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Some considerations about the books of the literary canon *

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Abstract

In the following work, it is raised the importance in education of key elements such as creativity and divergent thinking. This exhibition has as its main objective the review of studies on visual impairment and creativity. We propose a systematized reflection of the synthetic quantitative estimation of all the available studies, proposing a theoretical framework relating creativity in the education of students with visual deficiency, providing personal assessments. Within the conclusions drawn, the role of creative potential is evidenced, through divergent thinking in the creation of concepts and ideas, for problem solving, with interest not only in education but in any field of life.

Keywords: Visual deficiency, creativity, bibliographic review, inclusive education, divergent thinking.

“Every book that is worth reading has been written by the Spirit”

Bernard Shaw

Introduction

After rereading the classic works, as Italo Calvino says: “The classics are those books of which it is usually heard saying: I am rereading ... and I am never reading ...” (2009: 13), it is experienced that something has changed in us. Although the feeling of perplexity and, in turn, familiarity is lost when it passes the moment of reading, the images that the classics record in the mind become so influential in what we are, that they may seem more real to us than certain experiences that we have lived in our own flesh.

At the risk of sounding too personal, I think that as well as the image of Gustavo Aschenbach, the main character of *Death in Venice* (1983), standing on the beach, delighted to see in the distance how the beautiful young Tadzio enters the sea, and in the next instant, Aschenbach himself falling dead, just as this image is inevitable once the readers of the novel are confronted with the notion of the beautiful, likewise the time I went down with my brother on his bicycle without braces by the steep skirt of the White Elephant defines what my personal self-associates with the notion of speed. However, the image of Aschenbach died seconds after having seen beauty is universal and my experience with my brother is just an individual memory. Aschenbach communicates something that any citizen of the world can assume as representative of the relationship of the human with the beautiful; offers an experience that is not limited by the incidents that occur to a particular subject in a specific space and time. The universal images of

the classics and their ability to grasp transcendental aspects of human life can be postulated as devices that increase the possible and real experiences of our inner life. In the article *The cultural look (La mirada cultural, 2012)*, the writer and essayist Rigoberto Gil describes literature as one of the symbolic instances that constitute worldviews, modes of interpretation of reality:

The cinema, literature, journalism, newspapers, letters, archival documents, collection books, photo albums, advertising sheets, souvenirs and many other materials that constitute the symbolic heritage of individuals, serve as referring evaluators and constructors of the picture of the time contained in the corpus of the object that motivates the study (2012: 93-94).

This document risks the idea that the classical works of literature offer a certain universal symbolic stock, from which a certain conception of man and the world can be obtained that goes beyond subjective experiences. Gustavo Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* (1983); Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* (2010); the Mexican people in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1994), and Altazor in *Altazor or the parachute trip* (1931) are four literary characters, which despite being creations of the imagination, may have more rockiness, more materiality than some of the real experiences that the readers of these works have had. In fact, these four protagonists have more persistence in the world than we do. Since 430 BC, Oedipus has been in the minds of men and will surely continue to persist in them. After each one of us ceases to exist and we become land and minerals; Aschenbach, Oedipus, the Mexican people, and Altazor will have as much psychological and universal life as they have today in our minds. Harold Bloom characterizes as a power of: “Invasion of our reality” (2012: 33) to the power that certain characters of literature have to

install themselves in our selves. I consider that the condition of timelessness and universality of these characters, once it is sown in our inner reality, allows it to spread. The boundaries of the self-open because the specific and local circumstances of our individual lives are placed in parentheses while we receive the flow of existence of these universal characters that high literature dispenses.

I propose three ideas to show how the classic works of literature expand the inner world of its readers. The first: each person has an inner self that, to a large extent, is constituted from their specific experiences, or what is the same, each reader has a personal identity constituted from the experiences he has had. The second: there is a series of universal experiences, of images and sensations that exist independently of an individual self; Don Quixote fighting against windmills and Raskolnikov murdering the old usurer with an ax are examples of this. And the third: classic works, for this case, the four protagonists of the works referred to are a source of these universal experiences. Once installed in our inner world the tragedy of Oedipus in its search for truth, or the vitality that Aschenbach re-encounters in the contemplation of beauty, once the Mexican solitude described by Octavio Paz has been fixed in our mind, or the *Tralalí tralalá*, from the poetic language of Altazor, our relationship with truth, beauty, solitude and language expands beyond our personal and historical limits.

Harold Bloom: The Daemon and the Psyche

“But all poetry is mysterious; no one knows at all what he has been given to write.”

Jorge Luis Borges

When talking about the canon or the classics of literature it is difficult to stop evoking Harold Bloom. While his conception of the literary canon has received significant criticism for making him depend exclusively on Shakespeare, for Bloom, it defines not only those who succeeded him but also those who preceded him, something is forceful and incontestable in his proposal: literature it is not an ideological or political program for social salvation. In elegy to the canon (2002) text that serves as a prologue to *The Western Canon*, Bloom denounces the politicization of literature. The most estimable works of literature are not because of their vocation to gestate a social change, or because of their value as a historical or linguistic record, they are because of their capacity to expand the freedom of men. Thus, to

face the dishonorable role of literature as historical or ideological proselytism, Bloom proposes as a value something that has to do with the possibility that literature gives to teach us to hear better when we talk to ourselves. Although this idea seems proven, since it is akin to certain sensations that we as readers have had, it presupposes a series of philosophical and literary commitments that are not so clear. Is there inside us several voices that allow us to talk to ourselves? If there are such voices, are they ours or are they of others? How are the characters of high literature related to those voices and how can they be extended? Our inner self? In *The anatomy of influence* (2011) offers a key to try to understand the idea that high literature teaches us to hear when we talk to ourselves, allowing us to expand our consciousness.

Bloom says that in the soul of each man, it can be seen an empirical self: the psyche, and a divine or transcendental self: the Daemon. The first reflects our individual and subjective life. Thus, we are children of an era and by living in a specific space and time we are related to a series of unique and unrepeatable experiences. As individuals we are subject to certain places, moments, ideas and emotions that to a large extent determine our relationship with ourselves and with others. In his interpretation of the psyche, for Bloom this includes our individual and circumstantial self. However, the inner life of people is not limited exclusively to the experiences of the psyche. The desire for transcendence and universality is also an essential part of the human soul. While the management of our self is inevitable and necessary with the specific time and space in which we live, so is the desire to go beyond our particular limitations. For Bloom the Daemon is the inner voice that inhabits each person and urges him to go beyond his individual and immediate desires.

Following the Socratic idea, the Daemon [1] is a voice that imposes itself autonomously on the individual, offering him a knowledge that goes beyond his subjective and casuistic considerations. The Daemon represents the voice of universal wisdom, a voice that rests within people and that can be heard once we silence the noise of our intestinal needs and earthly ambitions. Bloom points out that the superficiality, immediacy and excessive individuality of the new generations, in terms of Maestro Cruz Kronfly: “The narcissism and the banality of the subjects of the Internet and social networks” (2014), makes the voice of the Daemon heard every time less. “In our world of

screens --computer, television, cinema (smartphones should be added)-- the new generations apparently grow deprived of their Daemons (2011: 28).

Made these distinctions between the psyche and the Daemon, we suggest that the classics of literature are part of the voice of the Daemon. Although each work is embedded in its historical moment, the Daemon that persists in them guarantees its transcendence and universality. The temporal and spatial ubiquity of characters such as Aschenbach, Oedipus Rex and Altazor can be understood because they are part of that universal voice that discovers images, symbols and truths that go beyond the temporal and geographical limits of people. The authors of classical literature are like Diotimas: seers who decipher the messages that the gods engrave on the hearts of humans. The characters and situations they recreate in their works are the written translation of universal wisdom. In the same tenor Borges says that a book, and it should be specified, a book of high literature, is one that goes beyond the poor intentions of the author; it is a work that is written by the Spirit. Borges writes:

“If I say:

Flowing waters, pure, crystalline,

Trees that you are looking at them

Green meadow, fresh full

It is evident that the three verses consist of eleven syllables. It has been loved by the author, it is voluntary. But what is that compared to a work written by the Spirit, what is that compared to the concept of Divinity that condescends literature and dictates a book?” (1985: 19).

The expansion and freedom that reaches the internal life of people through the works of the canon is explained, then, as they awaken the Daemon of the readers. Aschenbach, Oedipus Rex and Altazor enliven the inner and universal voice that underlies each subject. The partial vision that each one of us forms of our life and of things is silenced when, through Sophocles, Thomas Mann, Octavio Paz and Vicente Huidobro, the individual self is absorbed and transported to the region of the spirit. Says Bloom quoting the From the sublime of Longinus: “When touched by the truly sublime, the soul is naturally exalted, rises to the proud height, is filled with joy and boasting, as if she had created this thing she has heard “(2012: 32).

As a reader who has concerns, interests, hopes and beliefs in what follows I will try to show the way in which Oedipus Rex, Death in Venice, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and Altazor elevate the self to the region of the universal. I will propose some of the experiences of the four protagonists of these works as cases of experiences that are part of the universal voice of the Daemon. Oedipus tearing his eyes, to avoid seeing the truth he discovered about his existence; Aschenbach died placidly after feeling free by the contemplation of the beautiful; Mexicans celebrating death, and Altazor untying language are the voices of the Daemon translated into written words and images. Sophocles, Thomas Mann, Octavio Paz and Vicente Huidobro, respectively, the creators of the characters in these four works are the chosen ones. The Daemon has made a revelation to them and they communicate their message to men.

Methodologically I will extrapolate the technique that Milan Kundera uses for the construction of the ego of its characters. That is, to apprehend their: “existential codes (2006: 44). As well as in the unbearable lightness of being (2008) the words weight and lightness are decisive to define Thomas, the protagonist of the novel, in the case of this document, the question will be: What are some of those experiences that make up the universal self that transcends individuality and underlies as an inner voice in all humans?

Truth and knowledge in the case of Oedipus the king; beauty and contemplation in The Death in Venice; loneliness and confinement in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*; language and fall in Altazor I propose them as the existential codes of these works, as well as terms that collect part of the universal and transcendental experience of the human. The truth, beauty, loneliness and language are part of the basic structure with which we experience reality. Regardless of the particular truths that each individual has to face, the type of specific relationship he has with the beautiful, solitude or language these four notions collect some of the threads that make up the universal and timeless self of man.

Oedipus Rex: tragedy of knowing the truth

Race ephemeral and miserable, daughter of chance and pain. Why do you force me to reveal to you what you do not know about? Nietzsche

It is a historical truth that the Greeks decided the course of Western reason. The treatises of logic of

Aristotle are the zenith of the history of logos, which starts in the pre-Socratic against the myth, becomes soul and flesh in the dialectical conversations of Socrates and system in *The Organon*, (1979) the logical book of Aristotle. Not so popular historically, the knowledge of the passions are also part of the legacy of Greek culture. A human geography of passions should always go through the study of Greek tragedy. In this context, Oedipus Rex rises like the Socrates, no longer giving reason, but of human passions. He embodies admiration and shame, love and hate, joy and sadness, piety and revenge. Once the search for the existential truths that Oedipus undertook is followed, these feelings can be seen as his own, as an essential part of what Oedipus is.

Sophocles begins his work by presenting two issues that are at the heart of the self of all humans: the longing for truth and the repudiation of fear. Although, it seems that lies and deception are an essential part of who we are, the truth is more basic, because we can only lie and deceive knowing what is true. We lie when knowing the true we say what is not true.

The citizens of Thebes are gathered near the altars, they carry bouquets of olive trees and laurel. They beg their divinities to eliminate the calamities that loom in the city. Men and women, young and old, wise priests, shepherds and farmers carry their heads down, for the plague reduces everything that has life in Thebes. Through one of his priests the citizens beg their king, Oedipus, to save her from suffering. Oedipus in the past has proved its enormous value and ability to redeem the Thebans from misfortune. He defeated the Sphinx, who with his shadow of death obscured life in Thebes. An evil that seemed immortal was defeated by Oedipus. Now, when the plague seems invincible, the king of Thebes is once again the only human to whom he can turn to stop it. Thus, the people represent the fear of calamities that seem to escape the control of the people and Oedipus the courage and strength that can overcome evil.

The priest tells Oedipus:

Oh Oedipus, the wisest of all! We implore all of us here as supplicants to get us some help, whether it be after hearing the message of some god, or knowing of some mortal. Well, I see that the facts carried out by the councils of those who have experience are effective. Hey, oh the best of mortals! Straighten the city. Hey! Prepare your guard, because this land now celebrates you as its savior for the favor of yesteryear (2010: 79).

In the face of evil, a typical human reaction is to beg God or the gods to eliminate the events that cause it. The Thebans initially face evil by praying to the gods. They are gathered *en masse* next to the temples carrying branches of olive and laurel to make public their pleas. The evil is so great and widespread that it has left the intimate lives of the Thebans, becoming a matter of State. That is why the prayers are now part of public life.

But the Thebans, through the mouth of the priest, appeal to another human form of facing evil, that is: knowledge. They appeal to knowledge of the past. By experience they know that Oedipus can overcome that which is untamable by the entreaties or boldness of ordinary men. Oedipus, the wisest among all, now has the request to know the cause that has generated the suffering in Thebes and, once he knows it, offer the method to overcome it.

Although the tragedy is written against the background of the gods and their capricious way of playing with men, Sophocles represents Oedipus and the citizens of Thebes as people who assume that to overcome evil it is necessary first of all to know the truth. In fact, Creon, the brother-in-law of Oedipus, after going to the sanctuary of Delphi, knows some clues that will allow the king of Thebes and his citizens to discover the cause of evil. Creon heard from the god Phoebus that the misfortune is due to an impurity that has existed for years in the city, and that it is necessary to eradicate so that it does not continue to grow. That misfortune is the same as that had once saddened Thebes with the death of his King Laius. Finding the true culprit of Laius's death and doing justice by murdering or banishing the murderer is the way to atone for the pain of Thebes. Thus, discovering the truth is in the work of Sophocles the way to free men from the fear and suffering that is reducing them. Oedipus the King, the wisest and greatest of men can save Thebes; not using his strength or physical agility, but his ability to discern and grasp the truth.

In this company Oedipus embarks, and as an expert researcher begins the search for Laius's killer. It is worth mentioning that this way of approaching the book, apparently, refers us to a very accepted interpretation of Oedipus Rex. It has been said that this is a police story in which the detective, without knowing it, is the murderer himself. However, and returning to the initial idea under which I intend to present the four works, it seems to me that the knowledge Oedipus is seeking is his own: Oedipus

wants first of all to know who he is. Although at the beginning of the work he seems oblivious to the murder of Laius, only a few pages later the search for Oedipus is the search for the truth about his own existence. Socrates urged the knowledge of himself: “Know yourself” and Oedipus assumes this mandate, even suspecting the calamity that this knowledge brings.

The blind and fortune teller Tiresias sows in Oedipus the possibility that he himself is the murderer of Laius. After being rebuked to say what he knows, Tiresias affirms without hesitation that Oedipus is the murderer. In addition, he blames him for crimes superior to Laius’s murder, such as failing natural laws, and sentencing him to greater calamities than those that may arise from the murder:

And I tell you: that man who, for a while, you are looking for threats and proclamations because of the murder of Laius is here. It is said that he is a foreigner established here, but later it will be revealed that he is a Theban by his lineage and will not be pleased with such luck. Blind, when before he had sight, and poor, instead of rich, he will move to a strange land, feeling his way with a cane. It will be clear that he himself is, at the same time, brother and father of his own children, son and husband of the woman from whom he was born and of the same race, as well as murderer of his father. Come in and reflect on this. And if you catch me in a lie, say that I am not right in the divinatory art (2010: 98).

Although Oedipus rejects these ideas with anger, assuming them as a trick of his brother-in-law Creon to keep the kingdom, there is already in Oedipus the sting of doubt about the outcome of events. From the beginning to the investigation of the truth, it is not seen as a simple external agent that must look for a murderer. Oedipus knows that events in one way or another begin to involve him. From now on, the question will not be limited to knowing who killed Laius, but to recognize if what Tiresias says is true or false.

After manifesting to his wife, Jocasta, the suspicion that has Creon using Tiresias wanted to dethrone him, tells the terrible words that the old fortune teller said. Jocasta increases the doubts of Oedipus, because when questioning the divinatory art of Tiresias and defending the appeal to the facts in the search for the truth, without wanting it, he warns about an event that would validate the possibility that Oedipus was the culprit of the death of the king. Laius was murdered

in the region of Phocis, a place where Oedipus, before arriving in Athens, committed a murder. Faced with this new fact, Oedipus begins to feel that definitely the search he undertakes is to know who he is. He declares: “Woe to me, unfortunate! It seems to me that I have just hurled myself unknowingly into terrible curses.” “I wonder, with tremendous anguish, if the fortune teller was not right” (2010: 112).

From this moment of the work neither the wisdom nor courage of Oedipus, or obeying the mandate of the god to banish the impurity of Thebes, inclusive, nor the suffering of citizens is relevant. All the work is directed to present a man who desperately seeks to find the truths that allow him to discover who he is. Step by step Oedipus goes gripping the truth and, despite the terrible, continues in his search. Once the messenger arrives from the lands of Corinth, Oedipus’s homeland and learns that his father is not Polynices, that he can really be Laius’s son and murderer. Despite the fatality of the final truth, Oedipus does not skimp on seeking it. When Jocasta rebukes him to stop wanting to know what is best ignored, he persists in proving conclusively what he is. It is worth mentioning Jocasta, because she is a symbol of the tranquility and security that living in ignorance gives, she represents the possibility of existing in the comfort and tranquility of illusions, for which we must turn our back on the cold and sentencing truth:

No, by the gods! If something worries you about your own life, do not investigate it. It is enough that I am distressed. “Obey, I beg you, do not do it” Oedipus replies: “I could not obey you in not knowing clearly.” Jocasta says to him: “Oh hapless, never get to know who you are!” (2010: 129).

The outcome we know. The old servant of King Laius appears before Oedipus and tells him the facts with which he definitively proves that he is a son, and at the same time, husband of Jocasta, murderer and son of Laius, destroys his eyes with the clasps of his mother’s dress and wife, who lies dead after committing suicide:

Once she was lying down, the unfortunate one on the ground, it was terrible to see what followed: she ripped the gold brooches from her dress with which she was adorned, and lifting them, she hit them with the eye sockets, at the same time saying things like these: that they would not see him, nor the evils he had suffered, nor the horrors he had committed, but that he would be in the dark the rest of the time not

to see those he should not and not know the ones he wanted. (...) He was striking his eyes with the clasps. The bloody pupils stained the cheeks and did not distill dripping drops of blood, but everything was wet with a black rain of hailed blood (2010: 139).

Oedipus destroying his eyes not to see the truths he discovered is an experience that is consciously or unconsciously sown in the minds of all the readers of this tragedy, an experience that emerges once we as subjects are required to find some of our fundamental truths. Oedipus' experience with the truth is offered to the readers of Sophocles as a profound and not always evident feature of what can or does happen when we go after the search for our most basic truths. Although the truth can save, as at the beginning of the work the Thebans considered it, paradoxically, it can also condemn, as Oedipus lived from his flesh. The interest to know the truth finds in the tragedy of Oedipus one of its most crude and universal manifestations. There is in every man who persists in finding the truth, regardless of the consequences, a feature of Oedipus' life.

Aschenbach: the contemplation of the beautiful

The allusions that in *The Death in Venice* (1983) or in *Story of my life (Relato de mi vida)* (2016) makes Thomas Mann to Friedrich Schiller can be more than an excuse to understand, from the humanistic concerns of both writers, the protagonist of *Death in Venice*: Gustavo Aschenbach. For Schiller the human spirit is configured at its base by two impulses: the sensible impulse and the formal impulse (1795). The first connects man with the sensations that the external world offers to the senses, the second pushes the subjects toward the attainment of abstract ideals; He urges him to follow moral criteria. Human formation must aspire to harmoniously reconcile these two impulses. In fact, those who reach their equilibrium are participants in what Schiller calls Vivid Form, which is the ability to recognize and contemplate the abundant beauty that exists in the world.

To a certain extent, the protagonist of *Death in Venice* represents this humanistic aspiration. Aschenbach is a man who has deserved the recognition of the people for his honest and laborious work as a writer. He has the ability to control and direct properly the obsessive human desires, causing, in the men of his generation, the selfishness, the frivolity and the brutality that defines them as a banal generation. In his books, which are not the product of the natural and spontaneous talent, but of the studied discipline,

characters that embody promising moral values for the correct formation of citizens are highlighted. Some of his works, without necessarily being moralistic, are included in the schools as part of the texts that young people must study. The certainty that constant work and mastery of the passions is the way to achieve a justified life, Aschenbach sums it up when in one of his books he writes:

Almost all the great things that exist are great because they have been created against something, in spite of something: in spite of pains and tribulations, of poverty and abandonment; despite body weakness, vice and passion (1983: 20).

Aschenbach, then, is an honest professional who knows his trade in depth and executes it well, not only because he manages to make sense of his life, but because he knows that with his work he becomes an exemplary man to his fellow citizens. But Aschenbach, once he decides to go on vacation to air his work routine, is faced with the vision of beauty, in which it is for him his purest and highest form. He sees in a hotel in Venice a young Polish man of such overwhelming beauty that he does not hesitate to assume it as the Platonic ideal of the beautiful. Tadzio of fourteen years makes him undertake to Aschenbach a new way in his life, that one of the sensibility stimulated before the perception of the beautiful. Although there is no hint of lasciviousness in the merely contemplative relationship of Aschenbach to Tadzio, the systematic and quiet routines of life, achieved by Aschenbach through the constant cultivation of reason, will be assaulted before the contemplation of the beauty of Tadzio. His only visual perception is enough to fill him with sensations that take him out of his ordinary life, elevating him to the kingdom of the gods:

The vision of that living figure, so delicate and so manly at the same time, with its moist curls and beautiful as those of a young god who, coming from deep in the sky and the sea, escaped to the power of the current, evoked evocations Mystical, it was like a stanza of a primitive poem that spoke of the original times, the beginning of the form and the birth of the gods (1983: 63-64).

For Aschenbach this kind of beauty is so superior, so unworthy of him, that he is unable to overcome his shyness to cross a few words with the young man. In this regard, a scene in the novel is memorable. The part of the beach destined for the guests of the hotel becomes the environment in which Aschenbach

contemplates the beauty of the young man every day. He consecrates a chair in which he rests every morning while at a distance he sees him play, run, swim and share with his family and friends. Both, being part of a scene that is repeated, seem to establish a certain relationship of familiarity; although it is Aschenbach who is always attentive to the young man. One night, while Aschenbach was walking through the terrace of the hotel, he unexpectedly goes to Tadzio. The attraction that produced him was such:

As he did not expect the kind appearance, as it surprised him, he did not have time to compose the expression of his face calmly and with dignity. In this way, when her gaze met the boy's, the joy, the surprise and the admiration must have been openly expressed in her. At that moment it was when Tadzio smiled at him (1983: 98).

Faced with this fatal gift, Aschenbach flees from the light of the terrace, seeks refuge in the darkness; with fear, tenderness and admiration he says "You should not smile like that! You should not smile like that to anyone!" (1983: 99).

Aschenbach resigns to the predominance that his reason exerts over him and is carried away by the aesthetic enjoyment that Tadzio's vision generates. But it is a sensitive delight that does not ignore the aspiration to intellectual and spiritual ideals. While it can be said that at the beginning of the work Aschenbach is dominated by what we have called since Schiller the rational impulse, and once it is in Venice, and is alienated by the beauty Tadzio, by the sensitive impulse, the figure of Aschenbach suggests that beauty is a means through which people can rise to the realm of the spiritual. Citing Plato's *Phaedo*, Mann writes about Beauty: "She is, hear it well, the only form of the spiritual that we receive with our body, and which our senses can withstand." Beauty is the path of man sensitive to the spirit, it is path, it is medium "(1983: 87). It can be said that this is a gesture of Thomas Mann that elevates beauty over the rigor and tyranny of reason, but in turn, does not condemn it to the excess and lasciviousness of pure sensations. Aschenbach achieves the balance of the formal impulse and the sensitive impulse, the intellectual harmony called by Schiller: Living Form.

The complacency that lives in the hotel does not stop you from knowing that a plague is looming over the region that is claiming lives. It is a real danger, because it has been noticed that foods such as vegetables, meat and milk could be infected.

Aschenbach thought about the possibility of returning home. However, when he recalled the mechanical march of his existence in Munich, and contrasted it with the vivacity that through the contemplation of the beauty of Tadzio had reached, he decided to stay at the hotel. In fact, he saw himself witnessing the possible chaos generated in Venice by the plague.

The awareness of death and the recognition that the significant events that were living in the hotel were ephemeral produce in Aschenbach a break to the control of their passions. It is at this moment, and not when compelled by the beauty of Tadzio, in which the protagonist of Death in Venice becomes a man enslaved by his passions. Without waiting for it, he ends up transformed into the dreadful man he saw on the ship when he started his trip to Venice: a fake young man. The temperate Aschenbach is seen sitting in a hairdresser being made up to look young. His obscene reaction to seeing himself in the mirror contrasts with the contemplative states when he is observing Tadzio.

The assumption that spirituality can be achieved through beauty is mutated in the Aschenbach that comes out of the hairdressing salon: "Aschenbach went out drunk with happiness, confused and fearful, his tie was red in color, and his broad hat was ribbon of profuse colors "(1983: 133).

Through an extensive quotation from Plato, Thomas Mann at this time reminds us that beauty, while it can elevate man to the sphere of the spirit, can also throw him into the abyss. But Aschenbach still has a last moment with Tadzio. When realizing that the suitcases that are prepared in the vestibule are of the family of the young person, one goes to his beach chair, contemplates from the distance and for the last time to Tadzio. In a final, which personally, suggests that Gustavo Aschenbach regained the dignity and freedom that gave him the contemplation of the beautiful, gets up to see Tadzio and falls flat on his face. He dies while seeing a celestial Tadzio who from the distance seems to smile at him and say hello:

The beholder was there, sitting in the same place where for the first time the look of those dreamy eyes had crossed his. His head, leaning on the back of the chair, followed anxiously the movements of the walker. At a certain moment he got up to find the look, but he fell flat on his face, so that his eyes had to look from bottom to top, while his face took on the tired, sweetly faint expression of a deep numbness. However, it seemed to him that, from afar, the pale

and kind young man smiled and greeted him (1983: 142).

Beauty, one of the fundamental concepts of human life, is illuminated in *Death in Venice* through the fictional experiences recreated in the figure of Aschenbach. The impulse to contemplate or to engulf it, and the risk that it frees or enslaves, pass as much by the sensible disposition of the subjects as by its intellectual vocation. A man dying on a beach, rejoicing and liberated by the almost celestial vision of the beautiful is one of the universal experiences that the voice of the Daemon has given to the literature of Thomas Mann. The ordinary subjects, those who are made of flesh and bone, face the agony and liberation generated by the recognition of beauty in the other or in the other. Gustavo Aschenbach is the symbol of these past sensations of the beautiful that accompany the life of humans of all times.

Octavio Paz: “Geometry does not replace myths”

The Labyrinth of Solitude (1994) written by Octavio Paz when he was just over 30 years old, testifies to the immense intelligence and spiritual richness of the Mexican Nobel (Prize). He is one of the few Hispanic writers that Harold Bloom includes in his book *Geniuses: a mosaic of one hundred creative and exemplary minds* (2012). The book may well be presented as one of the projects to praise and learn from the intimacy of the Latin American people, especially the Mexican people. Although in the last chapter of the book: *The Dialectic of Solitude*, Paz's reflections lead to the description of loneliness, not of Mexican man, but of every son of the industrial and technological age.

Nine parts make up the book. Although each one is autonomous, since it describes a historical and social feature of the Mexican being, a backbone unifies the whole book: the Mexicans and their historical and sociological uprooting. Paz shows that the great Mexican tragedy is the lack of communion with its roots, this condemns them to loneliness. Being taken from their ancestors, Mexicans are pariahs within their own land; they live alone, exiled within their own souls. But Paz, and this is one of the most valuable achievements of the book, shows that the uprooting is not only of Mexicans, but of humanity, hence the loneliness of all peoples.

In the first chapter entitled *El pachuco and other extremes* Paz asks about the identity of Mexicans: What is it to be Mexican? This question will reverberate throughout the book. *Pachucos*, a group

of Mexicans living in Los Angeles who, because of the unique way of dressing and acting, show a certain identity, seem to reveal important aspects to answer the question. Paz discovers that the *Pachuco* is a contradiction. He is neither gringo nor Mexican, he does not assimilate the civilization in which he lives because he hates it, he knows it does not belong to him, and when they feel like pariahs of Mexico, nor they assume themselves as Mexicans either. Despite the exaggerated and repeated behavior of *Pachucos*, they lack identity, they are only superficial:

Pachuco has lost all its inheritance: language, religion, customs and beliefs. Only one body and one soul remains in the open, helpless before all eyes. His disguise protects him, and at the same time, highlights and isolates him: he hides it and exhibits it (1994: 17).

Paz presages from the beginning of his work, and from this subgroup of Mexicans, the results of his research: Mexico, humans in general, no longer have an identity. The lack of communion of *Pachucos* with their existential condition is a symptom of man in general. Just as *Pachucos* have fought with Mexico and with the gringos, the men have revealed themselves against the Universe. Paz says that the meaning of life is in: “Ensuring an order in which consciousness and innocence coincide, man and nature” (p.30) but having broken that order men walk like *Pachucos* of the universe: alone, exiled in their own rebellion.

In the second chapter called *Mexican Masks*, two themes develop peace: Women and lies. He concludes that the Mexican is a dissimulator of his inner reality, he flees from himself and from others. It is closed, in it its essential being consists. The Mexican does not open up, he does not let himself know about the other, because this makes him feel humiliated, that's why he simulates, he mimics. Remember Paz that when Mexicans should excuse themselves for something, they do not say, “Excuse me, sir,” but “Disimule señor.” Hence, it is understood because “splitting”, opening up to the other, is the worst shame a Mexican can suffer. In order not to split or open to the other, it hides to the point of preferring to be nothing. Paz says that the Mexican does not like himself:

I remember that one afternoon, as I heard a slight noise in a room next to mine, I asked aloud: who is walking around? And the voice of a servant recently arrived from her town answered: “It's nobody, sir, it's me” (1994: 49).

With respect to women for Peace, Mexicans are also contradictory, women themselves are contradictory. Instruments are known, only functional beings within the closed machismo of Mexico, but at the same time, they are recognized as sacred beings. Paz says that as passive women become beloved goddesses, being that embodies the stable and ancient elements of the universe: earth, mother and virgin. But for Mexicans, femininity is never an end in itself, as is manhood, because women by their natural condition have to open up; the women are cracked. Solitude returns and framed, because not opening to the other and denying oneself condemns them to be locked in their bodies.

For Paz, only at parties do Mexicans flee from themselves, they open up for instants. Because of its importance and recurrence, each town has a saint and for every saint there is a party. Among them, *The shout party (La fiesta del grito)* stands out, in which the contained soul of the Mexicans exploits giving each other at moments. “The Mexican does not have fun: he wants to surpass himself, to jump the wall of his solitude that the rest of the year isolates him (1994: 53).

The characteristic of his party is opulence. There is an excess of everything: food, drink, laughter, tears, feelings and people. In them, Paz sees a way, albeit a momentary one, of understanding Mexican desires and wishes. In the revelry they are imaginative, open to their present and past, to the sacred and arcane. The obstacles of their daily lives are forgotten. There are no individuals, there is a collectivity, there is no past or future, there is only the continuous present. Although for Paz, in the end, there is so much content in the soul of the Mexicans for their fear of giving themselves to the other than at the parties rather than opening up: they explode and scatter.

Along with *The shout party (La fiesta del grito)* the celebrations to death are telling in the Mexican soul. When considering existence as a chaotic sum of events, Mexicans do not fear death, it does not end with any sense of life. Contrast this with the way the modern world assumes death. While in this they deny it, Mexicans assume it as a constant part of reality; they even turn it into their toy; although they do not run away, they do not look for it either. It is a Mexican saying: “If they have to kill me tomorrow, let them kill me once”. The almost indifference towards death reveals again in Paz the Mexican uprooting, its loneliness. Only when one is indolent to life can one have indifference before death.

In the following three chapters: *The children of Malinche, Conquista and Colonia*, and *From independence to revolution*, once Paz understands that the loneliness of the Mexican is due to her hermetic (character), he begins a journey through the history of this nation to understand the cause of this self-exile. Not before warning that this secrecy could be a void of spirit, an inner nothingness. In fact, Paz describes the worker of the industrial age: the workers who reduce their lives to the factories, as subjects without soul. Parts of a large machine in which, as isolated parts, they only exist as long as they fulfill a function.

After this image that puts the loneliness of the global human as the subject of his book, Paz analyzes certain words, certain linguistic expressions of the Mexicans, because he assumes that being said in sensitive moments can represent his collective soul. Study the expression “*Chingar*”. Check that the hermetic character is the sign of the Mexican, because the worst insult is that someone is told that he is fucking. To be *chingado* is to be cracked, is to be opened by the other. It is letting the other go violently or cunningly into the soul. On the contrary, the one who *chinga (fucks)* reduces her in her nakedness. The father is *The Great Chingon*, the mother is the *chingada (fucked)*. The male is the one that is closed and opening to the other the conquest; the mother is the one who is open and conquered. *La Malinche*, the woman who was subdued by Cortés is the *chingada (fucked)*. For Paz in the background, as if it were a genetic inheritance, Mexicans deny themselves. They know that they are sons of the fuck, children of the *Malinche*, all are the product of a defeat, of a mother and a king that was opened to the other.

At this point Paz plunges into the roots of Mexican indigenous history. Describe a king: Moctezuma who opens to Hernán Cortés the doors of the empire without any resistance. Paz emphasizes that in the pre-Hispanic era there was a civilization, a sovereign, warlike and religious people. But sovereignty, confidence in the strength of struggle and arcane religion are lost when Moctezuma opens. As if it were the original sin of the Mexicans, the fact that Moctezuma had opened up, would have cheated the Spaniards, is part of the undaunted Mexican condemnation, is the fate that takes them into exile from their souls. Likewise, Paz underlines the excessive Mexican religiosity, which largely explains the submission of Moctezuma to Cortés and the Spanish colonization of the indigenous past. A

figure of the colony praises Paz: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. He sees her as a restless and reflective spirit. She is an example of the possible reconciliation of the Mexican with the other. Science and poetry, baroque and enlightenment are conjugated in their interior:

She is an intellectual: a conscience. It is not possible to doubt the sincerity of her religious feelings, but where a devout spirit would find evidence of the presence of God or of his power, Sor Juana finds occasion to formulate hypotheses or questions (1994: 124).

Paz warns that the figure of Sor Juana is one of the few cases in which the Mexicans opened up, and in turn, they dominated the other.

Darker and nefarious in the constitution of Mexican solitude is the period of independence and revolution. *The Labyrinth of Solitude* dedicates a few pages to describing the betrayals and cruelties that the children of Mexico attacked against themselves. Although they overthrew the power and privileges of the Spaniards, the new Mexican rulers deepened inequalities. Paz says: "The political lie settled in our towns almost constitutionally" (1994: 134). The consequence is a moral damage that is incalculable and that reaches very deep areas of the Mexican being. The expulsion of the Spaniards separated the church from the government. An abstract and pilgrim notion began to circulate through Mexican minds: the idea of political freedom, an idea alien to a people that is religious from its roots. Ideals and fashionable philosophy in Europe, specifically, positivism was imposed as a doctrine, which is more intrusive than Catholicism, because in the end, Catholicism is religion and Mexicans are religious. Peace is laconic: geometry does not replace myths. That is why he sees in Emiliano Zapata, the peasant who revived the indigenous past the figure of the true caudillo of Mexico.

Paz finds out that the history of Mexico is a continuous narrative of colonization struggles. Spaniards colonizing Mexicans, Mexicans colonizing Mexicans, Mexicans allowing themselves to be colonized by foreign ideas. In this circle tricks deceits and thousands of dead. So to close the other and condemn the one that is left to crack is an almost instinctive reaction, provoked by the collective memory of a past full of vileness.

In the final chapters of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: Mexican Intelligence, Our Days, and the Dialectic

of Solitude, Paz highlights the figure of men like José Vasconcelos for his commitment to educate the Mexican people from their traditions. He sees him as the first Mexican who understands that education entails an image of the world, which is why a new life program is necessary for all of Mexico. He extols the figure of Alfonso Reyes, because he saw part of the Mexican character. He thanks Reyes for having taught him that the writer owes his fidelity, first of all, to language; Paz thinks that Reyes: "By teaching us to say, he taught us to think" (1994: 177).

Although these figures stand out among Mexican citizens, for Paz the loneliness of the people does not diminish, especially when the inequalities generated by the policies of the world make Mexico an underdeveloped country, and worse when all the men of these days are divided in two: workers, on the one hand, and owners of capital on the other. The plague of inequality in which all humans feel strangers, the ones because they are only what they have, and the others because they are not in as much as they do not have, makes that at the end of their reflections Paz reveals a certain pessimism. There is hopelessness not only for the Mexican people but for the entire humanity. However, he believes that the current situation of the planet is an opportunity to rewrite the history of all peoples. If loneliness is the sign of the times and dissatisfaction and nonsense is one of its consequences, the idea of communion is offered to Paz as a hope, not only for Mexicans, but also for all nations. It says "The fullness, the meeting, which is rest and happiness, concordance with the world, awaits us at the end of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*" (1994: 212). That meeting awaits Peace when modern man recreates redemptive myths, when he stops dreaming of his atrocious nightmares and rebuilds himself in a creative communion. To stop seeing with open eyes and start dreaming with closed eyes is the final commendation of Octavio Paz.

The Mexican "I" for which Octavio Paz investigates allows him to grasp universal features of human experience. Loneliness is not just a peculiar mark of the Mexican, it is a consequence of the universal uprooting of all men. Octavio Paz has discovered it by walking through the labyrinth of the loneliness of Mexicans, a labyrinth that is already of humanity. To read *The Labyrinth of Solitude* is to discover that a part of the human soul is made by the history of its people, and that the history of solitude and the Mexican uprooting is a representative case of the solitude of the human people.

Altazor: The fall of language and the ascent to the song

All the arts aspire to the condition of music, the only art that is nothing else than form.

Jorge Luis Borges

In an introduction to literature theory (2009) Terry Eagleton points out the difficulty of defining literature. As an art that includes so many different phenomena, the question: What is literature? It can hardly get to have a univocal answer. The essays of Montaigne, as well as evidently the Quixote of La Mancha, the aphorisms of Cioran and the *trovas* of an oral people are genuinely literary phenomena. However, there are two elements that become almost ubiquitous in all literature: language and imagination. Without being both sides of an equation, Eagleton affirms that literature is equal to language plus imagination. Although both elements do not define it conclusively, it does offer a guiding principle for its comprehension. Altazor or the parachute trip (1931) is a clear case of this definition. Populated with brilliant images, built with an almost supernatural use of language, Vicente Huidobro creates a literary fact that fits this notion very well, only that at the end of his poem he even surpasses it. From Altazor, Huidobro deconstructs from literature to literature.

By way of examples, it is worthwhile to bring in disorder some images and linguistic expressions of the poem overflowing with genius: "In the tapestry of heaven our luck is played". "Solitary as a paradox". "The soul paved with memories." "You go straight to death, like an iceberg that falls off the pole." "Let the scaffolding to break from the bones, let the beams of the brain to collapse." "Words with fever and internal vertigo, the words of the poet give a celestial dizziness." These images and expressions are part of the literary path that Huidobro goes through to the end, and after deconstructing the imagination and language praise things such as: *Tralalí, tralalá; Lalali, lo*, because Altazor is a literary work that collapses the most characteristic of literature: language and images. From Alfonso Reyes it was affirmed: "The only loyalty of the writer is the language", Huidobro is so faithful to him that he seeks to overcome it to turn it into music. In the tour that will be done by Altazor will try to show the project that Huidobro undertakes: to collapse the language for its debris extol the music.

The fall of language and its rise to music can be understood allegorically from the collapse experienced by the character in the first part of the poem. Altazor, the one blessed by the Virgin, risks falling from the heavens of his thought to know the foundations of reason. From the beginning he is confident and arrogant. Besides feeling himself a child of God, he is accompanied by the boldest charioteer: poetry. As an adventurer he recognizes the joy of the trip, but also its risks. Altazor closes his eyes and begins his descent: the fall in his inner world. As an allegory of the remaining six parts of the poem, in which the language is destroyed until it becomes a song, Altazor falls but feels safe and alive because he can sing his poem:

I got on my knees in the circular space and the Virgin

I rise and come to sit on my parachute.

I fell asleep and recited my most beautiful poems.

The flames of my poetry dried the hair of the Virgin,

She said thank you and walked away, sitting on her soft rose.

And here I am alone, like the little orphan of anonymous shipwrecks.

(1931: 12).

Like an omniscient mind, Altazor perceives everything, but as it descends, it also sees how everything is destroyed. Mountains, rivers, jungles, flowers, snails are mutating in beliefs, ideas, desires and sighs. Altazor holds on to them as if they were solid marble; but in their interior fall they vanish:

I opened my eyes in the century

In which Christianity died.

Twisted in its agonizing cross

He's going to give the last breath

And what will we put in the empty place tomorrow?

We will put a dawn or a twilight

And must we put something in? (1931: 21).

Not only religious faith, but also ideological and political convictions, are crushed in the fall of Altazor.

Six months ago only

I left the equatorial freshly cut

In the warrior tomb of the patient slave

Crown of mercy on human stupidity

It's me that I'm talking about in this year of 1919

It is winter

Europe already buried all its dead

And a thousand tears make a single cross of snow
(1931: 21).

Neither the rockiness of the biological laws from which Altazor looks at science, resists the demolition that in the inner world Altazor presence.

I am standing here before you

In the name of an idiot proclamation law

Of the conservation of the species

Disgusting law

Despicable law rooted in the naive sexes

For that law first trap of unconsciousness

The man is torn.

He broke into deadly howls through all the pores of his Earth (1931: 25).

Neither mountains nor gods, nor seas nor religions, nor laws or ideas save Altazor from its vertiginous fall. The anguish of nothing hovers around the paratrooper. The suffering of Altazor, which makes him even hesitate to continue his journey, finds a brief breath in poetry. As if everything that has become nothing was only made of language, it was only a matter of grammar and concepts, the figure of poetry suggests a brief illusion. However, Altazor now faces his self. Faced with his crumbling thoughts turns his gaze to his most substantial intimacy, he meets his pure self, which increases the vertigo of his adventure:

I suffer, I wallow in anguish

I suffer since it was cloudy

And since then I bring this primordial pain of the cells

This weight on the wings

This stone on the edge

Pain of being an island

Underground anguish

Cosmic anguish (1931: 29).

As if the rebellion was a celestial impulse, in the worst of his anguish Altazor looks like an angel, who expatriate of sanity gropes his way, or better, falls to the touch. He kicks, rebels against his condition as a martyr and recovers his inquisitive impetus. He returns to proclaim himself as the chosen one, now bigger. It is a bird that sings:

I will populate the dreams of men for a thousand years

And I will give you a poem full of heart

In which I will tear myself to pieces from all sides
(1931: 36).

Despite the anguish Altazor experiences in this song, he never loses heart. The fall fills him with life. The beautiful image that is repeated several times while Altazor is recovering its strength: "Silence, the earth is going to give birth to a tree" seems a puzzle that is completed with the final line of this first part of the poem: "The earth has just lighted (delivered) a tree." (1931: 44).

In the second part, from a masterly, luminous and sensitive poem to the woman, and without showing us his fall again, Altazor spreads his sovereignty over language. The images have such a wonderful visual effect that they muffle any echo of the first part of the song.

The plains are lost under your fragile grace

You lose the world under your visible walk

Well, everything is artifice when you introduce yourself

With your dangerous light.

Innocent harmony without fatigue or forgetfulness

Tear element that rolls inward

Built of haughty fear and silence

You make doubt at the time

And to heaven with infinity instincts.

Far from you everything is mortal.

Throw the agony for the land humiliated by nights.

Only what you think of you has a taste of eternity
(1931: 46-47).

Altazor not only stretches the language making it express what seems ineffable, in the third part of the poem plays with it, and at the same time, with the images that words allow to create. Words and images meander, they are like children when they run zigzagging along the sidewalks of the streets:

We know how to pose a kiss with a look

Plant looks like trees

Cage trees like birds

Water birds as heliotropes

Play a heliotrope like a music

Empty a music like a sack

Behead a sack like a penguin (1931: 56).

In this part of the poem, and in spite of the supernatural control of language and recreation that is found in it, the speaker is already beginning to be bored with it. Another fall is insinuated, not Altazor's, but that of language:

Let's kill the poet who has us saturated

Poetry still and poetry and poetry

Poetry poetry poetry

Poetry of poetry of poetic of poet

Poetry

Too much poetry. (1931: 56)

Surely, and already tired of so much poetry, of so much dominating and playing with language, in the fourth song he announces the symbol of the destruction of language and the rise of music:

The swallow is coming

The swallow is coming

The swallow is coming

The swallow is coming (1931: 68).

To the extent that it announces the prescription of language, it shows how he himself is self-destructing. Words begin to appear that lack meaning. Certain sounds begin to filter in the language, sounds that before words emulate music. And in an anxious rhythm that announces a great transformation, Altazor appears again, this time, in a subtle and momentary line, but perhaps, it is an immense symbol of the fall

of the language: "Here lies Altazor, azor, struck down by the height." (1931: 72).

At the end of the fourth song, there are no words anymore, the bird sings

Uiu uiui

Tralalí tralalá

Aia ai aiia i i (1931: 74).

The figure of the bird, the symbol of the song becomes clear and constant in the fifth part. In an extensive row of words that always begin with Mill and ends in ento, the poem stops meaning and begins to sound:

Wind mill

Story mill

Mill of intent

Increasing mill

Ointment mill

Mill of livelihood

Torment mill

Rescue mill

Advent mill

Weaving mill (1931: 85).

More and more the poet shows his renunciation of language, he approaches music. He wants to be a tree to sing his wind, a mill to sing his time, and a rosebush to sing his roses. He says:

Shut up, I'm going to sing

I am the only singer of this century

Mine is all infinity

My lies smell like heaven

And nothing else (1931: 95).

Later:

I am the king

The king sings to the queen

The sky sings to the heavens

Light sings to light (1931: 97).

In the sixth song the total deconstruction of language is made. Although before the words presented in addition to their musicality certain images, now all seem to be devoid of meaning. Although, there are still some expressions with referent in the verses:

Wool flower by eye

Flower by cloud

Flower by night

Lord horizon comes

Door

Illuminating black (1931: 104).

There are no longer any meanings and the syntax is completely destroyed, it has broken like a crystal, as this part of the poem says at the end:

Dream Crystal

Old glass

Flower and night

With his statue

Crystal death (1931: 107).

The final part of the Altazor is the sound, the music that birds emit in the rebirth of dawn. The language has been deconstructed, becoming the song of a bird:

Lalali

Io ia

iii

Ai a i a i a i i a i a (1931: 111).

Schopenhauer (2004) said that music is the most universal and sovereign of the arts. She, unlike words, is not half of anything, neither of images, nor of thoughts; nor does music have a reference. It is not fortunate to say that Huidobro finally found a music that rises above the language. While as readers we can not necessarily hear their chords, the grandiose mastery of images and words that demonstrates, and in turn, deconstructs in the poem makes us think that it actually exceeded it, because it is a genius of imagination and language.

Conclusions

In the *Discourse on the method*, Descartes says: “The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the most select men of the past, and even a studied conversation, in which they only discover their best thoughts” (1983: 46).). Oedipus and his search for truth, Aschenbach and his contemplation of the beautiful, the solitude and the historic uprooting of the Mexican people, and Altazor elevating language to the art of music, have traced new paths to our self, or at least, they have given depth to certain mental lines that we already had. At the risk of sounding euphoric and vehement, our way of connecting with truth, beauty, loneliness and language becomes more substantial after reading the classics. Not necessarily better or more valuable than that of those people who have not had or will not have the opportunity to read them, but more profound and less limited in relation to ourselves and the superficiality of the culture of our time. The idea, sometimes cliché, that literature makes us freer, is found after reading a classic, because they expand our inner world.

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