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## HOW TO RE-INVENT THE SELF DESPITE THE WORLD: A READING OF PEDRO SALINAS' *TODO MAS CLARO*

Ruth K. Crispin

When *Todo más claro* was published in 1949, Pedro Salinas' fame was already assured, at least in Spain, by two books of love poetry he had written during the course of a heady, but ultimately failed love affair (a third collection was published posthumously). The books' overt subject was, of course, love; but on another level it continued, in a much more intense and determined way, the preoccupation with his identity as a poet hinted at in his earlier collections. In the love poetry, the drama of the story propels the subterranean narrative until they fuse, and are released by an identical solution: Taking from Percy Shelley's *Defence* the rationalizing notion that all poets contribute "episodes" to the "one great poem", Salinas transfers it to the realm of love, assuring that all lovers form part of a chain in which past and present are connected, to serve as witnesses to the world.<sup>1</sup> Concomitantly, unconsciously but logically (since the original reference was, in fact, to poetry), this consolation is proposed in the poetry for the individual poet who then can accept the priority of the past while simultaneously creating an original voice.<sup>2</sup>

*Todo más claro* marks a radical change in Salinas' poetry, but it is one of focus rather than direction. The love cycle comprised by *La voz a ti debida*, *Razón de amor* and *Largo lamento* is primarily centered on the self; the seeking of the beloved's response veils what Jacques Lacan would call an "imaginary" or "mirror" attachment, in which the other's response serves to confirm the speaker's own sense of world and self.<sup>3</sup> Yet these books do not record static moments but rather an evolution. Once the demands of these self-absorbing needs have been met, the poet can turn outward to the world, teaching what he has learned; and the uses of poetry are transferred from the anecdotal (the personal narrative) to the generic, the social and also, inevitably, the ontological.

Social concerns were never absent from Salinas' work, which from the beginning was sensitive to the impinging of society on the individual (even as early as *Presagios*' "Hijo mío, ven al mundo"). *Todo más claro* exposes the constraints of society's systems, and the ways in which such hierarchies (whether in religion, language, ethics, art or "lifestyle") are necessarily and perniciously judgmental and exclusive, while also being indispensable. At the same time, the poetry will point to ways out from the impasse: the way of the inner life and of the imagination, the way, thus, of poetry itself. The solution is not escapist but activist, involving an inner willing of the self out of a narcissistic "imaginary" stage to the ultimate limits of what Lacan has called the symbolic stage, in which the subject, possessing language, knows himself irrevocably split, but will seek to recognize and empower his authentic self.

Salinas' poetry has all along -- especially in *Seguro Azar* and in *Fábula y signo* -- played with the idea that the completed, or the complete, is always a fiction which replaces the "real" end of any story, any desire. The tactic of these earlier books was to keep consciously at the point before the end, in tension on the brink, as if nothing more were desired: recognizing but not bracketing the fictiveness of wholeness. In *Todo más claro*, as the poetic voice works through the negative aspects of the various fictions or systems men have invented to avoid the truth, the "as if" stance no longer satisfies. The intellectual, passive knowledge of transcendent ultimate failure — the realization that even if we survive the daily threats and disappointments of missed engagements, lost loves, failed careers, car crashes, bombs, war, we still in the end lose everything — such knowledge is no help. Hence the solution is for the will to preempt the power death has over us by empowering itself, in an only apparent paradox, to choose the inevitable, to choose death. Or, we might say, with Heidegger and Lacan, to choose life redefined as finitude. The majority of the poems in *Todo más claro* set out problem and solution (as well as, for contrast, false solutions) in poetic metaphor, engaging our own imaginations and providing, as a substitute for the fables and lies which have up to now been our props, a truth which make the horror and the mystery clearer and less fearful. Beyond even this, as the poetry illustrates, recognizing our split self, and embracing our authentic one, can lead to a defiant yet life-enhancing transcendence, beyond anything imagined even in *El contemplado*.

But the solution is achieved in increments, as the poet describes and interrogates the impediments to the mature vision. In this paper I examine six poems which successively explore the problem, often brilliantly, and which reach, in the last of these, its definitive Heideggerian resolution, poetry written "from the other side" of the abyss.<sup>4</sup> I end by considering how the book's final, horrific prophecy, so unexpectedly unlike the preceding poems, in fact encompasses the wider vision.<sup>5</sup>

The opening poem, called, like the book, “Todo más claro”, and subtitled “Camino al poema”, consists of four named and numbered sections, and is an introduction to plan guiding the examination of the problem. Almost as if this exploration had been conceived with the psychoanalytic model in mind, its four parts come close to recreating the steps by which a self realizes itself as a subject (and which themselves duplicate, in compressed form, the evolution of the childhood self). In the psychoanalytic situation, the analysand initially projects his or her imaginary gaze onto the world, and then discovers with frustration the fictive nature of that construct and the alien nature of the ego. Similarly, the first part of “Todo más claro” (“Las cosas”) begins with the optimistic vision of a “lost paradise”:

Al principio, ¡qué sencillo,  
allí delante, qué claro!  
No era nada, era una rosa  
haciendo feliz a un tallo,  
un pájaro que va y viene  
soñando que él es un pájaro,  
una piedra, lenta flor  
que le ha costado a esta tierra  
un esmero de mil años.  
¡Qué fácil, todo al alcance!

and then moves to the realization that this vision is deceptive, that knowledge of the things of this world, as the speaker tells us, is not in fact accessible: “las manos... / acuden siempre al engaño”. In the mimetic act of taking — of plucking flowers, or harvesting the earth — we are deluded into believing we know reality. But rather than respond hostilely to this realization, as the analysand may do, the poet understands that the knowledge which our physical acts fail to attain can be desired and willed:

Hay otra cosa... un puro querer  
un algo que inicia ya  
... el trabajo de coger su flor al mundo  
— alquimia, birlibirloque —  
para siempre, sin tocarlo. (23-33)

“Querer” in this stanza is both desire (the impulse) and will (the force to act); “querer” is also both noun and verb. The subject too, to initiate the search for his authentic being, must turn from being a mirror (a noun) to becoming a self with history, a self in time (a verbal construct).

The next section, “En ansias inflamada”, is devoted to that pure willed desire which turns out to be the only light in the shadows: “¡Tinieblas, más tinieblas! / Sólo claro el afán”. This desire, like that of the subject seeking to replace his empty speech with authentic expression, is the “entrega total / a

la busca del signo” which somehow, depending on the inevitable chance, will lead to the “¡[t]ensión de ser completo!”. And, indeed, “Verbo”, the third section, moves to that sign, in a seemingly total acceptance of language (“En sus hermanados sonos / ... viene el ayer hasta el hoy, / va hacia la mañana”, vv. 13-16), and, especially, of the language of the poetic canon:

padres míos, madres mías  
a mí las mandan.  
Cada día más hermosas, por más usadas.  
Se enegrezcan, se desdoran  
oros y platas;  
“hijo”, “rosa”, “mar”, “estrella”,  
nunca se gastan. (25-32)

“El poema,” the fourth and final part, is a paean not to the poem itself but to the writing of the poem, in whose light “todo, / desde el más nocturno beso... / está mucho más claro”. Clearer, of course; not clear. It is not the poem which is the solution, but the poem’s process (reminding one of Lacan’s assertion that “it is by the way of [speech] that all reality has come to man, and it is by his continued act that he maintains it” [106]). With this introductory poem the poet has in effect set out the book’s goal; the remaining poems will engage the reader in a journey analogous to the one the poet has taken in the effort to strip bare the entrapping masks of the imaginary and evoke a deeper and more genuine response.

Thus the reader discovers at once, with the menacing opening words of poem 2, “El inocente”, that what is involved here is the drama of the split self: “Esta sombra pareja que me sigue / apenas raya el sol, ¿es culpa mía?”. Here is where the book as dialectic properly begins, a struggle, hinted at in “Las cosas”, between the two factions of the human being: individual desire — desire as knowledge, as love, as the “only light in the shadows”, finding expression in poetry — against the civilizing forces that repress it, here represented by Christianity, language, commerce, love, even art itself. For the latter are, or have become, systems, inevitably restraining and restricting desire, channeling it to an end which admits no dissent, which exiles whatever elements of the human soul or psyche do not fit; or which, even worse, refuses such elements a name and thus deprives them utterly of their reality. Poem 2 deals with such a pariah: the “innocent”, the self born without the taint of original sin. In this poem, the speaker acknowledges his guilty self because he indeed feels the guilt, yet he refuses to accept the identification: “No soy mi crimen, aunque mío se hizo. / No soy mi sombra.” Instead, the majority of the poem is devoted to seeking the innocent self which he (also) is.

Asserting his belief that this self is not a historically created ego (for his history has been only a “sucesión de ademanes carceleras”, in which he

is becoming his own prisoner), the poet undertakes the symbolic search which constitutes parts 2 and 3 of the poem. In a section reminiscent of *Seguro Azar*'s "Cinematógrafo", he investigates first the possibility of the film screen, on which deeds, passions, seem so real. Yet when the screen returns to its immaculate whiteness, free from the evils recently shown upon it, the poet's illumination also ceases. Unlike the *Seguro Azar* screen, which retained, optimistically, the potential for creativity even when the film images had disappeared, this movie screen keeps itself distant ("ajena") from the struggles of its stories, is disconnected from them, and thus holds no promise of answers.

Next the poet looks, also unsuccessfully, in memory, and then in expectation, and finally (in Part 3) in the possible meanings of poetic or prophetic signifiers: cloud formations, syllables, comets, reflections, ciphers, even riderless carousel horses. At last, almost despairing of making sense of symbols ("¿Es que con tanto signo y tanta seña / nada hay que acierta?"), a bird — freewheeling yet a "cartógrafo del aire" (v. 96) — reveals that his innocent is neither within nor beyond him, but above him. His innocent turns out to be part 4's circus trapeze artist, goallessly swinging back and forth, suspended in the air.

The two symbolic spaces which this poem highlights, the cinema and the circus, are revealing from a Lacanian perspective. The film is not only illusory, it is historical, it is teleological and it is enclosed in a frame. The circus, on the other hand, is a marginal institution, unbound to social law (and the trapeze flyer is an intensified symbol of this), representing a kind of "azar". The Lacanian imaginary is never so explicitly rediscovered in adult life as in the movies, with whose images, as Chrétien Metz has shown, we identify as we did in early childhood with our reflections in the mirror, or in our mothers' eyes. Yet the contrast with the circus is like that of the imaginary with the symbolic, with a significant difference. The circus' principal images — the clowns, the lion tamers, the side-show freaks — are funhouse versions, perversions of the identifications we seek, and which we cannot or will not normally accept. But the circus has a tradition of freedom gained precisely because it is a marginal world, unacceptable to the semiotic patterns which the world dictates as permissible. To choose the circus, to choose the trapeze artist, is to make a choice for a world whose symbols do not have fixed meanings but oscillate; not so much a world with risks as one which can be defined as risk, since nothing in it is secure or translatable.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the poem's speaker very deliberately does not choose to join his "innocent" in the air. It is the separation of the two selves, he says, which is the "law" ("Sea nuestra unidad, tan alejados, / la obediencia a la ley que nos desliga," vv. 158-9) and which he will obey. Unity, under this law, is separation, a living apart in which both are lost, yet never lose sight of one another. One can see in this a description very like the creation of an unconscious, in which the authentic self is repressed, and the (Lacanian)

“law” accepted. For the poet, the recognition of the split self, the deliberate maintaining of the division between man and his dream (“guardar, guardar, acordes, la distancia / que al hombre le distingue de su sueño,” vv. 162-63) becomes therefore the necessary way to be, the only way to avoid the trap, the lie, of believing oneself whole **and** therefore wholly, historically guilty.

The next poem, “Hombre en la orilla”, takes up again the problem of desire and will in the face of society’s civilizing constraints. The brink is a recurrent symbol in Salinas’ poetry. Its most significant treatment before *Todo más claro* was the opening poem of *Fábula y signo*, whose speaker, at the poem’s end, turns deliberately away from the brink and from the abyss it overlooks.<sup>7</sup> The problem of the brink is in *Todo más claro* set against two of mankind’s “solutions”, the pagan and the Christian; and the poem’s true ancestor is Jorge Manrique’s fifteenth-century “Coplas por la muerte de su padre”, in whose medieval Christian orthodoxy the pagan elements of Fame, and Fortune with her wheel, are also at home. That Salinas had this consummate poem in mind is suggested at the outset. The seemingly cryptic first verses of “Hombre en la orilla”:

Este río no es aquél:  
corriente, a secas.

resonate, once the poem is read in full, with the beginning of Manrique’s third stanza:

Nuestras vidas son los ríos  
que van a dar en la mar  
que es el morir

In fact the Manriquean river is not the only association to this poem’s river; a second obvious one — the almost mystical use of water as symbol of union, as an almost responsive entity to man’s contemplation — is crucial as a contrast with the dry “riverbed” of frantic city traffic which the poem describes almost at once. But the river is equally Manrique’s for, as we will see, Manrique’s response to death, the lesson of how the good Christian dies, is the model for the speaker’s own disquieted stance at the poem’s end.

The middle three stanzas of Part 1 describe two examples of the bourgeois’ closed system of imaginary lives. The adults are described in a cynically humorous tone (with allusions to mythological figures); and both of them are identified in the poem with images of the Lacanian imaginary: Mrs. Morrison with the mirrors which will give evidence of her Venus-like rebirth, the actor with the movie screens on which he “lives” (“vida sutil, que por las blancas telas / sin bulto se desliza, al mismo tiempo / aquí y en las antípodas,” vv. 61-63) and with the billboards which display his girlfriend’s meter-and-a-half-wide smile. Their lives are fictive, illusory; their reality nothing more than their reflected images. Meanwhile, the poem’s eponymous

subject — an unnamed man present in stanzas one and five and in the refrain preceding each middle strophe — stands trembling at the curb.

In Part 2 the focus moves to this stone curb itself. And here it is identified as what it symbolically has been all along: as the brink, the edge. This is not precisely the edge of the abyss of *Fábula y signo*'s "La orilla" — or, rather, it is not the same vision or understanding of the abyss. Step by difficult step, Part 2 tries to define this brink. It is an edge, but an edge of what? The poet reminds us of some of the countless others, signal thinking and feeling human beings, who have found themselves at just such an impasse: Hamlet, deciding between being and not-being; Kierkegaard and the choice between the aesthetic or the ethical life; Heloise, having to choose between "him" and "Him". And then the speaker defines the choice as he sees it now, as that between "conocer o no conocer", v. 229.

Now, in the poem, the moment of choice, the "hora atroz", is newly described: it is the confrontation with what the poetic voice calls the "O", which always, inevitably and ubiquitously surrounds us, preventing our desired unions of opposites, forcing us instead to choose between.<sup>8</sup> And this choice, the decision to move (even if to move back), is merely, terribly, to move into another moment — "merely", because one moment is exactly like every other; "terribly", because all our moments crowd into each other endlessly, going on in eternal sameness, into eternity, which is to say into nothingness.

Mankind trembles, therefore, because choosing and not choosing (or, rather, choosing not to choose) are the same: all choices will turn out badly, as Kierkegaard wrote, and both lead ultimately to death; and yet one must endure the moment of making the choice. This is obviously still a trembling before the abyss, but the differences between earlier attitudes, through nuances, are nonetheless striking. First, this abyss is not the void; it is life — but life which now consciously encompasses death. The poet's standpoint is no longer denial, as in *Fábula y signo*, nor is it fear. Realizing that death is inescapable regardless of how we act or fail to act, the speaker instead accepts the moment of active choice. It is here where he is following Manrique and where the Catholic tradition provides a direction. The father whose dying moments are described in the "Coplas" speaks to the figure of Death when she comes to his door, saying to her, "... consiento en mi morir / con voluntad placentera." Salinas' speaker is not hoping for a Christian death in anything like the terms of the medieval poem (after all, the Christian life no longer exists: "Este río no es aquél"). But what he can do is accept actively whatever death does exist, even if with anguish rather than a Manriquean calm.

Through the end of Part 2, we can read "Hombre en la orilla" as a poem which acknowledges that neither the old Christian nor the "pagan" modern framework is any longer viable even as an ideal, and which embraces the intimate undifferentiation of life and death, as the only union of opposites which still holds. From the Catholic framework, however, the poet seizes



the belief in active acquiescence, rather than resignation, to the scheme of things, of willed participation in his fate. For this reason his expression of the will is in terms of knowing — “conocer o no conocer” — rather than of being), however awful the final knowledge is. And this is why, too, he gives the O, at the end of the poem, a final identification with the sun at its zenith, which both illuminates and blinds: “La O, / iluminadora y cega - dora, lo mismo que el sol... [/] a su irremisible cenit,” vv. 374-6 and 380). The sun at its zenith is the pillar of the world; it is the sacrificial stake, since Christ both died and was reborn at noon; and it is the mystical point — a hole through which “thought may pass out of space and time” into non-space and timelessness (Cirlot). In a sense the poem thus dramatizes the plight of the divided self, or selves, as they were defined in “El inocente”, both lost yet never losing sight of each other. For just as the self’s innocent is always, trapeze-artistlike, in a precarious balance, swaying between, so is the man on the edge, whose “choosing between” is always a midpoint, a noon which is fate (“mediodía del sino / del hombre”).

In the following poem, “Pasajero en museo”, the poetic voice reopens his interrogation from the perspective, this time, not of those failed specimens of humanity whom he viewed from the curb, but rather that of the sublime pro-ductions of humankind, hung in a museum. The first section of the poem addresses the subjects of a number of paintings, with loving and nostalgic pathos, for they are “saved”, their wisdom preserved forever; they are “lentos destiladores... de la última verdad”, “a salvo... de la corriente”, while he is outside,

del otro lado errante  
y condenado a serlo...  
que echando voy mi vida sucesiva...  
sobre el blanco quehacer de los días,  
pobre imagen del cine. (70-76)

Yet even as he compares his life to the illusory, fugitive world of the movie screen in contrast to the paintings’ fixed, perfected calm — “ya tenéis abolido lo siguiente, / lo inmediato, el terror de lo que viene”, — he lets slip phrases that betray doubts about the desirability of such a state. He speaks, for example, of “la honda **conformidad** con que aceptasteis / **cifrar** la vida en un momento, / a una mirada **reducir** los ojos”; vv. 99-101, my emphases. Thus, in the third section, still lamenting his own fate (“me veo a mí, me lloro”), he knows, in language which the next poem (dedicated to the indelible vocation of poetry) will pick up, that he will never be like them:

... nunca  
estaré con vosotros.  
Siento la orden constante por mis venas  
transcurrir, sin parada,  
de ansia a minuto, de minuto a ansia. (140-44)

Yet this inescapable escaping from himself, although he may lament it, is something which he chooses. He calls himself "lost" (v. 164), he "resigns himself" (v. 171), but he also, in the same few lines, says: "mi sangre / quiere que siga siendo, / escoge, contra mí, contra vosotros, / la gran mortalidad; el movimiento" (vv. 164-67, my emphasis). Thus his crossing the threshold is also a confirmation of the death-embracing life which is his; and the wounding beauty of this world suddenly transforms the crossing of the street into an "aventura" (vv. 177-84). The speaker leaves behind his "pensive self", alluded to in the epigraph from the "Cimetière marin"; he crosses; and in so doing he "declines eternity":

Pero ella hermana inmensa [the afternoon's beauty]  
 igual que yo declina eternidades.  
 Su pasar ella, el mío yo, aceptamos;  
 su noche, que ya viene, y la mía. (203-06; end of poem)

"Pasajero en el museo", as a poem consciously in the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, not only recognizes a precursor (Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn") in its first epigraph, but also engages in the same dialectical meditation as did Keats, arriving at an interpretation of the Ode as finally a rejection of the *urn's* proposition ("Truth is beauty, beauty truth; that is all..."). And finally, the poem is framed in Christian terms: the paintings, in the poem's second verse, are called "criaturas salvadas"; the speaker, toward the end of section 3, reenters the world "falling" and receives the world as a "sacramento, / confirmación" (vv. 177-178). Yet as "Lo inútil," poem 13, makes clear, the poem adopts the framework of an established system not simply to suggest it allegorically, or to subvert it, but to redefine, and therefore in a sense to transcend it with language.

The Manhattan street scene which inspired "Nocturno de los avisos" — the book's seventh poem, and perhaps its finest — a circus of advertising razzle-dazzle (lips blowing puffs of smoke, enormous smiles made of blinking bulbs hanging vacuously in space), parodies nature:

tus orillas, altísimos ribazos  
 sembrados de ventanas, hierba espesa  
 que a la noche rebrilla  
 con gotas de eléctrico rocío.

The speaker, walking the length of Broadway, interrogates each advertisement with mock seriousness for any possible meaning in its message. Can the "White House" be a modern Pegasus? Might the "pause that refreshes" be a significant pause — that of Paulo and Francesca in their reading, that of Christ between death and resurrection? Obviously the answers are no. The glitter and brilliance, the "rigorosas normas paralelas" of the city pattern, the mystery — the city is mysterious, brilliant, laid out according to a plan —

mask, literally, nothing. They expose the emptiness of modern life, which has no true myths; and worse, the emptiness of the void itself, more frightening because the masks so successfully disguise it.

Perhaps remarkably, the nightmare of evasion and meaninglessness which the poem portrays is, in the description, deeply moving. This may be because, as readers of an essentially urban world, and not necessarily as poets, we identify intimately with the cityscape itself; surely it is also because the poet has discovered a true metaphorical relationship between, for example, the surface world which these larger-than-life advertisements summon to consciousness and the mythical reverberations to which they are unintentionally connected, and because he exploits the basic multiple myths of the city: as symbol of man's domination over nature, as symbol of man's fall from grace, as symbol of an ultimate order. The poem's language manages, somehow, to juxtapose the glaring with the subtle, myth with mask, so that both can be contained in a pattern. Poetry and anti-poetry (Cf. the White Horse section, vv. 50 ff.) form a new kind of ode which jars and disturbs without ever seeming not to be poetry.

Thus when the speaker, at v. 116 near the end of the poem, refuses to continue walking and speculating and sits down "incrédulo de letras y de aceras" on a curb, we are prepared for his rejection of "salvation" through whisky or toothpaste, of exaltation inspired by electric lights; and for his reaffirmation of the light and "messages" of the constellations, "publicidad de Dios". Yet curiously, as Manuel Durán has pointed out (167), the speaker's affirmation is couched in the same language here as that of the rest of the poem; God, his angels, the constellations are described **commercially**: the constellations are "publicidad de Dios", they announce "supremas tiendas", and the angels who serve the soul do so "sin moneda". With this deliberate linguistic affirmation of a world which the poem seemed to have been rejecting, we realize that his rejection is not of what civilization has created; it is not a rejection of the city for a bucolic ideal, nor is it a return to either a pagan mythical world in which Pegasus really flies nor to a Christian world under God and his angels. Rather, the poem itself is a revelation. It is a deciphering of our sublimations at their most grotesque, revealing how frighteningly close to the surface our fears (and repressions) are, how easily the masks of dentifrice are stripped away to show the bone behind the lip, the death behind the desire. It also reveals how flimsily our symmetries of streets and money exchanges superimpose "order" — no better, in fact, but perhaps also no worse, than did the fictions of the ancient constellations, or of the Christian story. The value of the "old lights" and the stories told of them (whether pagan or Christian) is that they sought to understand, and to make sense of our mortality, our destiny: Even while they sublimated the motive for anguish they acknowledged it, or allowed the acknowledgment to surface. These harrowing depths are apparently disowned

by modern society, which seems to recognize the existence only of a fairytale version of life eternal — youth and glamour. Yet for all the overpowering presence of the superficial symbols of this tale, the depths lurk close to the surface. It is no accident that the majority of the commercial images which the speaker describes (and which were there to describe) utilize the mouth, the lips, the smile, that paradox of lip and bone, desire and death. Yet as the subtle change of subject in the moments before dawn, and the more lyrical tone of the poem's last verses suggest, death and birth, darkness and light, are indistinguishable not only in the horror of ultimate meaninglessness and nothingness, but also in connection with the story of creation: here, specifically, the creation of a word which can create the world. The speaker, sitting at the curb, overwhelmed by his walk and by what he has seen, seems at first simply to wait in hopelessness: for the turning off of the lights, the shining through of the stars. Yet he is also waiting for the filling of the void with light; for, finally, the sense of the world's poetry — of the world as poetry — to issue from the opening lips (a metaphor from the previous poem, "La vocación") of the sky between night and daybreak. "Nocturno de los avisos" does not explicitly remind us of this metaphor, but the staging of its final stanza, in time and tone, makes palpable another equation: lips and voice, instead of lips and bone, which, like the real light of the stars, clarifies rather than conceals.

Three poems later, and three from the end of the book, it is that voice which responds to "Nocturno de los avisos"'s tremulously hopeful speaker. "Contra esa primavera"'s first section masquerades as a pleasant romantic ode to spring — to the calendar's spring, as we are told in its first verses — eagerly awaited by everyone, everywhere. But in the second part, protagonized by an anonymous escapee from the spring of April and May, we learn what the solution to the overwhelming clutch of systems, which swallows up even the natural, might be. The escapee, against all convention and all opposition, creates his springtime wherever he finds it — in the birds that sing in January, in the poppies' opening, like icy hearts, under snow. And with this creating of spring, this symbolic going-against what is ordained by the "world", he also creates (as the poem's triumphant end proclaims) his own life: "El inventor, al fin de tantos siglos, / del gran pecado original, su vida" (vv. 161-162). "El inocente", eight poems back, searched for his sin; this is it, this "sin" which is the self-created or self-creating song (the escapee "canta su don de alegrarse sin modelo, / inventor de su propia métrica" (vv. 133-134). His life is a sin because it rebels against models, romantic in a classical world. Ben Jonson, the great classicist of English metaphysical poetry, said that poetry must offer "a patterne for living well"; but for the Romantic (or post-Romantic, like Salinas), the breaking of models, the creative, willed response to social pressure, is the solution — and poetry, language, song are its first and perhaps highest expression.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, surprisingly, *Todo más claro* does not end with this felicitous resolution, but rather with an extreme, apocalyptic poem about the destruction of the world by a nuclear bomb. “Cero” comes as a shock after a poetic evolution which finally achieves, or at least promises, transcendence. Rather than hope, “Cero” seems all despair, from the initial description of the dropping of the bomb (by a once-innocent soldier), to the poignant close-ups of young people about to be destroyed, to the survey of the devastated earth. It seems to be about the destruction of poetry as well: The sensuality of Baudelaire’s “Invitation au voyage” is transmuted in the poem’s opening “Invitación al llanto”; its second verse, “ojos, sin fin, llorando”, recalls but exaggerates the Renaissance shepherd’s lament for his unfaithful love (“Salid sin duelo, lágrimas, corriendo”). Part 2 ends with the death of a morning on the cutting edge of its certain dawn — an image haunted by Salinas’ own “alegría que es / el filo de la mañana” in a *Seguro azar* poem that hints covertly at most at the breaking of promises and moorings. The destruction elegized by the poem is presented as the annihilation of people as thinking, planning, hoping beings; people whose immense creativity — attested to by the imagining of gods, or by the poet’s ability to summon beauty from pain — is now all for nothing.

But apocalypse is only one, the public, face of the poem. The private, individual face speaks to us at the end of the poem when we learn that the speaker has been wandering the earth in search of his body; and that when he finds it he realizes that this “cadáver de los muertos que vivían / salvados de sus cuerpos pasajeros”, vv. 376-77) — this poet, that is, who was capable of giving the finite body a kind of immortality — is in fact the body of the “NO” said to time and death. The bomb, then, means two things. It is indeed the end of humankind whose destruction the poet sings here, sweetly and terribly. But it is also the end not only of the poetry of false hope, but of false hope itself. The emptiness, indeed the violent emptying of the planet is the necessary setting for the acceptance of death and the acknowledgment of the void; only thus are society’s systems fully acknowledged as fictive limitations which can be transcended, only thus can one really invent oneself, only thus is everything truly clearer.

#### NOTES

1 As an admirer of Shelley and of English Romanticism in general, Salinas was surely familiar with this essay.

2 This is not quite the stance of Salinas’ 1947 book on tradition and originality, which asserted that the poet, to be great, must openly embrace the tradition; here, the drama which evolves in an unconscious one, and it is both less facile or naive and more conflictive.

For more detail on the theme of poetic identity in Salinas’ poetry, see my essay in *Hispanófila*.

3 Even the ecstatic mystical union of *El contemplado* can be read this way: as a specular bonding which answers a profound but essentially narcissistic need.

4 It is this resolution which informs all of *Confianza*, Salinas' last collection.

5 The collection as Salinas apparently originally conceived it consisted of twelve long poems. He later inserted a tripartite poem ("Entretiempo romántico") first intended for *Largo lamento*, which he had failed to get published as a separate book. For the purposes of this essay, I am ignoring that trio of poems when I refer to numbering.

6 The poem in fact says that the innocent self's words are made of light which, when the poet writes them, have already become "penumbras, / luces mal traducidas" (vv. 144-45).

7 Because of its relevance to "Hombre en la orilla" and other poems of *Todo más claro*, it may be helpful to reproduce the text almost in its entirety of the earlier "La orilla":

Basta, no hay que pedir más,  
 luz, amor, treinta de abril.  
 Hay que fingir que ya tienes  
 bastante, que estás saciado,  
 que te sobra lo que queda  
 de abril  
 después del treinta de abril.  
 Dejarlo...  
 Te irás  
 sin sospechar que estuviste  
 allí al borde de lo último.  
 Porque aquello, fecha, beso  
 — cuando tú te despediste  
 te parecía lo eterno —,  
 era lo último.  
 Detrás  
 el fin sin remedio, el fondo  
 duro y seco de la nada.  
 Lo que hubiese visto tú  
 si llegas a pedir más  
 abril al treinta de abril.

It is interesting that the preface to *Todo más claro*, whimsically attempting to justify its function, plays with the idea of the book as a brink, from which the unprepared reader, expecting prose, might plummet into the unknown depths of its poetry, perhaps to reemerge on the other side of the world and never be seen again. The whimsy of this conceit, developed at some length, should not mask its seriousness. For Salinas, the experience of the reader of poetry should be exactly as he describes it here, as the poem "Contra esa primavera" will corroborate.

8 The possible significance of the "O" as the symbol of this confrontation is multiple: the O of the word "orilla"; the O as the omega point, as what in English might be called the "zero hour"; the O as a zero, an infinite nothingness; the O as the vowel reminding us of the bottom-line choice, echoed in the poet's summary of

that choice, “conocer o no conocer”; the O as the spontaneous cry of horror and of recognition. Most pertinent of all, though, is the O as a symbolic geometrical figure (and here we might recall that Salinas himself defines the “orilla” as geometric: “Esta es la orilla. De piedra / Geométrica. Ni égloga / Ni remanso”; Part 2, v. 1-3). The O is self-enclosed, allowing no escape — like the closed system of Part 2’s bourgeois, unthinking representatives, for whom life is a series of reflections of the self, giving only the illusion of direction. Moving out of this circular trap, says Salinas, according exactly with Lacan, means moving from the imaginary to the symbolic, which involves the repression or “death” of the innocent, authentic self:

¿Te matarás lo mejor,  
sin saber que era tu ángel?  
No hay escape.  
Tan sólo por una muerte  
tiene salida la O. (323-7; end Part 2.)

This interpretation also accords with the “law” of “El inocente” (vv. 104 and, especially, 159), which decrees the perpetual separation of the innocent, believing self from the self subject to externally imposed systems.

9 See García Tejera for some interesting evidence of how Salinas fits in the Romantic tradition.

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