his philosophy of unity is demonstrated in the poem, “Árbol adentro” from his book that bears the same name. All three of these components of Paz’s poetics helps identify his use of synesthesia as an invitation to a transcendent worldview over the confines of everyday language, perception, and definition. Paz believes everyone can experience perceptual and sensorial transcendence through poetry, and he uses synesthetic activity to encourage his reader to adapt to a multiplicity of perceptive possibilities and senses. It is then up to the reader

to either choose freedom from mundane language and its limitations, or embrace the synesthetic lifestyle of poetry.

The research undertaken in this thesis fills a void in Paz studies that has overlooked the use of synesthesia throughout his body of work. In every collection (even those not addressed here), Paz accentuates the senses and manipulates perception in some way or another, and yet there are only a few academic projects that make an effort to document, review and create theories about this prevalent literary trope. Therefore, this work is not only necessary, but it opens conversation about an apropos topic. With the acceleration of technology and growing dependence on social networking websites, sensorial human interaction has become limited. Paz's poetry combats the slow erosion of the human element within modern society by reminding his readers of the primal features of human existence, namely, the senses. This study of synesthesia in a body of work like Paz's only draws more attention to the already emphasized and much needed point. Furthermore, the purposed limitations of this project also open the doors for future research.

The majority of Paz's literary achievements could be appropriate for synesthetic studies. Several of his prose works include the essence of synesthesia and a few even give specific examples. In this present work, Octavio Paz's prose has been largely left untouched, and only sparingly referenced. Therefore there are copious amounts of material within his collection of prose that could be studied further. One such prose composition with great sensorial prospect is his short story, "El ramo azul," originally published in *Arenas Movedizas* (1949). The deceptive shift of perception and its play on perceptive elements could be of great importance to synesthetic literary studies. Several of his poems could also qualify for a position in a study of synesthesia, but the extensive poem, *Pasado en claro* (1974) deserves special attention as it

includes elements of altered perception, specific examples of synesthesia and poetically presents his poetics. A third publication that identifies with the essence of synesthesia is the collaborative work he created with his wife entitled, *Figuras y figuraciones* (1999). Published shortly after his death, this collection of poems and artistic representations highlights the theme of multiple perceptions by its very nature, and belongs in a discussion about Paz's synesthetic works. With further studies of Paz's opus, his profound compendium once again finds a voice within the academic community and may overcome the temporary lull that currently plagues his literature. So much of his poetry remains untouched, and deserves further erudite consideration.

Octavio Paz's work is timeless in that, as noted earlier, the content of his poetry will always apply directly to contemporary cultural struggles. His principles reach back to primitive, primal truths, so as long as humanity strives to reach forward, it will need a voice of reason to connect us to our past. Every poet is unique in his or her contribution, but the work of Octavio Paz is truly a global treasure. It is no surprise then that so many wait in eager anticipation for the release of his unpublished works. In a 2001 article in the *Washington Post*, Mary Jordan reports about the tension between Octavio Paz's widowed wife, Marie José, and the president of the Paz Foundation, Guillermo Sheridan, who was appointed president of the foundation by Paz himself. The main source of tension between the two is rooted in the unpublished works of Paz. Sheridan wishes to have them at the foundation for editing and publication, but Marie José, the sole heir of his treasured works, cannot bring herself to let them go (Jordan). The sudden release of these works also could lead to a resurgence of academic attention that may even spread retrospectively to his entire body of work.

The richly textured *oeuvre* of Octavio Paz will always provide academic fodder for discussions and commentary. Future academic trends may open even more doors for

study, new perspectives will be explored, and old topics rekindled. Such was the case with this academic endeavor. The transcendent synesthetic poetry of Octavio Paz offers a three-fold directive and presentation as the overarching theme of transcendence manifests through synesthesia within the redemptive nature of poetry. Each facet demonstrates its own perspective of Paz's poetics, and together they form the trinity of Paz's faith. His poetry may not be able to heal physical ailments or extend our lives, but in the true spirit of formalism, Paz makes the world feel new again, and his poetry helps his reader remember all the ways in which to appreciate the human senses.

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