

‘Caballero solo’: Eliot, Lawrence ... Porter?

The sexual act between modern people is merely ugly and degrading.

D. H. Lawrence

‘Caballero solo’

Los jóvenes homosexuales y las muchachas amorosas,
 y las largas viudas que sufren el delirante insomnio,
 y las jóvenes señoras preñadas hace treinta horas,
 y los roncadores que cruzan mi jardín en tinieblas,
 como un collar de palpitantes ostras sexuales 5
 rodean mi residencia solitaria,
 como enemigos establecidos contra mi alma,
 como conspiradores en traje de dormitorio
 que cambiaran largos besos espesos por consigna.

El radiante verano conduce a los enamorados 10
 en uniformes regimientos melancólicos,
 hechos de gordas y flacas y alegres y tristes parejas:
 bajo los elegantes cocoteros, junto al océano y la luna
 hay una continua vida de pantalones y polleras,
 un rumor de medias de seda acariciadas, 15
 y senos femeninos que brillan como ojos.

El pequeño empleado, después de mucho,
 después del tedio seminal, y las novelas leídas de noche, en cama,
 ha definitivamente seducido a su vecina,
 y la lleva a los miserables cinematógrafos 20

donde los héroes son potros o príncipes apasionados,
 y acaricia sus piernas llenas de dulce vello
 con sus ardientes y húmedas manos que huelen a cigarillo.

Los atardeceres del seductor y las noches de los esposos
 se unen como dos sábanas sepultándome, 25
 y las horas después del almuerzo en que los jóvenes estudiantes,
 y las jóvenes estudiantes, y los sacerdotes se masturban,
 y los animales fornican directamente,
 y las abejas huelen a sangre, y las moscas zumban coléricas,
 y los primos juegan extrañamente con sus primas, 30
 y los médicos miran con furia al marido de la joven paciente,
 y las horas de la mañana en que el profesor, como por descuido,
 cumple con su deber conyugal, y desayuna,
 y, más aún, los adúlteros, que se aman con verdadero amor
 sobre lechos altos y largos como embarcaciones: 35
 seguramente, eternamente me rodea
 este gran bosque respiratorio y enredado
 con grandes flores como bocas y dentaduras
 y negras raíces en forma de uñas y zapatos.

It is a long established critical commonplace that at the heart of ‘Caballero solo’ (ll.17-23, the precise midpoint of the poem), from the first volume of *Residencia en la tierra*, Neruda glosses a famous sequence from Eliot’s *The Wasteland*:

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
 A small house agent’s clerk, with one bold stare,

One of the low on whom assurance sits
 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
 Endeavours to engage her in caresses
 Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
 Exploring hands encounter no defence;
 His vanity requires no response,
 And makes a welcome of indifference.¹

The parallels seem indisputable, at least when it comes to the essentials of the scene, and it is not my intention here to deny them. Nevertheless, Neruda's text departs from and amplifies Eliot's considerably, and both the re-working itself, as well as the specific differences and additions, invite a number of questions which critics have thus far failed to address. Why, for example, should Neruda have elected to make this episode the centrepiece of 'Caballero solo', and what is its precise function within the context of the poem as a whole? Why should he have included a reference to 'novelas leídas de noche'? Why, moreover, should he have relocated the sordid encounter to a dingy cinema, and taken the trouble to specify that

¹ *The Waste Land in The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 2 vols., ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), I, 53-77 (63-64). For 'Caballero solo', see Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra*, ed. Hernán Loyola (Madrid: Cátedra, 2000), 165-66. Octavio Paz was one of the first to note the borrowing ('Interview: Octavio Paz', in *Diacritics*, 2:3 [Autumn, 1972], 35-40 [36]), and Alfredo Lozada refers to it in his *El monismo agónico de Pablo Neruda. Estructura, significando y filiación de 'Residencia en la tierra'* (Mexico: B. Costa-Amic Editor, 1971), 205. The most detailed commentary is provided by Tom Boll in his *Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot: Modern Poetry and the Translation of Influence* (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), 93-94.

the films showing there featured ‘potros o príncipes enamorados’? Are these details merely decorative?²

In fact, an explanation for these various divergences and modifications, as well as the centrality of the passage, is to be found not in Eliot’s work but rather in that of his contemporary, D. H. Lawrence, whom Neruda read avidly when he was composing the poem in Ceylon, between late 1929 and mid-1930 according to Hernán Loyola’s chronology.³ Neruda never mentions Eliot in his correspondence of the period, but refers admiringly to Lawrence on several occasions, describing him, in one of his most revealing letters to Héctor Eandi (dated Ceylon, 27.2.1930), as ‘el más grande’ of the many new English writers whose works he came to read as a consequence of his friendship with Lionel Wendt.⁴ The only work by Lawrence that he names is the original, Florentine edition of *Lady Chatterly’s Lover* (1928), but by mid-1930 he could, in principle, have read everything that Lawrence published in his lifetime, and in what follows I shall endeavour to show that in ‘Caballero solo’ he drew inspiration from a broad range of Lawrence’s writings, both poetic, fictional and non-fictional.⁵

² Boll concedes that there are major differences, but claims only that these ‘contribute to a sensual realization of the scene that is alien to *The Waste Land*’ (Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot, 94). He says nothing of the novels, the cinema, or the content of the films.

³ Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra*, 14. In his notes to the poem, Loyola acknowledges that ‘En el texto ... resuenan lecturas de D. H. Lawrence y de otros escritores ingleses’, but omits to say what or who those readings and other English writers may be (*Residencia*, 325).

⁴ See Pablo Neruda, *Obras completas* (henceforth *OC*), ed. Hernán Loyola, 5 vols (1999-2002), V, 952-55 (953). In his memoir, *Confieso que he vivido*, Neruda tells how he would receive a weekly ‘saco de libros’ from Wendt, including ‘kilómetros de novelas inglesas’, singling out those of Lawrence (*OC* V, 397-789 [498]). Years later he recalled reading Eliot in Ceylon in ‘Sonata con recuerdos’, originally published in *Ercilla*, no.1,718 (22.5.1968) (*OC* V, 162-75 [162]). This passage reappears in edited form in the memoir, but with the reference to Eliot, a political and cultural anathema to the later Neruda, strategically excised for an international readership (*OC* V, 502-3).

⁵ Pablo Neruda, *Confieso que he vivido*, 498. In the same work he refers in the plural to the ‘obras de Lawrence’ which ‘me impresionaron por su aproximación poética y cierto magnetismo vital dirigido a las relaciones escondidas entre los seres’, adding that (despite the fact that in the intervening years Lawrence must have become at least as abhorrent to him as Eliot in political terms), he still admired his ‘torturada búsqueda mítico-sexual’, strongly suggesting an acquaintance with the later novels and stories, as well as essays such as *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) (*Confieso que he vivido*, 498). Ideology aside, Lawrence’s intuitive poetic sensibility remained more attractive to Neruda than that of the more cerebral Eliot.

Sex and the Cinema

The most obscene painting on a Greek vase is not as pornographical as the close-up kisses on the film, which excite men and women to secret and separate masturbation.

D. H. Lawrence, 'Pornography and Obscenity'.

The core subject matter of the poem, which sees the appalled, unattached gentleman of the title hemmed in by a grotesque 'bosque respiratorio y enredado' of what, for the most part, are awkward, embarrassed, loveless or purely mechanical sexual fumbblings and failures, is clearly indebted to Lawrence, much of whose later work delineates and denounces what he viewed as the wholesale degradation of erotic experience in a modern age blighted by the tyrannical domination of mind over body and the crass democratization and commodification of human relations, so that sex had been reduced to a 'nasty fiasco'.⁶ He was especially censorious of the way in which self-conscious, idealized 'sex in the head' had caused natural physical impulse and interaction to be viewed as debased and shameful, thereby giving rise to a number of substitute perversions, many of which masqueraded as respectable behaviour. This is the basic premise of *Lady Chatterly*, but we find the same thesis illustrated or expressed throughout the novels, stories, much of the poetry, and in essays such as 'Pornography and Obscenity' (1929), articulated in ways which suggest a direct and pervasive influence on 'Caballero solo'.⁷ Lawrence viewed the twin vices of his title as the product of the near total subjugation of the 'individual self' by the vulgar, ersatz 'mob-self' in contemporary Western society and the concomitant repression of spontaneous sexual

⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious/Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Penguin, 1977), 7-195 (126).

⁷ This essay originally appeared in *The Quarter* (July-September, 1929) and was republished by Faber and Faber in January, 1930. It is surely noteworthy that the word 'obsceno' appears for the first and only time in *Residencia en la tierra* in 'Ritual de mis piernas', another poem written in Ceylon under Lawrence's influence in which the speaker criticizes the prudery and hypocrisy of a modern world whose rejection of the body has turned it into an 'obsuro y obsceno guardarropas' (*Residencia en la tierra*, 167-70 [168]).

instincts, which sends sex underground, turning it into a ‘dirty little secret’.⁸ He claimed that ‘the worst specimens of mob-self’, its self-appointed moral arbiters, are ‘to be found in the professions, lawyers, professors, clergymen’, the latter two of which feature so memorably in the poem.⁹ Lawrence later adds doctors to his roll-call of sexual censors, taking umbrage at their ‘wise and scientific’ attitude to sex that ‘tend[s] to disinfect the dirty little secret, and either kill sex altogether with too much seriousness and intellect, or else leave it a miserable disinfected secret’.¹⁰ They too are depicted, in appropriately condemnatory mode, in the poem. Interestingly, although absent from this particular essay, another figure representative of enervated, mass society for Lawrence (as it also was for Eliot) is the clerk. In ‘Aristocracy’ (1925) he is typically scathing:

One would think, to read modern books, that the life of any tuppenny bank-clerk was more important than the sun, moon and stars [...] This is the democratic age of cheap clap-trap, and it sits in jackdaw judgement on all greatness.¹¹

Note here also the association of the clerk with trashy popular literature, a link to which I shall return presently. The disparaging references in both Eliot and Lawrence may have reinforced a prior loathing in Neruda, who, during his time in Ceylon, was told an appalling story of abuse by a local girl who was effectively raped by fourteen ‘jóvenes ingleses,

⁸ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Pornography and Obscenity’, in *À Propos of Lady Chatterly and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1961), 60-84 (70). See also ‘Beware, O My Dear Young Men’, ‘Obscenity’, ‘Sex Isn’t Sin’, ‘Leave Sex Alone’ and ‘The Mess of Love’, in *Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1993), 462-65, 471-73. All these poems appear in *Pansies* (1929), published when Neruda was in Ceylon.

⁹ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Pornography and Obscenity’, 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Aristocracy’, in *Reflections On The Death Of A Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. Michael Herbert (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 367-76 (371). There are countless other examples. In *The Lost Girl* (1920), for instance, the worst fate that the narrator can imagine for his heroine, Alvina, is that she should marry ‘some dull schoolteacher or office clerk’, whilst in ‘Morality in the Novel’ (1925) Lawrence, with customary spleen, condemns ‘the ordinary bank-clerk buying himself a new straw hat’ as anathema to anything that might be deemed ‘life’. In ‘Pan in America’ (1924), meanwhile, he claims that ‘It was better to be a hunter in the woods of Pan than it is to be a clerk in a city store’. See *The Lost Girl* (London: Penguin, 1972), 107; *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 171-76 (173); *Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays*, ed. Virginia Crosswhite Hyde (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 155-64 (163).

pequeños empleados de tiendas y compañías’ in a single night.¹² One consequence of the blanket suppression of healthy sexual urges is their re-emergence in deviant and (self-)destructive forms, by far the most pernicious and wasteful of which, for Lawrence at least, is masturbation, which he describes with customary hyperbole as ‘the deepest and most dangerous cancer of our civilization’.¹³ This too we find in the poem, where Neruda appears consciously to be condensing and refashioning material from the essay. For example, Lawrence reports that he has ‘heard men, teachers and *clergymen*, commend masturbation’, but only so as better to ‘censor all open and plain portrayal of sex’ by admitting the supposedly lesser evil.¹⁴ A further, related observation appears to be incorporated virtually unchanged:

When the grey ones wail that the young man and the young woman went and had sexual intercourse, they are bewailing the fact that *the young man and the young woman didn’t go separately and masturbate*.¹⁵

In ‘Caballero solo’, of course, they *do*, to the speaker’s patent disgust. The other alleged sexual aberration identified by Lawrence is homosexuality, though he himself clearly experienced and may well have acted upon homoerotic desire. It is mentioned just once in ‘Pornography and Obscenity’ (73), but in the poem ‘The Noble Englishman’ the eponymous figure, who ‘is sure he is a gentleman’ and ‘rather proud of being a Don Juan’, is decried by a former lover as ‘by instinct a sodomist’, a symptom of his being narcissistically ‘in love with

¹² Pablo Neruda, *Confieso que he vivido*, 504 (my emphasis).

¹³ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Pornography and Obscenity’, 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72 (my emphasis)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71 (my emphasis). Derogatory references to masturbation pepper the essay (71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84) and can also be found in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (especially 122-23) and elsewhere, so it is hardly surprising that it should feature in the poem.

himself”.¹⁶ In ‘The Crown’ (1915/1925), meanwhile, Lawrence’s first major ‘metaphysical’ essay, he picks out ‘the prevalent love of boys’ as an example of the ‘pornographically reaching out for child-gratifications’ that is a product of the pandemic ‘sentimentalism’ and ‘infantile idiocy’ of the age.¹⁷ Neruda’s reference to the ‘jóvenes homosexuales’ may stem in part from his own experience, but its function as opposed to its mere presence in the poem may owe as much to Lawrence’s musings on the subject as to his own observation of his neighbours’ sexual mores.¹⁸

But what role does cinema, not to mention ‘novelas leídas de noche’, play in this collective sexual debacle? For Lawrence, cinema epitomized the whole technological, dehumanizing, ‘mob’ civilization in which it had come to occupy so prominent a place, and it comes in for repeated and vehement censure throughout his work, variously betokening the catastrophic substitution of intimate bodily contact for lifeless, depthless images, the levelling of individuality and the emasculating mechanization of life under rampant capitalism, and the cheap vulgarity and sentimentality of popular, democratic culture. In *Lady Chatterly* Mellors offers an excoriating summary of his author’s views when lamenting the demise of modern working people:

¹⁶ *The Complete Poems*, 446-47. It is tempting to think that this hilariously caustic poem, with its effete, self-absorbed ‘gentleman’ protagonist, may have provided Neruda with his title. I shall say more about Donjuanism below.

¹⁷ D. H. Lawrence, ‘The Crown’, in *Reflections On The Death Of A Porcupine And Other Essays*, 253-306 (285).

¹⁸ See the aforementioned letter to Eandi (27.2.1930), in which he refers to his Tamil, Singhalese and burgher neighbours as originally having been ‘homosexuales ... incestuosos’ who lived in ‘la más deliciosa putrefacción’ and ‘carecían de moral’ (OC V, 954). It is also worth remembering that Wendt was gay and courted the company of young local men who were often the subject of his photographs.

Their spunk's gone dead – motor cars and *cinemas* and aeroplanes suck the last bit out of them It's a steady sort of bolshevism – just killing off the human thing and worshipping the mechanical thing. Money, money, money!¹⁹

In 'The Crown', meanwhile, Lawrence goes as far as to attribute the sexual infantilism mentioned above and the pederastic tendencies it supposedly breeds to the influence of 'the movies'.²⁰ Cinemas themselves are invariably seedy places in Lawrence, and in 'Pornography and Obscenity' he identifies popular 'love films' as malignant repositories of the covert pornography of the age:

One might easily say that half the *love novels* and half the *love films* today depend entirely for their success on the rubbing of the dirty little secret [...] This furtive, sneaking, cunning rubbing of the inflamed spot in the imagination is the very quick of modern pornography.²¹

He goes on to claim:

¹⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (London: Penguin, 2006), 217 (my emphasis). Again, there are numerous further instances. Much of *The Lost Girl*, for example, revolves around a troupe of travelling performers who are gradually being put out of business by cheap, popular cinema, a theme revisited in the pair of poems 'When I Went To the Film' and 'When I Went to the Circus', the latter of which Neruda had certainly read since he borrows from it explicitly in 'Ritual de mis piernas' (see Note 66 below). Cinema is also berated in 'Let the Dead Bury Their Dead', 'Let Us Be Men', and especially 'Film Passion', in which the 'luscious filmy imagination' leads swooning female spectators to prefer the 'film face of Rudolf Valentino', his mere 'shadow', to his flesh-and-blood self, which would repel them should they actually encounter it (*Complete Poems*, 441-42, 443-44, 450, 538). Again, all these poems appear in *Pansies*. Cinema is even singled out as one of the central evils of modern life in one of the hymns to Quezalcoatl from *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). See D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (London: Penguin, 1979), 270.

²⁰ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Crown', 285.

²¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'Pornography and Obscenity', 70-71 (my emphasis).

The cheap and popular *love-novel* and *love-film* flourishes and is even praised by moral guardians, because you get *the sneaking thrill fumbling under all the purity of dainty underclothes*, without one single gross word to let you know what is happening.²²

The consequences are predictable:

The pornography ... of the popular novel, film, and play, is an inevitable stimulant to the vice of self-abuse, onanism, masturbation.²³

And so the vicious circle turns. Of particular note here is Lawrence's repeated yoking together of popular romantic novels and films as equivalent sources of obscenity, a conjunction found in 'Caballero solo' (the furtive, almost embarrassed 'de noche, en cama' suggests a certain sort of literature) but not in the passage from Eliot. This is surely no coincidence.²⁴ Neruda's 'principes apasionados' are suggestive of precisely the type of mawkish 'love-film' reviled by Lawrence, and even the wincingly protracted evocation of groping in the dark in ll.22-23 is perhaps closer to Lawrence's description cited above (there may even be a direct echo of it in Neruda's appropriately susurrating 'rumor de medias de seda acariciadas') than to Eliot's far less graphic 'unreproved caresses', even though in the former case the fondling takes place on screen rather than off.²⁵ As for the unspecified

²² Ibid., 71 (my emphasis).

²³ Ibid., 71 (my emphasis).

²⁴ There are related references to film and popular literature on pp.61, 72, 74, 77 and 83 of 'Pornography and Obscenity' – Neruda could hardly have missed them. Eliot was as dismissive of the cinema as Lawrence, but in fact removed the only reference to it from an early draft of 'The Fire Sermon', the same section of *The Waste Land* in which the 'Young man carbuncular' passage appears. See T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 29; *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, 649 (note).

²⁵ Elsewhere in Lawrence, however, the cinema itself is the location of such activity. In *The Lost Girl*, for example, as soon as the lights go down the auditorium echoes with 'gurglings and kissings', whilst in the story 'Tickets, Please', in which a local Lothario eventually gets his comeuppance at the hands of a posse of his former conquests, the cinema, which fills with 'wild whooping, and a loud smacking of simulated kisses' whenever the projector jams, is his preferred hunting ground. Interestingly, just prior to one amorous encounter

‘potros’, Neruda is surely alluding to another popular cinematic genre, whether the various films or serials which starred Rex or one of the other ‘wonder horses’ of the day or, more generally, the countless westerns churned out by Hollywood studios throughout the 1920s. Both were set in the same bloodless, cliché-ridden fantasy worlds typical of syrupy romantic cinema, and indeed Lawrence himself berated them for their vacuity.²⁶ Certainly, ‘potros’ looks like a knowingly anaemic substitute for Neruda’s customary, more potent choice of ‘caballo’, and the prancing alliteration of l.21 reinforces that impression.²⁷

If we remain unconvinced that Lawrence is at least as present as Eliot in ll.17-23, and that the episode detailed there is emblematic of the whole, prurient world in which it takes centre stage, close examination of the rest of the poem reveals a series of further allusions and specific turns of phrase which further suggest that Lawrence’s was the overriding influence.

Further Links

The first occurs in l.4, in the form of the seemingly unremarkable epithet ‘roncos’. This is an adjective which Neruda would often use in subsequent *Residencia* poems to suggest a raw, aggressively ‘antipoetic’ spontaneity of utterance, ‘más cerca de la sangre que de la tinta’, to

we find a description of him leaning over his latest victim ‘with a cigarette in his mouth’, a repellent detail also found in the poem. See *The Lost Girl*, 138 and ‘Tickets, Please’, in D. H. Lawrence, *England, My England* (London: Penguin, 1960 [1922]), 41-54 (45).

²⁶ The most extended instance of such criticism occurs the novella *St. Mawr* (1925) when the protagonist, Lou Witt (by title Lady Carrington), visits a ranch in Texas and finds life there ‘like a cinematograph’, peopled only by ‘flat shapes, exactly like men, but without any substance of reality [...] Cowboys [...] who saw Lady Carrington falling to them, as elegant young ladies from the East fall for the noble cowboys in films, or in Zane Grey.’ She is soon repulsed by ‘this living in a film-setting’. This sham existence contrasts with the elemental power of the stallion of the title. See D. H. Lawrence, *St Mawr*, in *The Complete Short Novels* (London: Penguin, 1990), 276-428 (399-400).

²⁷ We find further, invariably negative references to the cinema in ‘El fantasma del buque de carga’, ‘Walking Around’ and ‘La calle destruida’, all written after he had read Lawrence (*Residencia en la tierra*, 171-73 [171], 219-221 [219], 225-28 [227]). In the earlier ‘Caballo de los sueños’ (*Residencia en la tierra*, 93-96) he used the old Chilean word ‘biógrafo’ rather than ‘cine’, his unvarying choice thereafter (93).

quote Lorca's famous description.²⁸ Indeed, in the 'Oda a Federico García Lorca' (1935) Neruda praises his friend for 'cantando roncamente'.²⁹ In his later, populist poetry, the term was often indicative of both a rough-and-ready vitality attributed to the common people and the supposedly artless, unpolished verse in which he celebrated it. Thus, in the first 'Oda al libro' he defends the 'ronca familia de mi canto' against bookish attempts to 'empapelarme'.³⁰ This, however, is the first time the term is used affirmatively in his work, connoting a primal, animal sexual urge and its immediate, inarticulate expression.³¹ This is precisely the sense in which Lawrence uses it when making a qualitative distinction between waking, cerebral consciousness and a deeper, instinctual 'blood-consciousness' which is that of sex:

Sex is our deepest form of consciousness. It is utterly non-ideal, non-mental. It is pure blood-consciousness [...] The blood-consciousness is the first and last knowledge of the living soul: the depths. It is the soul acting in part only, speaking with its first *hoarse* half-voice [...] As *the night falls* and the consciousness sinks deeper, suddenly the blood is heard *hoarsely* calling.³²

Note also the blind, nocturnal nature of this compulsion, echoed perhaps in Neruda's 'en tinieblas'. In fact, the whole of l.4 looks like a borrowing from Lawrence's remarkable poem

²⁸ Federico García Lorca, 'Presentación de Pablo Neruda', in *Obras completas*, ed. Miguel García-Posada, 4 vols. (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1996-97), III, 249. The word also appears, always in an affirmative sense, in 'Un día sobresale', 'Melancolía en las familias', 'Enfermedades en mi casa', 'Estatuto del vino' (see note 30 below) and 'El desenterrado' (*Residencia en la tierra*, 193-98 [195], 229-32 [229], 237-40 [237], 265-72 [268, 270], 287-90 [287]).

²⁹ Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra*, 275-81 (277).

³⁰ Pablo Neruda, *OC* II, 142-44 (142-43). Perhaps the first broadly political use of the term occurs in 'Estatuto del vino' (1934/35) where the working-class 'hombres del vino' greet each other 'con roncadas bocinas' and sing a 'canto ronco' from 'roncadas gargantas' (*Residencia*, 268, 270).

³¹ Its only previous but unequivocally negative use in his poetry occurs in 'Arte poética', also from *Residencia I*, in which the speaker compares his faltering poetic voice to a 'campana un poco ronca', echoing Baudelaire's 'La Cloche fêlée' (*Residencia en la tierra*, 133-35 [134]).

³² D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 173-74 (my emphasis).

‘Tortoise Shout’, which records the polyphonic howl of pain which resounds through Nature as a consequence of our being ‘crucified into sex’ and thus condemned to unappeasable yearning. At the heart of a long, anaphorically structured passage which includes the ‘scream of a frog’, a ‘wild goose out of the throat of night’, a ‘nightingale’s piercing cries and gurgles’ emerging ‘out of a bush in the darkness’, the ‘scream of a rabbit’ in ‘a wood at midnight’ (the night-time setting is a constant), and a ‘heifer in heat, blorting and blorting’, the speaker recalls ‘my first terror hearing the howl of weird, amorous cats’.³³ Indeed, it may well be that Neruda’s ubiquitous insistence on the primacy of sound and hearing over sight and vision in *Residencia en la tierra*—what Jason Wilson, borrowing the expression from Eliot, terms his ‘auditory imagination’—is derived directly from Lawrence, and in particular from *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, where the latter dismisses sight as ‘the least sensual of the senses’, the one most closely associated with conscious, abstract thought, and deems hearing ‘the deepest’ and most visceral, since it develops before vision in the womb and even in waking life ‘Sound acts directly on our affective centres’, pre-empting our volition.³⁴

The next phrase which may betray Lawrence’s influence is the description of ‘senos femeninos como ojos’. The terms of the simile are self-explanatory, though ‘senos femeninos’ might strike the reader as curiously, even carelessly tautological. We find this association of eyes with breasts twice in Lawrence. The first and, in the present context, decisive instance occurs in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, when he is describing the unconscious ‘go[ing] forth seeking its object’ via the ‘sympathetic centre of the breast’. In relation to this process he comments:

³³ D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems*, 363-67 (365-66).

³⁴ Jason Wilson, *A Companion to Pablo Neruda* (London: Tamesis, 2008), 99ff.; *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 65-66, 70. This privileging of hearing reaches its apogee in the first poem of *Residencia II*, ‘Un día sobresale’, which recreates the dawning of a new day solely through the accumulation of sounds, but it is already present in the yowling of those ‘roncos gatos’.

The *breasts* themselves *are as two eyes*. We do not know how much the nipples of the breast, *both in man and woman*, serve as poles of vital conscious effluence and connection. We do know how the nipples of the breast are as fountains leaping into the universe, or as little *lamps irradiating the contiguous world*, to the soul in quest.³⁵

Familiarity with this passage might account for both the image itself, the speaker's irked sense of being the object of unsolicited scrutiny, and the seemingly superfluous gender specification.³⁶

In ll.23-24 Neruda plays simply but effectively on the two meanings of the Spanish 'sábana' ('sheet' and 'shroud') to imply that the frenzy of bedroom-based activity which envelops the speaker is threatening to see him to the grave. It is an apt analogy, and may well be Neruda's own invention, but it is perhaps worth noting that the image also occurs repeatedly, and in a closely related context, in Lawrence's essay 'Introduction to His Paintings', written to accompany an ill-fated exhibition of his work in 1929.³⁷ Describing the 'marvellous civilized cemetery' of contemporary life, he laments:

We were born corpses, and we are corpses [...] We are inside the tomb [...] Our instincts and intuitions are dead, we live *wound round with the winding sheet of*

³⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious/Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, 197-250 (231). The second mention occurs in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, when, while berating 'liv[ing] from the head' and the deathly idealism which this spawns, he wryly notes that 'This does not mean that man should immediately cut off his head and try to develop a pair of eyes in his breasts' (83).

³⁶ The same analogy was also used by one of Neruda's most revered poets, Baudelaire, who, in 'À une mendicante rousse', refers to 'Tes deux beaux seins/Radieux comme des yeux'. However, the phrasing in 'Caballero solo' is closer to Lawrence's. See Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 128-30 (129).

³⁷ This was originally published by the Mandrake Press in June, 1929, as a subscribers-only limited edition of 500 copies, but Neruda could easily have set eyes on one of these, given the scandal surrounding the exhibition (it was closed down on grounds of obscenity) and that one of his closest friends in Ceylon was the Cubist painter George Keyt, another culturally voracious member of Wendt's circle (the principal focus of Lawrence's essay is the work of Cubist precursor Cézanne). Indeed, Neruda published a review of Keyt's first exhibition, translated by Wendt, in *The Times* of Ceylon in January, 1930. For details see Ian Goonetilleke, *Lanka, Their Lanka: Cameos of Ceylon Through Other Eyes* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1984), 13.

abstraction [...] We walk and talk and eat and copulate and laugh and evacuate wrapped in our *winding sheets, all the time wrapped in our winding sheets*.³⁸

The spur for this gloomy diagnosis is, predictably enough, ‘a terror, almost a horror of sexual life’ which has blighted modern Western society as a result of ‘the growth of the “spiritual-mental” consciousness, at the expense of the instinctive-intuitive consciousness’ and the consequent demonizing of the body, particularly its sexual functions.³⁹

A further point of correspondence, though here too any parallels are less clear-cut, may lie in the speaker’s observation that ‘los primos juegan extrañamente con sus primas’. Neruda is clearly referring to the confusions and hesitations of nascent sexuality, and has selected a degree of consanguinity which augments the discomfiture – not quite taboo but nevertheless subject to social stigma and suspicion. It is a subject touched upon by Lawrence on a number of occasions, though almost always in less specific terms.⁴⁰ For example, in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* he says:

Sex in the real sense of dynamic sexual relationship, this does not exist in a child [...]

True, children have a sort of sex consciousness. *Little boys and little girls may even commit indecencies together*. And still it is nothing vital. It is a sort of shadow activity.⁴¹

³⁸ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Introduction to His Paintings’, in *À Propos of Lady Chatterly and Other Essays*, 13-59 (38-39 [my emphasis]).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴⁰ He refers explicitly—and disapprovingly—to amorous relationships between cousins in his essay on Poe in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1977 [1923]), 70-88 (73, 81).

⁴¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 102 (my emphasis). In ‘À Propos of *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*’ (1929/30), meanwhile, he remarks, ‘A young girl and a young boy is a tormented tangle, a seething confusion of sexual feelings and sexual thoughts’ (*Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, 305-35 [308]). It is difficult to know whether and in what form Neruda may have encountered this essay prior to composing the poem. A shorter version, titled ‘My Skirmish With Jolly Roger’ (which includes the passage just quoted, as well as all the other passages cited in the remainder of this essay), appeared in the so-called ‘Paris’ version of the novel, published by Random

Consequently he recommends that ‘boys and girls should be kept apart as much as possible, that they may have some sort of respect and fear for the gulf that lies between them in nature’.⁴² This obviously does not happen in the poem, presumably to the children’s psycho-sexual detriment.

Given the speaker’s revulsion at various socially sanctioned modes of erotic expression and interaction and their perverse corollaries, we might be tempted to see the blunt reference to animals which ‘fornican directamente’ as a defiant riposte to human hypocrisy and moral squeamishness, akin to Vallejo’s celebration, in a similar context, of ‘el bruto libre que goza donde quiere, donde puede’.⁴³ Yet the formulation is hardly alluring, and whilst animals may be unencumbered by sexual taboos, as unheeding intermediaries for the propagation of the species they remain incapable of erotic experience, which is the preserve of self-conscious beings.⁴⁴ Lawrence has Mellors spell this out in deliberately provocative terms in *Lady Chatterly*, when he explains to Constance the difference between ‘cunt’ and ‘fuck’:

Fuck’s only what you do. Animals fuck, but cunt’s a lot more than that. It’s thee, dost see; an’ tha ’rt a lot besides an animal, aren’t ’er?⁴⁵

House (New York) in July, 1929. It was then expanded and reprinted by the Mandrake Press in June, 1930, the month when Neruda was transferred from Ceylon to Singapore.

⁴² D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 102.

⁴³ See Poem XIII in César Vallejo, *Trilce*, ed. Julio Ortega (Madrid: Cátedra, 1991), 88.

⁴⁴ Lawrence often employed the term ‘fornicate’ in similarly pejorative fashion. In ‘Leave Sex Alone’, for example, he laments that ‘At present, sex is the mind’s preoccupation, and in the body we can only mentally fornicate’, whilst in ‘Worm Either Way’ (again from *Pansies*) the *faux* social rebel upon whom the poem pours scorn protests ‘I do all the things the bourgeois daren’t do, I booze and fornicate and use foul language and despise your honest man’ (*Complete Poems*, 431-33 [432], 472). It is also the verb Neruda uses to describe the horrific ordeal of the Ceylonese girl at the hands of the English clerks (see above), again associating it with loveless, even monstrous forms of sexual activity.

⁴⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, 178.

The one is mindless and mechanical, the other intentional and emotional. Neruda is, typically, more genteel in his expression (unlike Lawrence, he never attempted to divest the ‘obscene words’ of their ‘unclean mental associations’), but the underlying sentiment is the same – brute fornication does not offer a release from the speaker’s quandary.⁴⁶

My final example involves the ‘adúlteros que se aman con verdadero amor’ (l.34). The sense of ll.33-34 seems clear enough: revolted though he may be at the merry-go-round of sexual incompetence, indifference and inadequacy that encircles him, the speaker might, we imagine, derive some consolation, however meagre, from the thought that he is at least not missing out. However, to be confronted by ‘true’ love, in its classic, socially rebellious guise of adultery, proves intolerable, since it throws his own, loveless seclusion into particularly painful relief – hence the incensed ‘más aún’. There is surely some truth to this, and yet the description of the lovers seems deliberately overblown, knowingly and excessively ‘literary’. Whereas the language used in the remainder of the list in which they figure is, for the most part, plain and prosaic, their exertions are evoked via an extravagant simile, as if to suggest that they too were acting out an amorous cliché that is ultimately just one more part, albeit a peculiarly irksome one, of the general whirl.⁴⁷ In order to understand the protagonist’s attitude here, his galled insistence on remaining *au-dessus de la mêlée*, we must turn once again to Lawrence.

Sex and Solitude

⁴⁶ See D. H. Lawrence, ‘Introduction to *Pansies*’, in *Complete Poems*, 417-21 (418).

⁴⁷ Interestingly, this image (of beds as boats) occurs no fewer than three times in three neighbouring poems from Rafael Alberti’s *Sobre los ángeles* (1929), with the word ‘lecho’ used in every case. Alberti had received manuscript copies of the *Residencia* poems in late 1929 and the two poets had begun a correspondence. See ‘Invitación al arpa’, ‘Castigos’ and ‘Los ángeles de la ruinas’ in *Sobre los ángeles*, ed. Brian Morris (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 144-45 (144), 147-48 (147), 151-53 (151). Neruda may also be playing on the French *lit bateau*.

Hernán Loyola reads ‘Caballero solo’, as he does all the poems in *Residencia en la tierra*, as a slice of versified autobiography, interpreting the speaker’s predicament as an artistically transposed but substantially faithful reflection of Neruda’s personal circumstances and state of mind, and in particular of what the latter describes in the letter to Eandi cited above as the ‘asunto trágico’ of ‘la cuestión sexual’, his ‘más importante motivo de miseria’ in the wake of his definitive break with Josie Bliss and his failure to persuade his first love, Albertina Rosa Azócar, to join him in Ceylon.⁴⁸ Yet whilst Neruda undoubtedly does draw on elements of personal experience in the poem, the solitary persona at its core is a predominantly literary creation, at least as much a product of his reading as of any real-life sexual misadventures or feelings of abandonment.⁴⁹ Throughout his mature work Lawrence insisted that the origin of life was always individual and concrete in character, and that preserving and cultivating our profound and unique sense of self was of paramount importance if we were to experience life fully and authentically. A handful of examples should suffice:

The purest lesson that our era has taught us is that man, at his highest, is an individual, single, isolate, alone.⁵⁰

It is in pure, unutterable resolvedness, distinction of being, that one is free, not in mixing, merging, not in similarity.⁵¹

The individual can but depart from the mass, and try to cleanse himself.⁵²

⁴⁸ Hernán Loyola, *Neruda: La biografía literaria* (Santiago: Seix Barral, 2006), 445-47; *OC* V, 953.

⁴⁹ His memoirs indicate that the flesh-and-blood Neruda was anything but celibate during his time in Ceylon (*Confieso que he vivido*, 504-5). The speaker’s dim view of cinema is also a literary pose rather than a personal sentiment, since in letter of October 5, 1929 Neruda indicated to Eandi (himself a cinema critic, whose articles Neruda had read) that ‘El cine me gusta mucho, pero las buenas, viejas cintas, con amor, romanticismo y toda suerte de decorados’ (*OC* V, 941-51[1950]). That is precisely the sort of cinema despised by Lawrence.

⁵⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Penguin, 1976 [1923]), 332.

⁵¹ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Manifesto’, in *Complete Poems*, 262-68 (267).

⁵² D. H. Lawrence, *St. Mawr*, 80.

Life is individual, always was individual and always will be. Life consists of living individuals, and always did consist, in the beginning of everything.⁵³

That quintessential individuality, which Lawrence distinguishes sharply from mere egotism, which he views as both a symptom and a scourge of the age, was felt and expressed most intensely in and through sex.⁵⁴ Hence:

Sex is always individual. A man has his own sex: nobody else's. And sexually he goes as a single individual. So that to make sex a general affair is just a perversion and a lie.⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly, the greatest threat to that primordial sense of selfhood is contemporary mass society and its anonymising norms and protocols, especially the omnipresent, fatally disembodied 'love and benevolence ideal' and, as we have seen, the various cultural forms and clichés which enshrine it.⁵⁶ These include the sentimentalized conception of 'true love', which is often little more than a miniaturized war of attrition:

Take the love of a man and a woman, today. As sure as you start with a case of 'true love' between them, you end with a terrific struggle and conflict of the two opposing egos.⁵⁷

⁵³ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 150.

⁵⁴ See for example 'The Crown' (267ff.) and 'Love Was Once A Little Boy', in *Reflections of the Death of a Porcupine*, 331-46.

⁵⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 109-10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁷ D. H. Lawrence, 'Love Was Once a Little Boy', 331.

This may not be the same ‘verdadero amor’ of Neruda’s poem, but the shared rejection of the commonplace, in whatever form, remains striking. Lawrence spends much of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* railing against the prevailing, egalitarian conception of love as an obliterating fusion of identities, advocating instead a delicate balancing act which involves the deep commingling of what nonetheless remain non-aligned, sexually separate individuals.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is in the poetry where his abhorrence is most evident, his criticism most barbed and his plea for the individual to remove himself from the herd most impassioned. In ‘Noli me tangere’ (again from *Pansies*), for example, the speaker opens with the command ‘Noli me tangere, touch me not!/O you creatures of mind don’t touch me’, and concludes:

Great is my need to be *chaste*
and apart, in this cerebral age.
 Great is my need to be untouched
 untouched.
 Noli me tangere!⁵⁹

This entreaty is reiterated still more indignantly in the poem immediately following, titled simply ‘Chastity’:

Chastity, beloved chastity,
 O beloved chastity,
 how infinitely dear to me
 chastity, beloved chastity!

⁵⁸ See especially Ch. 9 (102-16). Perhaps the most eloquent description of Lawrence’s preferred sexual dynamic is provided by his alter ego Birkin, in *Women in Love* (1920). See D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 1995), 201.

⁵⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Complete Poems*, 468-69.

That my body need not be
 fingered by the mind,
 or prostituted by the dree
 contact of cerebral flesh—

O leave me clean from mental fingering
 from the cold copulation of the will,
 from all the white, self-conscious lechery
 the modern mind calls love!

From all the mental poetry
 of deliberate love-making,
 from all the false felicity
 of deliberately taking

the body of another unto mine,
 O God deliver me!
 leave me alone, let me be!⁶⁰

Better, the speaker maintains, in a loftily dismissive tone similar to that of ‘Caballero solo’, to remain in chaste isolation than to indulge in anything that passes for sexual love in the modern age. But is this bitter counsel equally applicable when it comes to the ‘verdadero amor’ of adulterers? We might recall that *Lady Chatterly*, that most explicit of adultery

⁶⁰ Ibid., 469.

novels, ends with a letter from Mellors to Constance in which the former welcomes their current separation on the grounds that ‘I love chastity now [...] Now is the time to be chaste, it is good to be chaste, like a river of cool water in my soul’, going on to wonder ‘How can men want wearisomely to philander. What a misery to be like Don Juan, impotent ever to fuck oneself into peace’.⁶¹ In other words, mere libertinage, the rote performing of the sexual act, however frequently or flamboyantly, is part and parcel of the current sexual malaise, not a cure for it.⁶² Indeed Lawrence himself, in his afterword to the novel, declares that his intention in writing it was not that ‘all women should go running after gamekeepers for lovers’, or indeed ‘go running after anybody’, but rather to encourage ‘honest thought about sex’ which may ‘bring us at last to where we want to get, to *our real and accomplished chastity*, our completeness, when our sexual act and our sexual thought are in harmony’. He insists that ‘A great many men and women today are happiest when they abstain and stay sexually apart’, since, released from purely mechanical ‘sexual action, a wearying repetition over and over, without an accompanying thought’, solitude and celibacy might allow them the ‘the full conscious realisation of sex’.⁶³

Now, whilst Neruda’s testy protagonist differs in certain important respects from the speakers and characters cited above, not least in the lack of solemnity with which he treats the subject of individuality and apartness (I shall say more about this below), his fundamental attitude towards the scenario in which he finds himself is the same one that we find time and again in Lawrence. And his influence does not end there. Thus far I have considered only thematic

⁶¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, 301. Don Juanism, which he sees as an egotistical masquerade of sexual freedom and fulfilment, is the constant target of Lawrence’s criticism. See for example ‘The Crown’, 269; ‘Pornography and Obscenity’, 80; and ‘..... Love Was Once a Little Boy’, where he dismisses ‘Don Juanery’ as ‘sex-in-the head, not real desire, which leads to profligacy or promiscuity’ (342).

⁶² Hence Lawrence’s contempt for supposedly emancipated bohemians who ‘swank most about sex’ but who, by merely performing it, have robbed it of all secrecy and profundity, so that ‘their sex is more mental than their arithmetic’ and ‘as physical creatures they are more non-existent than ghosts’ (‘Pornography and Obscenity’, 77, 79).

⁶³ ‘A Propos of *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*’, 308 (my emphasis).

aspects of the poem, but both its form, its prosody and its dominant tone also suggest that Neruda was operating under Lawrence's sway.

Language and Style

Anyone reading *Residencia en la tierra* sequentially will be surprised and very likely relieved by the dramatic alteration in poetic language which takes place between most of the first twenty-six poems in the collection (some of the briefer love lyrics, 'Juntos nosotros', the elegy 'Ausencia de Joaquín', 'Entierro en el este' and 'Sistema sombrío' are partial exceptions) and 'Caballero solo', in which the sometimes impenetrably opaque, intensely stylized and densely metaphorical idiom commonly considered one of the hallmarks of the collection suddenly gives way to a far more transparent, demotic form of expression that is predominantly metonymic in character. Neruda accounts for this transformation in the same, crucial letter to Eandi:

Los nuevos ingleses* [...] no se preocupan de ser ingleses 'nuevos' (a excepción de Joyce) sino de relatar directamente, con cierta virilidad y descuido exteriores que es bastante agradable e inesperado para hombres como yo cuya sola noción literaria ha sido modificar la forma, problema cutáneo que me parece sin sentido.⁶⁴

The asterisk leads to the footnote in which he names Lawrence as the greatest of those new writers. Recanting what he sees as his earlier, superficial formalism, he decides to experiment with a more direct, less conspicuously honed mode of utterance, just as Lawrence

⁶⁴ Pablo Neruda, *OC V*, 953.

had attempted to do in his verse.⁶⁵ As Loyola points out, this new turn is perhaps most apparent in the baldly prosaic passage from ‘Ritual de mis piernas’ beginning ‘Las gentes cruzan el mundo en la actualidad’, but the more communicative aesthetic clearly informs ‘Caballero solo’ too, and remains detectable in poems such as ‘Significa sombras’ (also written in Ceylon) and perhaps even ‘El fantasma del buque de carga’.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, significant traces of the ‘formalist’ Neruda remain, and ‘Caballero solo’, despite its relative accessibility within the context of *Residencia*, is rhetorically and syntactically more rich and refined than any of Lawrence’s equivalent free verse creations, to the poem’s considerable benefit. So, over ll.1-12 we find an extended military metaphor (‘enemigos’, ‘conspiradores’, ‘por consigna’, ‘regimientos’) which casts the speaker as the hapless victim of an organized sexual conspiracy. The main verb in the opening stanza (‘rodean’) is deliberately suspended until l.6, so that the disoriented reader is made to encounter the lascivious horde just as the speaker does, and in order to stress the soulless nature of the operation Neruda systematically depersonalizes the participants via a series of generic allusions and the recurrent use of synecdoche: we are given a fragmentary list of items of clothing and detached body parts (‘pantalones’, ‘polleras’, ‘medias’, ‘senos’) but there is no mention of individual human beings. The ubiquitous deployment of anaphora, which later builds to frantic crescendo over ll.24-35, accentuates the relentlessness of the offensive. Lines 24-35 themselves, whilst readily intelligible, are syntactically intricate, as Neruda employs both extravagant

⁶⁵ Lawrence sets out his views on the matter in ‘Poetry of the Present’, the preface to the American edition of *New Poems* (1918), where he champions ‘the seething poetry of the incarnate Now’, the ‘unrestful, ungraspable poetry of the sheer present’, over ‘the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities’, and free verse, ‘direct utterance from the instant, whole Man’, over the ‘fancy laws’ and ‘static perfection’ of ‘restricted, limited unfree verse’ (*Complete Poems*, 181-186 [183-84]). In ‘On His Paintings’ he is equally dismissive of ‘Significant Form’ or ‘Pure Form’ as a vacuous ‘cerebral formula’, a ‘form of masturbation’ all too typical of his bloodless age (33, 35).

⁶⁶ Hernán Loyola, *Neruda: La biografía literaria*, 445. Whilst perceiving the link with Lawrence in ‘Ritual’, Loyola misidentifies the source, citing oddly unrelated extracts from *Lady Chatterly* (though overlooking a crucial paragraph in Ch.17 that deals specifically with legs) when we find a much more similar passage in the poem ‘When I Went to the Circus’: ‘Modern people feel themselves at a disadvantage./They know *they have no bodies* that could play among the elements./ [...] /And they grudge the circus people the swooping gay weight of *limbs*/that flower in mere movement’ (*Complete Poems*, 444-46 [445-46, my emphasis]). I shall consider ‘Ritual de mis piernas’ and ‘Significa sombras’ in further studies of Lawrence’s influence on *Residencia en la tierra*.

hyperbaton ('atardeceres', 'noches', 'horas después del almuerzo' and 'horas de la mañana', carefully distributed throughout the stanza, are all subjects of the verb 'se unen') and polysyndeton to create the sense of a unrelenting, round-the-clock sexual siege. The poem concludes with a return to the studied impersonality of ll.14-16 in the form of the 'gran bosque respiratorio y enredado' cluttered with *disjecta membra*, once again giving the impression that individuals are little more than incidental agglomerations of organs and appendages in some vast, inhuman amalgam. That impression is further bolstered by the curious simile in l.37, in which the terms of the comparison are effectively reversed, since the 'bosque', itself a metaphor, is treated as the primary reality. The logical order is actually restored in the final line by the substitution of 'como' for 'en forma de', though the disconcerting effect of l.37 and the close parallelism of ll.37-38 means that we are unlikely to notice this on a first reading. The ordering of the various elements in l.38 also ensures that the poem culminates with a reference to an item of clothing rather than a body part, which is fitting, given the overall emphasis on the obscene (in Lawrence's sense) cloaking of naked sexual instinct under the pall of social proscription. The shoe acts as synecdoche for the latter, rather as it does at the close of 'Ritual de mis piernas', though the expression here is far more compact and allusive.⁶⁷ We find nothing so involved anywhere in Lawrence's poetry. Neruda also has an eye for concrete, sometimes queasy sensuous detail that is largely absent from Lawrence, the references to 'jóvenes señoras preñadas hace treinta horas', 'besos espesos' and 'piernas llenas de dulce vello' providing the most striking examples. And he still gives rein to his instinctive rhetorical exuberance at appropriate moments. For instance, whilst Lawrence is content with 'amorous cats', Neruda's 'roncos gatos' are likened to a 'collar de palpitantes ostras sexuales' ringing the speaker's dwelling, the undulating rhythm

⁶⁷ 'Siempre./productos manufacturados, medias, zapatos, o simplemente aire infinito,/habrá entre mis pies y la tierra/extremando lo aislado y solitario de mi ser' (*Residencia en la tierra*, 170).

and the onomatopoeic ‘palpitantes’ lending the line a suitable throb.⁶⁸ Indeed, even a cursory reading of ‘Caballero solo’ reveals the same obsessive concern for sound, rhythm and cadence which characterizes the earlier poems in the collection.

Another prominent stylistic feature of the poem, both derived and significantly developed from Lawrence, is its often withering humour. Remarkably, none of the poem’s leading exegetes so much as alludes to it, refusing to allow that there might be anything funny in a book routinely considered to be a uniformly despondent record of the ‘complete disgust with existence’ that emerged from ‘a period of virtually total spiritual bleakness’ in the Far East, and thereby doing the poetry a significant critical disservice.⁶⁹ Much of the humour in Lawrence’s verse, particularly the poetry impugning social prudery, is angrily, often bludgeoningly ironic, the sometimes unintentional (one suspects) by-product of the sheer force and crudity of the invective, and whilst we find traces of this exasperated tone in ‘Caballero solo’, the comedy in Neruda’s poem, whilst directed at the same targets, is, for the most part, more subtly and deftly contrived. The elaborate military metaphor, which rests on the speaker’s paranoid attribution of a whole series of sinister intentions where none exists, is a case in point, as is the pun on the word ‘sábana’ and its hyperbolic implications, but there are many other instances, too, not least that of the teacher who has sex almost by accident before proceeding to the more important business of eating his breakfast (ll.32-33).⁷⁰ Neruda also exhibits a gift for suggestive understatement, most evident in l.31, where he deliberately

⁶⁸ Here Neruda is aggressively sexualizing an image, that of the ‘collar’, which previously formed the centrepiece of the far more demure Poem 5 of the *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (OC I, 177-99 [181-82])

⁶⁹ The summary is Robert Pring-Mill’s, from the ‘Introduction’ to his *Pablo Neruda: A Basic Anthology* (Oxford: Dolphin, 1975), xv-lxxix (xxi). Loyola treats the poem as though it were as anguished and gloomy as ‘Arte poetica’ or ‘Sistema sombrío’ (*La biografía literaria*, 445-52), whilst Alonso compares its core scenario to the intolerable erotic ‘infierno’ of the later ‘Las furias y las penas’ (*Poesía y estilo*, 341 [note]).

⁷⁰ There may be a faint echo here of a passage from *The Lost Girl*, where the prudish Mr. May, a half-hearted suitor to the heroine Alvina, says of his wife, ‘When I was mental, she was physical, and threw her arms round my neck. In the morning, mark you. Always in the morning, when I was on the alert for business [...] Could the Devil have invented anything more trying?’ (139-40).

omits the reason for the doctors' fury, inviting the reader to speculate on just what the offending husband may have done. Earlier he generates humour from simple but eloquent juxtaposition, describing the rows of palm trees as 'elegantes' in implied contrast to the motely parade of 'gordas y flacas y alegres y tristes parejas', whilst on occasion scandalous insinuation arises from grammatical ambiguity, with the speaker leaving us to decide whether the verb in 'los sacerdotes se masturban' (l.27) is reflexive or reciprocal – or perhaps both. We are also left with the distinct impression after reading 'Caballero solo' that the joke may be as much on the speaker as it is on those whose amorous shortcomings he noisily berates, since, however we choose to view his seclusion, his jaundiced protestations cannot disguise and perhaps serve to underscore the fact that, whilst everyone around him may be having guilt-ridden, pleasureless or perfunctory sex, he is not having any at all. Lawrence's missionary earnestness meant that he was rarely capable of such self-mockery.

In sum, the pared-down, less forbidding poetic language of 'Caballero solo' undoubtedly constitutes a significant new departure for Neruda, one that would have been unimaginable had he not read Lawrence in Ceylon, but that departure is not quite as drastic as it may first appear. What we find rather is a fertile synthesis of the self-absorbed aesthete of poems such as 'Arte poética' or 'Diurno doliente', and a poet whose readings have encouraged him to look outwards and depict the world around him 'directamente, con cierta virilidad y descuido exteriores'.⁷¹ We find the same blending of attitudes and styles in the other major poems written under Lawrence's influence, 'Ritual de mis piernas' and 'Significa sombras', though in both of the latter the contrast between differing viewpoints and idioms remains stark, even jarring at times.

⁷¹ This distinction, it should be stressed, is anything but watertight, since even the most solipsistic of the earlier *Residencia* poems betray a concern with the poet's relation to and place—or lack of one—within the wider world. What we find in poems such as 'Caballero solo' is a modification of perspective, not a simple reversal.

Coda: Even Overeducated Fleas ...?

For all of the above, there *may* be another contemporary influence at work in ‘Caballero solo’, albeit a very different one, and I shall devote the remainder of this essay to exploring it. Perhaps the most arresting feature of the poem is the long, breathlessly articulated catalogue of sexual practices and their perpetrators which unfurls over ll.24-35. Critics have long since noted Neruda’s penchant for such lists in *Residencia*. Amado Alonso, in his important early study, highlighted the ‘hacinamiento de *membra disjecta* y objetos heterogéneos’ which litter the poems, deeming this recurrent ‘enumeración desarticulada’ a central stylistic tenet of the work’s ‘visión desintegradora del mundo y de la vida’.⁷² Leo Spitzer, developing Alonso’s thesis, referred to the phenomenon as ‘enumeración caótica’, also deeming it symptomatic of a ‘visión desengañada del caos total moderno’, whilst Loyola uses the term ‘inventario desencantado’ to describe these outpourings, in which the numbed speaker itemizes without qualitative distinction what appear to be randomly selected elements from the world around him.⁷³ And yet, As Loyola himself points out, what we find in ‘Caballero solo’ is not a haphazard assemblage but rather ‘un elenco bien deliberado y coherente de imágenes *afines*, de un desfile de figuras homologadas por situaciones eróticas’.⁷⁴ This is obviously in keeping with the poem’s subject matter, but what might have inspired Neruda to include such an inventory, by far the longest and most elaborate of its type in *Residencia I*, in this particular poem? One answer to this question might lie in the music of Cole Porter, and in particular his famous song ‘Let’s Do It, Let’s Fall in Love’. The mere suggestion of such a link may appear preposterous, but there is a certain amount of evidence for it, both contextual and internal. In the first place, it is more than likely that Neruda knew the song. Originally

⁷² Amado Alonso, *Poesía y estilo de Pablo Neruda*, 2nd edn. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1968 [1940]), 24, 156.

⁷³ Leo Spitzer, *La enumeración caótica en la poesía moderna*, trans. Raimundo Lida (Buenos Aires: Coni, 1945), 68ff.; Pablo Neruda, *Residencia en la tierra*, 199 (note).

⁷⁴ Hernán Loyola, *El joven Neruda, 1904-1935* (Santiago: Lumen, 2014), 219.

written for the musical *Paris* (1928), The Dorsey Brothers and Their Orchestra (with Bing Crosby on vocals), Rudy Vallée and Elsie Carlisle all released versions in 1929 and it quickly became a worldwide hit, receiving constant airplay.⁷⁵ Neruda arrived in Ceylon in early January of that same year. Even had he somehow managed to avoid hearing the song over the radio, we know from another letter to Eandi (11.2.1930) that he owned a gramophone.⁷⁶ Wendt, meanwhile, prior to becoming an accomplished photographer and cinematographer, was a concert pianist and music teacher with a keen interest in contemporary music, and we know that he aided Neruda in his search for the musical source of Vinteuil's sonata in Proust.⁷⁷ Furthermore, by the late 1920s Porter was already a covert gay icon whose often risqué lyrics may well have held a subversive appeal for the homosexual Wendt, who felt 'cribbed, cabined and confined by the stifling and inordinately puritan and overly chaste mores of the society in which [he] moved.'⁷⁸ As chance would have it, Porter himself visited Ceylon during Neruda's time there, though his biographers record next to nothing about his stay.⁷⁹ Still, it is not hard to imagine that his presence on the island would have attracted the attention of Wendt's bohemian group. And then there is the song itself. Commonly referred to as a 'list' song, it is built around a long, formally homologous and thematically grouped series of what, at the time, were often shockingly salacious sexual innuendos and double entendres, thinly veiled under the veneer of romantic love. It mischievously itemises a bewildering and often hilarious array of implied couplings, human, animal and even

⁷⁵ The Dorsey Brothers version appears on Okeh 41191, Vallée's on Harmony 0808 and Carlisle's on Dominion A.125 mx.1252-2.

⁷⁶ Pablo Neruda, *OC V*, 951-52 (852).

⁷⁷ Pablo Neruda, *Confieso que he vivido*, 498.

⁷⁸ Ian Goonetilleke, 'Lionel Wendt and George Keyt – A Close-Up', in *Lionel Wendt: A Centennial Tribute* (Colombo: Lionel Wendt Memorial Fund, 2000), 45-50 (49). For further comments on Wendt's sexuality and its influence on his work see Robert Aldrich, *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity* (London: Routledge, 2015), Ch.4 ('Modern Art and the Homoerotic Photographs of Lionel Wendt').

⁷⁹ In his problematically titled *Cole Porter: The Definitive Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), William McBrien fails even to mention the visit. Both George Eells and Charles Schwarz devote a paragraph to it, largely taken up with relating an aborted prank involving a baby elephant, whilst Noel Coward, who was also in Sri Lanka at the time, staying in the same hotel as Porter, fleetingly mentions the visit in his first volume of autobiography. See Eells, *The Life That Late He Led: A Biography of Cole Porter* (London: W. H. Allen, 1967), 97; Schwarz, *Cole Porter: A Biography* (London: W. H. Allen, 1978), 112; Coward, *Present Indicative* (London: Methuen, 2004 [1937]), 307.

vegetable. Now, we should exercise the utmost caution when seeking to identify parallels between song and poem. They are, after all, predicated on quite different thematic and compositional premises, the Porter taking the form of an uproarious but regularly structured celebration of sex and an invitation to indulge, whereas ‘Caballero solo’ is a more rambling, disgruntled remonstrance from someone who is not indulging at all. Nevertheless, both take a fundamentally humorous approach to their subject matter, and the presence in the poem of a lengthy, repetitive sequence of pairings and sexual mishaps is certainly reminiscent of Porter. The two works also share a number of specific allusions. ‘Let’s Do It’ includes the iconic line ‘And that’s why birds do it, bees do it,/Even overeducated fleas do it’, and whilst there are no birds in ‘Caballero solo’ we find ‘abejas’ and ‘moscas’ sharing a line. That ‘moscas’ means ‘flies’ and not ‘fleas’ may be a consequence of Neruda’s still imperfect English, but he is more likely to have chosen it because of the sense of frenzy associated with the buzzing of flies as well, perhaps, in order to disguise his source (‘pulgas’ would be both incongruous and its provenance too obvious in the context).⁸⁰ Either way, it is noteworthy that this is the first and only time the word appears in *Residencia* I.⁸¹ The same is true of ‘ostras’ (indeed, this is its first appearance anywhere in Neruda’s poetry), which also figure in Porter’s lyric (‘Oysters down in Oyster Bay do it’) and, given the coarse sexual connotations of shellfish in South American Spanish, may have struck a particular cord in the context.⁸² Given his own parlous economic circumstances at the time of writing, Neruda’s eye may even have been caught by Porter’s inclusion of penniless South Americans, albeit ‘Argentines without means’

⁸⁰ Rather than glossing a source directly and discretely, Neruda would often distribute carefully camouflaged elements from it throughout a poem, sometimes in quite different contexts – much as he does with Lawrence here. For further comments on this practice see my ‘Neruda’s “Arte poética”: Some Further Thoughts’, in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 88:2 (2011), 249-71.

⁸¹ Bees and flies previously featured together at the start of the thirteenth poem of *Tentativa del hombre infinito* (1926) (*OC* I, 210-12 [210]), though the context is not erotic. Jason Wilson suggests Ruben Dario’s ‘Augurios’ as a possible influence here (*A Companion to Pablo Neruda*, 89).

⁸² When the word next appears, in ‘El desenterrado’, Neruda’s homage to the Conde de Villamediana from *Residencia* II, it is also associated with sound and has odd sexual connotations, the poet calling for ‘un oído, de pronto, como una ostra furiosa,/rabiosa, desmedida’ as he metaphorically resurrects the Count (*Residencia en la tierra*, 288).

rather than Chileans. Finally, in the prelude to the song we come across the figure who provided the starting point for this entire study– the lowly clerk:

When the little bluebird,
 Who has never said a word,
 Starts to sing ‘Spring, Spring,’
 When the little bluebell,
 At the bottom of the dell
 Starts to ring ‘Ding Ding,’
 When the little blue clerk,
 In the middle of his work,
 Starts a tune to the moon up above,
 It is nature, that’s all,
 Simply telling us to fall
 In love.⁸³

Needless to say, these apparent correspondences may be wholly fortuitous, and in the likely absence of concrete evidence, the argument here must remain speculative. Still, given the peculiar status of the poem within the collection and its author’s manifest openness to and Protean capacity to assimilate and transform a whole range of influences in the poetry of *Residencia en la tierra*, the notion that there might be echoes of a popular Cole Porter song in ‘Caballero solo’ is perhaps not as far-fetched as it may initially appear.

Conclusion

⁸³ See Richard Kimball, *The Complete Lyrics of Cole Porter* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), 72-3 (72). The English Carlisle, whose version is the only one to include the prelude, sings ‘Sitting sadly in the park’ rather than ‘In the middle of his work’ in order to make the rhyme.

Indeed, Neruda's radical response to Lawrence, perhaps the most significant aesthetic shift in his poetry since his reading of Schopenhauer resulted in 'Galope muerto' (1926) and prior to his life-changing encounter with Lorca in Buenos Aires (1933), is a prime example of that same receptiveness. I have argued elsewhere that, for all the common thematic and rhetorical ground its poems may share, *Residencia en la tierra* is a more diverse work than is commonly held to be the case, and that the ingrained critical assumption that the first volume in particular offers a monochrome reflection of an unremittingly wretched and introverted 'Neruda residenciario', risks significantly skewing our perspective on particular poems which do not conform to that template.⁸⁴ That diversity, I have claimed, is largely the result of a series of serendipitous and productive literary discoveries and acquaintances which took place over the ten-year period of the book's gestation. Few poems illustrate it better than 'Caballero solo'.

⁸⁴ See 'Neruda's "Arte poética": Some Further Thoughts', and 'Neruda's "Waking Around" – Origins and Influences', in *Cantalao*, 1:1 (2013), 26-37 (especially 37).