

## Durham E-Theses

---

### *La razón poética in the works of María Zambrano*

Clare Elizabeth Nimmo

#### How to cite:

---

Nimmo, Clare Elizabeth (1994) *La razón poética in the works of María Zambrano*. Masters thesis, Durham University.

#### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/5869/> is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

Clare Elizabeth Nimmo. 'La Razón Poética' in the Works of María Zambrano.

M. Litt. 1994

### A B S T R A C T

In 1988, María Zambrano, a little known writer, became the first woman to receive the Cervantes prize. This prestigious award served to highlight the critical neglect Zambrano's fifty or so years of work had suffered. In recent years criticism has begun to appear in Spanish on specific aspects or individual works but there has been no contextualising overview up to the present. This thesis gives an exposition of Zambrano's idea of *razón poética*, a concept which provides internal coherence throughout her work. It focuses on three separate yet entwining strands to her narrative: the philosophical background to *razón poética*, its relation to mystical tradition, and its engagement with feminist theory. The whole constitutes an attempt to illustrate and explain the complex and densely metaphorical nature of her texts.

**'LA RAZÓN POÉTICA'**

**IN THE WORKS OF**

**MARÍA ZAMBRANO**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.  
No quotation from it should be published without  
his prior written consent and information derived  
from it should be acknowledged.

*A thesis submitted by Clare Elizabeth Nimmo  
for the degree of M. Litt. at the University of Durham  
Department of Spanish and Italian in 1994.*



**14 NOV 1995**

## C O N T E N T S

Chapter One: Intellectual Production	4
Chapter Two: Philosophical Influences	23
Chapter Three: Mysticism and 'la metáfora del corazón'	53
Chapter Four: Feminism: Zambrano and Cixous	81
Conclusion	106
Bibliography	109

## DECLARATION

The author declares that no material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without her prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to the staff of the department of Spanish and Italian Studies at the University of Durham, and especially to Dr Chris Perriam for his unfailing encouragement and perception as my supervisor. My thanks are also due to Professor Ian and Sheila Macpherson for their invaluable advice and steadfast support.

I should like to acknowledge the help of The British Academy and the ERASMUS scholarship which enabled me to research at the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares in Spain.

In Madrid I am indebted to Marisa Atienza, Luis Tornero, José Luis Tornero, Chuni de Diego and Ester Tordesillas for their generous support. My thanks also to Daniel Ibáñez for introducing me to María Zambrano and furnishing me with extremely useful information on her work.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the University of Manchester. Dr Nigel Griffin, Professor Jeremy Lawrance and Dr Gordon Kinder provided me with very helpful comments and painstaking editorial and bibliographical guidance. I am also deeply grateful to Reece Price for his good cheer and insight as my mentor.

My thanks to my family and friends for their many kindnesses during the preparation of this thesis, and especially to my parents, my sister, my brother, Margaret-Anne Hutton, Rosalind Mckenzie, Nigel Owens, and Carol Adlum. My thanks to Miguel Jiménez Pinilla for his constant, lively encouragement and careful scrutiny of the manuscript. I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandmother, Brenda Fewster.

## CHAPTER 1

### Intellectual Production

'If I were a philosopher,' Hélène Cixous remarked in an interview in 1984, 'I could never allow myself to speak in terms of presence, essence, etc., or of the meaning of something. I would be capable of carrying on a philosophical discourse, but I do not. I let myself be carried off by the poetic word'.<sup>1</sup> The French writer's comments may be applied to the practice of writing adopted by the contemporary Spanish author, María Zambrano, for Zambrano engaged in philosophical writing, yet she departed from systematic terminology and ratiocination, she let herself be carried off by the poetic word. José Luis Aranguren has suggested that the poetic nature of her work made her an 'hereje poética de la filosofía', and it is this 'heretical' synthesis of poetry and thought in her work which I wish to explore in this thesis.<sup>2</sup>

María Zambrano has been a little-known and less-studied figure of modern Spanish literature and philosophy. It is only since 1988, when Zambrano became the first woman to be awarded Spain's most prestigious literary prize, the Premio Cervantes, in recognition of her lifetime's work, that critical attention, and to a lesser extent public interest, has been focused

---

<sup>1</sup> Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln, Na and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), in the appendix 'An exchange with Hélène Cixous', pp. 129-61 (pp. 151-52).

<sup>2</sup> Aranguren, 'Filosofía y poesía', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, ed. Fernando Savater & others, *Por un nuevo saber*, 11 (Lérida: Grupo Cultural Zero Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada, 1983), pp. 111-21 (p. 114).

on her. She was born on 22 April 1904 in Vélez-Málaga, the eldest daughter of Blas José Zambrano García de Carabante and Araceli Alarcón Delgado, and she moved to Madrid and then Segovia as a child. Before the Civil War she studied and lectured in philosophy in Madrid. In 1939 she left Spain with her husband, Alfonso Rodríguez Aldave, for Paris and later Latin America. Separated from her husband, she returned to Europe in 1953 and took up residence in Rome and Switzerland before moving back to Spain after the death of Franco.

Zambrano's contribution to Spanish letters is not slight; when she died in 1991, at the age of eighty-six, she left behind her a substantial body of published and unpublished work comprising some thirty books and two hundred articles. Her first book, *Nuevo liberalismo*, appeared in Madrid in 1930; *Los bienaventurados* was published in 1990, the year before her death, and *Los sueños y el tiempo*, a major work written over a period of fifteen years, was published posthumously in 1992.<sup>3</sup> Zambrano's writings embrace a number of different genres (although all the published material is in prose). The greater part of her publications are collections of poetico-philosophical essays, but they also include literary criticism or critical exegesis, one play, *La tumba de Antígona*, and a work of semi-autobiographical fiction, *Delirio y destino*.

There are a number of reasons why María Zambrano's work has been overlooked until recent years. It has been suggested of many Republican writers of her generation living in exile, notably Luis Cernuda, Emilio Prados and Rosa Chacel, that historical circumstances were in part responsible for the critical neglect their writing has suffered, especially in Francoist Spain. For Max Aub, Zambrano's thought, like that of her contemporaries J. Ferrater Mora, José Gaos, J. D. García Bacca, Joaquín Xirau and Manuel Granell became 'pensamiento perdido' during the first three decades of Franco's reign owing to its inadmissible ideological foundation.<sup>4</sup> As the critic

---

<sup>3</sup> For details on the texts of Zambrano see my note in the bibliography on pp. 109-11.

<sup>4</sup> Aub's term is referred to and developed by José Luis Abellán, 'El pensamiento perdido', in *Panorama de la filosofía española actual: Una situación escandalosa* (Madrid: Espasa-

José Luis Abellán noted, she belongs to a group of committed writers, including Antonio Machado and Ramón Xirau, who gave 'su apoyo incondicional a la causa republicana, saliendo de España cuando consideraron la guerra definitivamente perdida y no habiendo regresado después a ella'.<sup>5</sup>

Before the Civil war Zambrano's political engagement included membership of La Federación Universitaria Española, La Liga de Educación Social and the participation in *misiones pedagógicas* (the left-wing project aimed at introducing Spanish culture to people living in remote villages). Moreover, in 1931 she played an active role in the successful Republican election campaign. During the conflict in Spain Zambrano became a national adviser on Republican propaganda and the evacuation of children from target areas, and in Valencia she formed part of the founder group of writers on *Hora de España*, and later she took over the editorship of the Republican periodical.<sup>6</sup> The objective of *Hora de España* was, according to Zambrano's formulation, 'realizar en lo intelectual la revolución que se realiza en las otras zonas de la vida' (*Senderos*, p. 50); it was seen as a radical intellectual response to the political struggle.<sup>7</sup> In 1939, in the face of the Republican defeat, she crossed the border with her family for France. Unlike

---

Calpe, 1978), pp. 167-168.

<sup>5</sup> Abellán, *Panorama de la filosofía española actual*, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of Zambrano's contributions to *Hora de España*, see Concha Zardoya, 'María Zambrano en *Hora de España*', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984), 81-94.

<sup>7</sup> In her prologue to the reissue of number 23 of the magazine Zambrano evoked the working atmosphere of *Hora de España*: 'Nos veíamos continuamente y en este verso de continuo se hablaba de la Revista cuando era necesario. Rafael Alberti con su presencia en Madrid nos asistía. Emilio Prados era el que pasaba por el local de la Redacción y con su oficio del arte poética de imprimir la cuidaba. Cuando venían del frente pasaban igualmente por la Redacción Rafael Dieste, Gil Albert, Gaya, Sánchez Barbudo, y traían sus dibujos, sus poemas, sus escritos. Solían venir también por mi casa. En la noche, alumbrados por la luz parpadeante de alguna vela, venían Arturo Serrano Plaja cuando no estaba en el frente, Vicente Salas Viu y más de continuo José María Quiroga, y a diario Emilio Prados. Debíamos escuchar más intensamente el silencio que nuestras palabras. [. . .] Y en algo se sentía que éramos al modo de una hermandad,' *Hora de España XXIII*, por María Zambrano', *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70/71 (March-April 1987) 129-36 (p. 136).

Machado and Xirau, however, Zambrano was subsequently able to return to her native country. On 20 November 1984 she landed at Barajas airport in Madrid after forty-five years spent in exile. Her homecoming, nearly a decade after the death of General Franco, granted her the status of *la última exiliada*; she was fêted by the Spanish press as the last leading Republican émigré to come back to Spain.

As a corollary of her political exile, María Zambrano's publications were not readily available for a period of over forty years in Spain, and during this time her work reached a limited readership. José Ángel Valente makes this point in his introductory essay on the author, 'El sueño creador':

La verdad de esa obra, crecida sobre todo en los aventurados y difíciles tiempos de la diáspora, nos estuvo semioculta o velada y, como tantas otras cosas, deficientemente sustituida, hasta encontrar reconocimiento entero en el ámbito nuestro, que era manifiestamente el suyo.<sup>8</sup>

Before her flight to exile she had published *Nuevo liberalismo*, and a number of articles in the *Revista de Occidente*, *Cruz y Raya* and *Hora de España*. From 1939 onwards she published exclusively outside Spain, in South American publishing houses, until 1960, when Taurus in Madrid brought out her collection of essays on Pérez Galdós, *La España de Galdós*, among the least political and polemic of her output up to that time. During the years Zambrano spent in South America and Europe, a gradual depoliticization of her work occurred. In texts written in the immediate post Civil war period political issues were foregrounded; for example, *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* examined the role of the left-wing thinker in the Spanish Civil War, *La agonía de Europa*, of 1945 considered the destructive force of Fascist ideology, and *Delirio y destino* was a semi-autobiographical account of the rise of the Second Republic and the impact of political exile after the defeat. In works written from 1955 onwards the political dimension is considerably less prominent; in *El hombre y lo divino*, *El sueño creador*, *Claros del bosque*, *De la Aurora* and *Notas de un método* for example, the emphasis falls on literary,

---

<sup>8</sup> Valente, 'El sueño creador', in *Palabras de la tribu* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 1971), pp. 237-48 (p. 239).

philosophical and religious motifs.

In Madrid, the publication in 1971 of a volume of collected works by Zambrano under the title *Obras reunidas (primera entrega)* -now out of print- was an important breakthrough, and in the past two decades a number of Spanish publishing houses have gone a long way towards making her work more available by issuing new editions of texts which were either out of print or only available in South American editions. For example, Anthropos in Barcelona have brought out a number of modest paperback editions of her early writings and the Madrid publishing house Siruela has reprinted a more lavish hardback edition of *El hombre y lo divino* as well as publishing posthumously *Los sueños y el tiempo* and *La razón en la sombra*, the most recent anthology of her writings.

Up to the present, Zambrano's work has not been widely available in translation. During her residence in Rome two of the author's collections of essays appeared in Italian before the Spanish version was issued: *I sogni e il tempo* was published in 1960, over thirty years before it was published by Siruela, and *Spagna, pensiero, poesia e una città* was published in Florence in 1964 and published in Spanish by Edhasa with the title *España, sueño y verdad*, the following year. There are, however, a growing number of translations into other European languages of her best-known work, *Claros del bosque*. Nevertheless the majority of her work remains inaccessible to a non-Spanish speaking readership.

In the field of criticism, it was the philosophical writer Aranguren who was the first to introduce a Spanish readership to Zambrano's work through a series of newspaper articles in the 1960s. In a much quoted article in *Revista de Occidente* published in 1966, Aranguren put forward the view that critical study of Zambrano's work had been hampered by professional jealousy and the narrowness of the literary world in Francoist Spain:

Si los escritores españoles no fuésemos tan duros y tan indiferentes los unos para con los otros, si de verdad nos importase lo que los demás hacen por su valor objetivo, y no para elogiarles porque son amigos nuestros, al revés, para denostarles porque no pertenecen a nuestro grupo, hace tiempo que alguien habría estudiado, como se merece, la

obra de María Zambrano.<sup>9</sup>

Criticism began to appear in Spain, spurred on by Aranguren, from the late 1960s onwards, usually in the form of newspaper articles or short articles in literary reviews. The first major collection of critical studies on María Zambrano appeared as late as 1981, the year the author was awarded the Príncipe de Asturias de Comunicación y Humanidades prize. In June of that year *Pueblo* dedicated the supplement 'Sábado Literario' to a consideration of her work, and the following month *Cuadernos del Norte* brought out a special number on the author.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, in France, the pioneering critic Alain Guy did much to advance the study of Zambrano's contribution to modern Spanish thought. Guy was the first critic outside the Spanish speaking world to consider her work within the context of twentieth-century Spanish and European philosophy.

Critical interest in Spain since then has grown considerably, often led by the generation of writers who follow Zambrano. Writers, above all poets such as José Ángel Valente, Jaime Gil de Biedma, Fernando Savater, Jaime Siles, Clara Janés, Fanny Rubio and Antonio Colinas, have embraced Zambrano's work with enthusiasm. Many of these writers have made extensive contributions to critical studies on Zambrano, and their commentaries number amongst some of the most interesting critical discussions that have been published so far. Valente's essay 'El sueño creador'; for instance, gives the reader a valuable insight into the phenomenology of dreams described by Zambrano in *El sueño creador* and in his commentary on *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* Savater draws a useful comparison between Zambrano's conception of the role of the twentieth-century intellectual and Julien Benda's work *La Trahison des clercs*.<sup>11</sup> Other writers have dedicated poems to the author; Biedma's 'Piazza

---

<sup>9</sup> Aranguren, 'Los sueños de María Zambrano', *Revista de Occidente*, 35 (1966), 207-212 (pp. 207-28).

<sup>10</sup> *Pueblo* (Madrid), 13 June 1981 and *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 8 (1981).

<sup>11</sup> José Ángel Valente, *Palabras de la tribu*, pp. 237-48 and Fernando Savater, 'Los intelectuales: razón, pasión y traición', *Quimera*, 100 (1990), pp. 28-31.

del Popolo' and Valente's 'Palabra' are particularly fine examples.<sup>12</sup> In many ways, it has been the earnest task of this younger generation of writers to restore María Zambrano to her rightful place in the history of Spanish letters. The sense that it was important to reclaim the work of the exiled writer for post-Franco Spain is perhaps best conveyed by Fernando Savater in his article on Zambrano's "Los Guernicas" que no vuelven' (1981):

No parece que este país tan mísero filosóficamente hablando pueda permitirse el lujo de olvidar a uno de los pensadores de mayor talento.

Parece demasiado grave admitir que hemos decidido pasarnos sin este talento singular y nuestro, mientras nos son imprescindibles tantas mediocridades foráneas.<sup>13</sup>

In Latin American literary circles, on the other hand, Zambrano's contribution was acknowledged at a much earlier stage of her writing career. The critical readership of her work in Latin South America, especially in Mexico and Cuba, is well documented. In an article recently published in the Spanish press, the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes indicates the impact of Zambrano's thinking on his contemporaries in the 1940s:

María Zambrano llegó a México y Cuba a raíz de la guerra de España, y fue una especie de faro que iluminó toda una generación de escritores hispanoamericanos. Nosotros, los que entonces éramos adolescentes y comenzamos a leer a María Zambrano hacia 1944 o 1945, vimos que se podía pensar con poesía. [...] Eso para un escritor que empezaba - pongamos mi caso, que tenía catorce años y empezaba a leer - , fue una auténtica revelación, como lo fue para muchísimos de mis compañeros en México, y lo atestigüé más tarde con amigos de todo el continente: María Zambrano nos había enseñado.<sup>14</sup>

Other prominent South American writers who have engaged in critical analysis of her work include Octavio Paz and José Lezama Lima. In Cuba, Zambrano and Lima worked together on *Orígenes*, and Paz collaborated with

---

<sup>12</sup> Jaime Gil de Biedma, 'Piazza del Popolo', in his *Las personas del verbo*, 6th edn (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992), pp. 70-71; José Angel Valente, 'Palabra', in his *Punto cero: Poesía 1953-1979* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1980), p. 464.

<sup>13</sup> Savater, '«Los Guernicas» que no vuelven', *El País*, 28 January 1981, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Fuentes, 'Faro de una generación', *ABC literario*, 26 November 1988, p. 9.

her on *Hora de España* in Spain, and *Taller* in México. Both Paz and Lezama Lima have published articles dedicated to the consideration of her thought, but it is interesting to note that the majority of publications by these and other South American writers date from the 1980s.<sup>15</sup>

In the past fifteen years a number of major volumes of critical studies have been published. Of particular interest are the editions of *Litoral*, *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, *Anthropos* and *Ínsula* dedicated to the author as well as the afore-mentioned *Papeles de Almagro: el pensamiento de María Zambrano*, and *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*.<sup>16</sup> Several conferences have been held on the works of Zambrano, amongst them the seminar in Almagro in 1983 and the *Primer Congreso Internacional sobre la Vida y Obra de María Zambrano* in 1990, organised by the foundation in Vélez-Málaga set up in her name in 1987.<sup>17</sup> These collections of articles or papers provide stimulating commentaries on María Zambrano, but they are largely introductory and at worst superficial, and there is still a large area of her work which remains to be considered.

Another factor to consider when examining the various reasons why María Zambrano is only a recent critical discovery is that her work reaches its height in her mature years. She wrote *Claros del bosque*, arguably her most original and significant text, when she was already in her seventies, and this pivotal work has received greater critical acclaim and enjoyed a wider readership in Spain, South America and in non-Spanish speaking countries than any other text she published. It was the issue of *Claros del bosque* which directed attention to her work as a whole.

---

<sup>15</sup> José Lezama Lima, 'Carta a María Zambrano', *La Gaceta del F.C.E.* (Mexico), 186 (1986), 12, and 'La forma de una ausencia', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 8 (1981), 4-5; Octavio Paz, 'Poesía y pensamiento', *ABC literario*, 26 November 1988, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Litoral* (Torremolinos-Málaga), 124-126 (1983); *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984); *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70-71 (March-Abril, 1987); *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989); *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, ed. Juan Fernando Ortega Muñoz (Málaga: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Vélez-Málaga & Universidad de Málaga, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> *Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre la Vida y Obra de María Zambrano* (Vélez-Málaga, 23-26 de abril 1990) (Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 1991).

It is true to say that neither works of reference nor literary criticism up to the 1980s did much to introduce Zambrano's writings to a broader critical readership or to explore in any depth the significance of her thought. Her name appears in a number of dictionaries or histories of modern Spanish philosophy compiled by Spanish authors in the 1960s and 1970s; but with a few notable exceptions (Abellán's two historical studies and the French critic Alain Guy's influential survey of Spanish thought),<sup>18</sup> entries tend to be brief, inadequate and even inaccurate, and serve to highlight the dearth of information about Zambrano and her work (rather than to inform), especially when compared with the fuller entries on her male peers. ~~Nonetheless,~~ this does show that her status as a philosopher is implicitly approved.<sup>19</sup> The following lamentably brief entry by Guillermo Fraile in an *Historia de la filosofía española desde la Ilustración*, published in 1972, is not altogether untypical, if extreme in its brevity and dismissive, sexist tone:

La delicada escritora María Zambrano busca las coincidencias íntimas que relacionan la filosofía y la poesía.<sup>20</sup>

In many reference works that date from that period, such as, José María Ferrater Mora's *Diccionario de Filosofía*, and indeed in a number of more careless recent publications, it is not uncommon to find Zambrano's date of birth incorrectly entered as 1907 instead of 1904 (a biographical confusion she herself has clarified).<sup>21</sup>

As Fraile's summary suggests, misogynist readings of Zambrano's work have proved a further obstacle. Philosophers have been predominantly male throughout the history of the activity and it has been only recently that women have begun to develop a presence in philosophy. Male philosophers

---

<sup>18</sup> José Luis Abellán, *El exilio español de 1939*, Colección Biblioteca Política Taurus, 36, 6 vols (Madrid: Taurus, 1976), III, and his *Filosofía española en América (1939-1966)* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1967); Alain Guy, *Los filósofos españoles de ayer y de hoy: Épocas y autores*, trans. Luis Echávarri (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1966).

<sup>19</sup> See for example José María Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de Filosofía*, 4 vols (Madrid: Alianza, 1979), IV.

<sup>20</sup> Guillermo Fraile, *Historia de la filosofía española desde la Ilustración*, ed. T. Urdániz, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1972), p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de Filosofía*, 3527.

have shown a reluctance to accept women into their ranks and Cioran's barbed criticism of the women who do engage in the intellectual discipline of philosophy is not perhaps untypical of male hostility:

Basta con que una mujer se entregue a la filosofía para que se vuelva presuntuosa y agresiva o reaccione como una advenediza. Arrogante, al tiempo que insegura, visiblemente asombrada, parece a todas luces no hallarse en su elemento.<sup>22</sup>

What is surprising, then, is the widespread acceptance of Zambrano as a thinker and philosopher. Colleagues and critics have not, as one might have expected, devalued her work on the grounds that its author is a woman, nor has its value been enhanced for that reason.<sup>23</sup> It is true that contemporaries of Zambrano have made no secret of their respect for her work; for instance, Fernando Savater considers María Zambrano as 'una de las grandes cabezas y mejores corazones pensantes de este siglo en Europa, similar en categoría a Ortega y Gasset, Miguel de Unamuno y Simone de Beauvoir'.<sup>24</sup> But seldom is her gender a decisive factor in their critical judgement. It is more common to find the view that her work is highly regarded by her peers despite her gender. The implication is that she was a philosopher despite, rather than because of, her gender. For example, regardless of his general hostility to women philosophers Cioran is a great admirer of Zambrano's work and in the light of his previous jibe he asks 'cómo es posible que el malestar que tal situación inspira no se produzca jamás en presencia de María Zambrano?'<sup>25</sup> And Savater writes: María Zambrano es un gran pensador, que además - anécdota no significativa, pero anécdota al fin- resulta ser mujer.<sup>26</sup> This

---

<sup>22</sup> E.M. Cioran, 'El ensombrecedor magisterio de Ortega', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo) 8 (1981), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Zambrano herself saw gender as no obstacle to writing philosophy, regardless of other doubts she harboured about her vocation: 'el autor de estas líneas ha sabido que Filosofía, ella, y no por ser mujer, nunca podría hacer', *Filosofía y poesía*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Fernando Savater, 'Gran pesar entre los intelectuales ante la muerte de Zambrano', *El Independiente*, 7 February 1991, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Cioran, 'El ensombrecedor magisterio de Ortega', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo) 8 (1991), 14.

<sup>26</sup> Savater, '«Los Guernicas» que no vuelven', *El País*, 28 January 1981, p. 9.

raises an interesting question about the femaleness of Zambrano's writing which will be discussed in a later chapter.

The fact that María Zambrano's poetico-philosophical work does not quickly admit critical analysis has probably contributed to her isolation, and explains in part the dearth of reliable criticism of her texts. The criticism of her writing that has appeared so far would seem to testify to the fact that it resists analysis. The notion that her work is non-systematic has been perhaps its most insidious attraction, for it has lead critics away from an analytical or systematic approach. In general, criticism of the works of María Zambrano has been plagued by highly subjective glosses, as critics have tended to imitate in their own commentaries Zambrano's style of writing, often questionably manipulative, rather than tackle the metaphorical strategies and the structures that underpin it. One need only look at Chantal Maillard's recent study of Zambrano's thought, *La creación por la metáfora*, for evidence of imitative and non-systematic critical writing. I would agree with Jaime Siles when he writes of Maillard's work:

Este libro, ¿es un ensayo sobre Zambrano?; ¿es una investigación sobre la metáfora? Sí y no. Es una reflexión sobre ambas y sobre ninguna. Faltan demasiados puntos.<sup>27</sup>

Articles by José Miguel Ullán, Blas Matamoro and Juan Fernando Ortega Muñoz betray similar traits. The opening paragraph of a recent article, 'María Zambrano, al filo de la aurora' by the latter plainly manifests this spurious tendency:

Cuando nos acercamos al pensamiento a la vez frágil y profundo de María Zambrano, tenemos la sensación de estar asistiendo a ese momento huidizo y débil en que apunta la aurora. La noche queda atrás, es el delirio de una razón dominadora, la gran nada, el cero infinito, que describiera A. Machado, el intento de fijar con alfileres la vida en la pizarra oscura de un pensamiento abstracto, como mariposas multicolores en la vitrina de un museo. La voz tenue, transparente, de María Zambrano se proyecta sobre los mausoleos de los grandes

---

<sup>27</sup> Jaime Siles, *ABC literario*, 9 October 1992, p. 14, review of Chantal Maillard, *La creación por la metáfora: Introducción a la razón-poética*, Pensamiento crítico, 67 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1992).

sistemas, haciendo brotar, como el centelleo inquieto de infinitas luciérnagas, pensamientos vivos, sugerentes, prometedores de una luz nueva, dinámica y apasionada.<sup>28</sup>

These subjective, mimetic readings often serve to complicate the already complex, they are generally unhelpful and, as in the instance above, occasionally excruciating.

There have been two marked tendencies amongst critics, both understandable given the extent of the author's writings: either to examine only one (or sometimes more) texts in isolation, or to write about Zambrano's thought in the most general of terms, often with lamentably scant reference to the texts themselves. Examples of the first tendency include Julia Castillo's introductory study of the play *La tumba de Antígona*, Hector Ciochini's commentary on *Claros del bosque* and José Antonio Ugalde's Foucauldian analysis of *Delirio y destino*.<sup>29</sup> Amongst the critics who have adopted a general approach to her work are Jesús Moreno Sanz and Juan Fernando Ortega Muñoz. Both critics have attempted to outline the main philosophical influences evident in her writing in various articles.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> José Miguel Ullán, 'Sueño y verdad del corazón', in *María Zambrano: Premio Miguel de Cervantes*, ed. Javier Ruiz (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1989), pp. 19-20; Blas Matamoro, 'El arrabal de los santos', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984), 66-71; Juan Fernando Ortega Muñoz, 'María Zambrano, al filo de la aurora', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 28.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Castillo, '*La tumba de Antígona: Tragedia y misericordia*', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 105-110; Hector Ciochini, 'La santa realidad sin nombre: En torno a *Claros del bosque* de María Zambrano', *Ínsula*, 388 (March 1979), 3; José Antonio Ugalde, 'Modos de subjetivación en María Zambrano: no ser apenas', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Jesús Moreno Sanz, 'Las fórmulas del corazón', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 16-38; 'Sub quadam aeternitatis specie', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984), 32-54, 'María Zambrano: del punto oscuro al centro creador', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 9-10; 'La visión segunda: el método en María Zambrano y la tradición filosófica y gnóstica en Occidente', in *María Zambrano: Premio de literatura en lengua castellana 'Miguel de Cervantes' 1988* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989), pp. 89-125, and 'Introducción', *La razón en la sombra: Antología del pensamiento de María Zambrano*, (Madrid: Siruela, 1993), pp. xi-xxxvii; Juan Fernando Ortega Muñoz, 'La superación del racionalismo en la filosofía de María Zambrano', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 53-99; 'La confesión, género literario y método en filosofía', *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 111-53; 'La crisis de Europa en el pensamiento de María Zambrano', *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp.

However, in criticism on Zambrano there has been little analysis so far which provides a contextualising overview of both the philosophical and poetic nature of her work as a whole.

María Zambrano's poetic thought presents the critic with a number of dilemmas. Not least is the question of generic classification: the critic must ask if her work belongs to a philosophical or literary tradition, or even both? Hers are curious essays by ordinary standards -meditative, intensely lyrical, disjunctive in argument. They challenge any attempt to establish rigid generic boundaries. Ortega y Gasset drew a sharp distinction between literature and philosophy in his well-known dictum: 'o se hace literatura, o se hace precisión, o se calla uno'. But it is not always appropriate to make this clear demarcation. Philosophers vary, and there are some philosophers who are more literary than others, just as there are some literary writers who are more philosophical than others.

In modern Western philosophy Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and, despite his dictum, Ortega y Gasset, belong to a group of writers whose works often bridge these two disciplines. In a similar way the philosophical import of the literary works of writers such as Dante, Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky are well documented. In Spain, in the absence of a formal philosophical tradition, a form of literary philosophy or philosophising can be found. As Zambrano puts it: 'al no tener pensamiento filosófico sistemático, el pensar español se ha vertido dispersamente, ametódicamente en la novela, en la literatura, en la poesía' (*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 70). One might quote as examples the works of San Juan de la Cruz, Calderón de la Barca, Pío Baroja or Jorge Guillén. And, of course, Antonio Machado and Miguel de Unamuno, two of Zambrano's pre-eminent literary mentors, are major exponents of this tendency. The literary output of all of them is suffused with philosophical meditations.<sup>31</sup>

---

245-83, and 'Los intelectuales en el drama de España según María Zambrano', *Litoral* (Torremolinos-Málaga) 124-126 (1983), 130-58.

<sup>31</sup> Cioran ascribes the absence of a strong philosophical tradition in Spain (and Russia) to the inability of these peoples to forget themselves: 'Whatever his political orientation, the Spaniard (or the Russian) who questions himself about his country treats the only

It is interesting here to consider the differences between literature and philosophy identified by Iris Murdoch, herself both a writer of fiction and philosopher (though her unorthodox philosophical writings are much ignored):

Philosophy aims to clarify and to explain, it states and attempts to solve very difficult highly technical problems and the writing must be subservient to this aim.

Literature is read by many and various people, philosophy by very few.

Art is fun and for fun, it has innumerable intentions and charms. Literature interests us on different levels in different fashions. It is full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification. Literature entertains, it does many things, and philosophy does one thing.<sup>32</sup>

A consideration of María Zambrano's work in the light of these distinctions fails to bring forth any obvious classification. As regards philosophy, Zambrano's work does not address 'highly technical problems', but it does seek to clarify and explain the nature of reality and the problem of human existence. In philosophical terms the absence of rigorous argument in her writing can be seen as a weakness. But it is important to note that the development of ideas through scientific method is far from being Zambrano's stated aim. She consciously rejects the notion of system in her thought, and this becomes its defining or distinguishing principle. José Ferrater Mora makes this point in his entry on Zambrano in his *Diccionario de Filosofía*:

Característico del pensamiento de María Zambrano, ya desde sus primeras páginas acerca del *saber del alma*, es el tomar el problema filosófico como algo muy distinto de un problema técnico: la filosofía es un acontecimiento -y aun un acontecimiento radical- en la

---

question that matters in his eyes. We understand why neither Spain nor Russia has produced a major philosopher. It is because the philosopher must attack ideas as a spectator; before assimilating them, making them his own, he must consider them from outside, dissociate himself from them, weigh them, and if need be, play with them; then, with the help of maturity, he elaborates a system with which he never altogether identifies', in *The Temptation to Exist* (London: Quartet Books, 1987) p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> Iris Murdoch, 'Philosophy and Literature', in *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Bryan Magee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 229-50 (p. 230).

vida humana.<sup>33</sup>

Her poetic writing is an integral part of her thought and it is in no way subservient to the ideas advanced. As Aranguren has observed: 'las palabras y las ideas están [. . .] íntimamente unidas en María Zambrano'.<sup>34</sup> It is true to say that her work is not widely read, but it is not only philosophy that suffers from a small readership; poetry and indeed any form of prose writing which is not easily accommodated in the genre of narrative fiction is read by a minority.

The Spanish writer's work may fall short of Iris Murdoch's description of philosophy but it still seems closer to philosophy than to Murdoch's description of literature. For María Zambrano's writings are far from 'fun' or 'for fun', no ludic sense emerges from her work, for instance she does not play with philosophical systems in a Borgesian manner. Her aim is manifestly a didactic one; she does not set out expressly to entertain but rather to explain and communicate her ideas. As the author sets down in quasi-mystical terms in her essay 'Por qué se escribe', it is the 'afán de desvelar, afán irreprimible de comunicar lo desvelado' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 34) that impels a writer to put pen to paper. The author's writings are literary in that they do engage the reader on a number of levels; although prominent, the sense of philosophical purpose is not exclusive and the poetic language and literary devices employed by the Spanish writer are of considerable interest to the reader. Perhaps Zambrano's work is best described by the analogy Murdoch sets up between philosophy and poetry ('the hardest kind of literature'): 'Both involve a special and difficult purification of one's statements, of thought emerging in language'.<sup>35</sup>

José Ángel Valente provides possibly the most accurate, if not altogether conclusive answer to the question of genre in María Zambrano's works. He suggests that, like Walter Benjamin, she realises the dissolution of generic

---

<sup>33</sup> José Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de Filosofía*, 3527.

<sup>34</sup> Aranguren, 'Filosofía y poesía', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 111-21 (p. 113).

<sup>35</sup> Murdoch, in *Men of Ideas*, p. 231.

boundaries in her work, 'la anulaci3n de las fronteras entre la literatura y filosofa'.<sup>36</sup> The conscious generic ambiguity of her work in itself precludes classification and strength<sup>244</sup> Valente's argument. For although it is clear that Zambrano felt she was writing philosophical thought, she constantly undermines this by her insistence on the poetry of her method. Her contribution belongs both to a philosophical tradition and to a literary tradition, but never fully to either one or the other. Marfa Zambrano is a writer of poetico-philosophical prose. Aranguren points out, she is an 'hereje de la filosofa en tanto que elige la expresi3n po3tica, y hereje de la poesfa en tanto que no escribe, propiamente hablando, poesfa'.<sup>37</sup> In this way her discourse, like Cioran's, reflects a tradition identified by Susan Sontag:

The starting point for this modern post-philosophic tradition of philosophizing is the awareness that the traditional forms of philosophical discourse have been broken. What remain as leading possibilities are mutilated, incomplete discourse (the aphorism, the note or jotting) or the discourse that has risked metamorphosis into other forms (the parable, the poem, the philosophical tale, the critical exegesis).<sup>38</sup>

An overview of Zambrano's work must take into account the poetic and philosophical nature of her writing which, as we have seen, makes it difficult to accommodate it in any one tradition. The fact that her texts show few signs of linear development proves a further barrier to critical analysis. Toril Moi has made the following observation about the interrelation between the various works of H3l3ne Cixous:

The fact that many central ideas and images are constantly repeated tends to present her work as a continuum that encourages nonlinear forms of reading. Her style is often intensely metaphorical, poetic and explicitly antitheoretical, and her central images create a dense web of

---

<sup>36</sup> Valente, 'Del conocimiento pasivo o saber de quietud', in *Marfa Zambrano o la metafisica recuperada*, ed. Juan Fernando Ortega Muoz and others (M3laga: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de V3lez-M3laga & Universidad de M3laga, 1982), pp. 101-10 (p. 106).

<sup>37</sup> Aranguren, 'Filosofa y poesfa', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de Marfa Zambrano*, pp. 111-21 (p. 114).

<sup>38</sup> Susan Sontag, in her 'Introduction' to E. M. Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist* (London: Quartet Books, 1987), pp. 7-29 (p. 11).

signifiers that offers no obvious edge to seize hold of for the analytically-minded critic.<sup>39</sup>

This is a comment which seems as appropriate to María Zambrano as to the French feminist writer. Repetition of formulations and solutions to the problem of human existence is customary in philosophical discourse and forms part of the thinker's method or system. In her thought Zambrano repeats ideas in a deliberately asystematic and poetic way; her work becomes a complicated mesh of images, symbols and icons and no obvious philosophical method or system emerges. However, unlike the writings of Cixous, María Zambrano's texts offer the reader an 'edge', albeit a slippery one, on which to seize hold in order to unravel her 'dense web of signifiers'. This edge is her concept *razón poética*.

In her early work *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, María Zambrano united the poetic and the philosophical in a concept which would later develop into *razón poética*. The author subsequently wrote: 'lo encontré precisamente en *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pero sin tener todavía mucha conciencia de ello'.<sup>40</sup> The first use of the term in her published writing appeared in the article '«La guerra» de Antonio Machado' (1937) and the idea recurs in her work from then onwards. Critics, especially in recent years, have begun to examine her ratio-poetical concept. However, the analysis that does exist is very limited. Two notable examples are the section 'Génesis de la Razón poética: textos de María Zambrano' and Maillard's study.<sup>41</sup> The first provides brief commentaries on a number of texts by Zambrano which are put forward as being representative of her idea of *razón poética*. The critic comments on passages from *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, '«La guerra» de Antonio Machado', *El hombre y lo divino*, *Claros del bosque* and *De la Aurora*. The comment that accompanies the texts sheds little light on the meaning of

---

<sup>39</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> 'Sobre la iniciación: conversación con Antonio Colinas', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo) 38 (1986), 2-6 (p. 6).

<sup>41</sup> 'Editorial', *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70-71 (1987) 37-60; Chantal Maillard, *La creación por la metáfora: Introducción a la razón-poética*.

Zambrano's concept as the critic limits himself to glossing the sense of the passage and making general observations. For example he draws to a conclusion with the following observation on Zambrano, 'en todos los fragmentos de creación encuentra forma y huellas de la razón poética, imágenes de vida entrañable, en transformación, cambio y mutación'.<sup>42</sup> Maillard's analysis centres on what she describes as the phenomenological basis of Zambrano's thought. She writes:

Puede considerarse el pensamiento de Zambrano como una de las últimas vertientes, heterodoxa y asistemática, de la fenomenología. La razón-poética puede entenderse como método fenomenológico por cuanto que se trata de una vía para la comprensión, para el 'estado de abierto'.<sup>43</sup>

Through an examination of the conceptual development in Zambrano's writing, its place in Western philosophical tradition, its relation to mystical literature and feminist theory, I aim to explore in greater detail the operations of *razón poética*.

---

<sup>42</sup> 'Editorial', *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70-71 (1987) 2-68 (p. 58).

<sup>43</sup> Chantal Maillard, *La creación por la metáfora: Introducción a la razón-poética*, p. 12.

## CHAPTER 2

### Philosophical influences

The considerable knowledge of the history of philosophy that María Zambrano displays in her work certainly gives testimony of her philosophical training. Zambrano is not writing for the uninitiated in Western philosophy; she enters into dialogue with philosophers from Parmenides to Aristotle and from Kant to Heidegger. Her work clearly owes a great deal to philosophical tradition, not excluding rationalist and discursive philosophy. In the development of her concept of *razón poética* Zambrano draws mainly on metaphysicians and/or asystematic thinkers, but she also depends on the work of rationalist philosophers. For example, *razón poética* is related to the tradition of Aristotle's *nous poietikos* - creative, active intellect- in contrast with the passive *nous pathetikos*.<sup>1</sup> Zambrano herself highlights the fundamental role played by rationality in her concept. In her intensely poetic work *De la Aurora* she insists that 'la razón se haga poética, sin dejar de ser razón' (p. 30).

---

<sup>1</sup> Walter Clyde Curry gives a useful summary of the distinctions Aristotle drew between *nous pathetikos* and *nous poietikos*. He writes: 'The rational soul, however, is actually divided into two parts: the *nous pathetikos* is the unifying Form of the materials presented by imagination, memory, sensation, and will; the *nous poietikos* is the unifying principle of all the other syntheses, the Form of Forms. The *nous pathetikos*, therefore, is mortal like the sensitive and vegetative souls which it includes, and passes away with the death of the individual. Only the *nous poietikos*, the pure reason, attains immortality' in *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 301-302.

There is critical consensus as to the diversity of philosophical influences in Zambrano, or what Jaime Siles calls her 'mosaico mental'.<sup>2</sup> Moreno, for example, remarks:

Sin duda hay algunos puntos claves de referencia de la órbita de acción de María Zambrano, por lo demás muy explícitos en su obra algunos: el orfismo y el pitagorismo -y ese 'pitagorismo' vencido que, como semilla, parece ir germinando con otro nombre a lo largo de toda historia-, cierto neoplatonismo- y los propios Platón y Aristóteles-, la gnosis permanente en el esoterismo cristiano de los primeros siglos, en San Pablo, en el Apocalipsis y en el Evangelio de Juan, en el pseudo-Dionisio, en los padres apostólicos, en Scoto Erígena, en Dante . . . y tantos misticismos. [. . .] Y necesariamente hay que mencionar Nietzsche como referencia de este pensamiento. Ciertamente, el magisterio de Ortega y la *razón vital* (y su largo entronque con las tendencias *vitalistas*), como la propia María Zambrano reconoce en su ensayo 'Ortega y Gasset, filósofo español', fueron para ella, más que nada, un medio que permitió, otorgando luz, que su pensar y sentir encontraran otras formas de sabiduría.<sup>3</sup>

What emerges from his enumeration of explicit references to Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, mysticism and Nietzsche (the list is a long one) is a sense of modern philosophico-theological eclecticism. However, Moreno does not do Zambrano much of a service through his flimsy name-dropping, as it is not a fair reflection of her style. What follows then is an attempt to bring out some of the principal sources of her concept of *razón poética* in the writings of previous philosophers. The account is organised in chronological order; it is selective and in no way conclusive. One obvious omission is mystical writing, which will be dealt with at greater length in the following chapter. But it does attempt to give a more detailed and sustained analysis of the main influences on her writing than has appeared so far.

María Zambrano's synthesis of poetry and philosophy draws essential force from the fragmentary contributions of the Pre-Socratic philosophers,

---

<sup>2</sup> Jaime Siles, *ABC literario*, 9 October 1992, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Jesús Moreno Sanz, 'Sub quadam aeternitatis specie', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984), 32-54 (pp. 33-34).

above all Parmenides. Parmenides was a native of Elea, in the south of Italy, and it is said that he legislated for his native city and visited Athens in his sixty-fifth year (c. 450 BC). His didactic poem, in prosaic hexameters, survives in large fragments and it is the earliest discussion of method in philosophy. In the writings of Parmenides there is no clear demarcation between poetry and philosophy, as Zambrano observes:

Los primeros pensamientos filosóficos son a la par poéticos; en poemas se vierten los transparentes pensamientos de Parménides, de Pitágoras; poetas y filósofos son, al mismo tiempo, los descubridores de la razón en Grecia.

(*Senderos*, p. 65)

The writer Antonio Colinas has suggested with enthusiasm that María Zambrano successfully recreates the pre-Socratic union between poetry and philosophy in her work:

¡Cuánto tiempo ha pasado, en verdad, desde el venerable poema de Parménides, desde la palabra luminosa y oscura de los presocráticos, que hacían ciencia y, al mismo tiempo, utilizaban la razón y elevaban el vuelo sobre la palabrería estéril para hacer también poesía!<sup>4</sup>

The reconciliation of poetry and philosophy which in some way reflects this Pre-Socratic unity was certainly one of Zambrano's main aspirations in her writing. Emphasis on an association between reason and poetry is a recurrent feature of her work but she also highlighted the difficulty of integrating poetry and philosophy:

La verdad se reconoce ya como parcial y la misma razón descubridora del ser reconoce la diferencia injusta entre lo que es, y lo que hay. Al hacerlo así, se acerca al terreno de la poesía. Y la poesía, al sufrir el martirio de la lucidez, se aproxima a la razón. Mas no pensemos todavía en que se verifique su reintegración, tantas veces soñada por quienes no pueden decidirse entre uno y otro.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 116)

A correspondence between Parmenides's didactic poem and Zambrano's

---

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Colinas, 'La esencia de un mensaje', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, ed. Fernando Savater & others, Por un nuevo saber, 11 (Lérida: Grupo Cultural Zero Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada, 1983), pp. 102-104 (p. 102).

writings is suggested by the poetic substructure of Parmenides's thought. His work opens with an allegory describing his chariot-journey from the House of Night to that of Day, where he is welcomed by an unnamed goddess:

**288** The mares carry me as far as my heart ever aspires, sped me on, when they had brought and set me on the far-famed road of the god, which bears the man who knows over all cities. On that road was I borne, for that way the wise horses bore me, straining at the chariot, and maidens led the way. And the axle in the naves gave out the whistle of a pipe, blazing, for it was pressed hard on either side by the two well-turned wheels as the daughters of the Sun made haste to escort me, having left the halls of Night for the light, and having thrust the veils from their heads with their hands.

There are the gates of the paths of Night and Day, and a lintel and a stone threshold enclose them. They themselves, high in the air, are blocked with great doors, and avenging Justice holds the alternate bolts. Here the maidens beguiled with gentle words and cunningly persuaded to push back swiftly from the gates the bolted bar. And the gates created a yawning gap in the door frame when they flew open, swinging in turn in their sockets the bronze-bound pivots made fast with dowels and rivets. Straight through them, on the broad way, did the maidens keep the horses and the chariot.

And the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and with these words: 'Young man, you who come to my house in the company of immortal charioteers with the mares which bear you, greetings. No ill fate has sent you to travel this road -far indeed does it lie from the steps of men -but right and justice. It is proper that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance. But nonetheless you shall learn these things too, how what is believed would have to be assuredly, pervading all things throughout.'<sup>5</sup>

The goddess reveals the truth to the poet at the point where Night and Day meet, where opposites are undivided and there are no contrasts, 'all is full of light and obscure night at once, both equal, since neither has any share of

---

<sup>5</sup> Parmenides, 'The Proem' Fr. I (Sextus *adv. math.* VII, 3 (lines 1-30); Simplicius *de caelo* 557, (lines 28-32) in G.S. Kirk & others, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), p. 243.

nothing'.<sup>6</sup> The goddess addresses the poet and describes three ways of thought, that It is, that It is not and that It is and It is not. The first, which Parmenides has just travelled, she presents in detail; departing from the premiss that it is, she deduces the characteristics of what is. What is like a sphere, it has no beginning and no end, it is single, motionless, continuous and determinate. The goddess rejects the second and third ways of thinking, the last being Heraclitus's Law of Contradiction. Heraclitus maintained that everything changes; Parmenides responded that nothing changes.

In Zambrano's essay 'La metáfora del corazón', she represents the heart as a dark recess visited by the light of Reason, which as we shall see is a metaphor for *razón poética*. In the section 'La secreta vida del corazón', Zambrano describes Reason as transparent and superficial, it is contrasted with the obscurity and depth of the heart, hence: 'la razón es pura manifestación' ('luz intelectual', *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 50) and the heart is 'un *dentro* obscuro, secreto y misterioso'. Having set up this opposition Zambrano then proceeds to dismantle it, a process which begins when the heart 'en ocasiones, se abre' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 54). The opening of the heart lets in the light of Reason, and darkness and light meet. This reflects the meeting of contrasts in Parmenides; the poet gains privileged access to truth through descent into a dark, mysterious region, 'The House of Night', but it is only when the light of Day meets this obscurity that truth is revealed. The parallel with Parmenides's thought is developed further in Zambrano's essay as the meeting of contrasts, darkness and light, takes place in the heart, a centre: 'todo centro vital vivifica. Y de ahí que el corazón ya desde la 'fysis' sea el centro entre todos,' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 69), which reflects the goddess's description of 'what is' as spherical and without beginning or end.

The second major influence on the development of Zambrano's concept *razón poética* is Stoic philosophy. Stoicism, as Julián Marías has observed in

---

<sup>6</sup> Parmenides, Fr. 9, Simplicius in Phys. 180, 8, in G.S. Kirk, p. 256.

his *Biografía de la Filosofía*, has left its mark on Western philosophy and literature from ancient times through to the twentieth century:

Y fuera de la esfera del pensamiento estrictamente "antiguo", el estoicismo sigue ejerciendo un largo influjo, que cruza la Edad Media entera, se reviva aún más en el Renacimiento y persiste en buena parte de la literatura y la filosofía modernas.<sup>7</sup>

Stoic doctrine has exerted a considerable influence on the work of a number of Spanish writers, from Jorge Manrique's *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* to the novel *San Mateo el Bueno* by Miguel de Unamuno and Angel Ganivet's *Idearium español*, and it seems to hold special relevance and interest for María Zambrano. In particular she focuses attention on the most undogmatic and unsystematic of all the Stoic writers of Antiquity, the Spanish-born philosopher Seneca.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born of an equestrian family at Cordoba (c. 5 or 4 B.C). As a child he was sent to Rome where he studied rhetoric and philosophy. During the reign of Caligula Seneca was already ranked as an orator and writer of first standing. He was later appointed tutor to Nero and with Nero's accession in 54 he passed from tutor to minister, obtaining in 55 or 56 a suffect consulate, which marks roughly the high point of his ministerial career. He became a reluctant accessory to Agrippina's death in 59 and it fell to him to compose Nero's explanation to Senate. In 65, after relations with the emperor had become strained and Seneca had been granted only partial retirement, he was named in the Pisonian conspiracy and faced the self-inflicted end he was permitted to choose by Nero. Seneca's main philosophical works include three formal *consolationes*, *Ad Marciam*, *Ad Polybium* and *Ad Helviam matrem*, seven philosophical or ethical treatises *De providentia*, *De constantia sapientis*, *De vita beata*, *De ira*, *De otio*, *De tranquillitate animi* and *De brevitate vitae*, three other prose treatises, *De clementia*, *De beneficiis* and *Naturales quaestiones*, and, by far the most important and influential of his writings, the *Epistulae morales*, some

---

<sup>7</sup> Julián Marías, *Biografía de la Filosofía*, 3rd edn (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1958), p. 517.

124 letters written to Lucilius.

In her edition of Seneca's writings, *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca: Presentación y antología*, Zambrano includes extracts from all of these principal works with the exception of three of the treatises, *De providentia*, *De ira* and *De otio*. Two intertwined strands of thought emerge from Zambrano's study of Seneca: first, the idea of philosophy as a direct response to historical circumstance; and second, the concept of *razón mediadora* (mediatory reason), which Zambrano advances in her interpretation of Seneca's writings and which precedes *razón poética*. An understanding of *razón mediadora* and its genesis enables the reader to trace the author's conscious move away from a Hellenic/Kantian conception of pure reason towards *razón poética*.

It was during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War that María Zambrano wrote a number of essays on Stoicism. *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* was first published in 1937, and in this early work the author draws various parallels between the position of the exiled Spanish intellectuals after the Civil War and Seneca's position during Nero's reign.<sup>8</sup> In addition, half of the lecture series Zambrano gave in 1939 in Mexico, collected in the book *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, is devoted to 'La cuestión del estoicismo español'; *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, which includes an interesting preface by Zambrano to a selection of Seneca's writings, was written in 1938 and published in 1944, and *La agonía de Europa*, written in 1940 and published at the end of the Second World War, contains several further references to Stoicism. After the publication of *La*

---

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to compare Zambrano's interpretation of Seneca's career with less indulgent commentaries on his person. See for example 'Séneca, maestro andaluz, abogado, fue el último sabio antiguo y el primer intelectual moderno siempre a vueltas con el poder, siempre trampeando en el límite de hacerse traición', *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, p. 33; 'Seneca's character with its lamentable rift between principle and practice in crises, is sometimes pronounced detestable. He preached detachment and was conspicuously a money-maker; defiance of circumstance, yet whined in Corsica and crawled before Polybius; contempt for death and pain, yet, till finally trapped, evaded them by flagrant complaisance', *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. M. Rose & others (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 828.

*agonía de Europa*, María Zambrano changed course in her thought; Stoic precepts ceased to form the basis of her argument, as her work became progressively less political, and she moved towards the consideration of the triad of philosophy, religion and poetry, where the influence is clearly more mystical than Stoic. In the early essays mentioned above, it becomes evident that Zambrano's interest in Seneca's writings lies in the historical relevance of his doctrine and its socio-philosophical application, 'y es que el estoicismo es un fenómeno propio de crisis histórica, ante todo' (*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 110). Seneca was writing at the time of the Roman emperors Caligula, Claudius and Nero; Zambrano, at the beginning of Franco's dictatorship and during the Second World War. A comparison of her descriptions of the two historical periods, first of Roman society and then the society of the 1940s in Europe, serves to highlight the similarity of her perception of the two situations:

Era el retorno al mundo del rencor y de la venganza, al mundo del delirio y del capricho, pero viéndolo ya instaurado, victorioso sin restricción alguna: totalitario.

(p. 22)

Hoy, este rencor se junta y extiende con tremendo ímpetu negativo; corroe, deshace, borra, va convirtiendo al mundo en un vacío espacio desolado.

(*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, pp. 9-10)

Nero's despotism and cruelty is linked to Franco's dictatorship and the rise of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. Zambrano goes on to claim that philosophical confusion accompanied the totalitarian states. She identified a philosophical void, disorder or chaos in the two critical periods of history in question. She contrasted Nero's tyrannical rule, described as 'el Imperio donde nada tenía medida, número ni armonía' (*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, p. 22) with war-torn Europe which is said to have lost its Greek 'rostro, forma y figura' (*La agonía de Europa*, p. 10). Zambrano developed her argument by suggesting that the exercise of reason was insufficient to offer an immediate solution to the Roman people:

El instante en que la sabiduría resulta al mismo tiempo demasiado y demasiado poco, insuficiente y despegada; el momento en que la razón no se adapta a la medida del hombre, y el hombre ha quedado solo.

(*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, p. 27)

A parallel suggestion is advanced in a modern context in 'La experiencia de la historia', the 1977 preface to the reprint of her *Los intelectuales en el drama de España*, where the author writes:

A los males de la guerra han sustituido en la fingida paz la tortura declarada y establecida en formas innumerables, la proliferación del horror metódicamente cultivado: la degradación última de la razón occidental que al horror ofrece su método.

(*Senderos*, p. 17)

In a thinly veiled allusion to the Francoist dictatorship, Zambrano takes the view that method and the exercise of reason not only failed to order post-war chaos in Europe, but were also instrumental in prolonging the horrors of war. In typically Zambranian terms reason at these times of crisis is 'helpless', 'destitute', or, to employ the author's phrase, *desvalida*.

Resignation is a central axis of Stoic philosophy and this is especially true of Seneca's teachings, as Zambrano affirms in *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*: 'en ningún estoico como Séneca vemos aparecer tan nítidamente el fondo último del estoicismo: la resignación' (p. 23). Seneca, however, wrote less to expound than to persuade; for Zambrano, he employs a persuasive, 'mediatory' process of reasoning in his essays. In Seneca's writing philosophy and the trials of human existence are reconciled, while resignation mediates between the two, according to Zambrano:

Es propiamente un mediador, un mediador, por lo pronto, entre la vida y el pensamiento, entre ese alto logos establecido por la filosofía griega como principio de todas las cosas, y la vida humilde y menesterosa.

(p. 17)

Mas esta resignación no nos ofrece dogmáticamente, sino de acuerdo con lo que podríamos llamar su naturaleza, lenta, suavemente, por medio de una razón persuasiva, de una razón mediadora que apenas se nombra a sí misma y que si lo hace es para echar mano del antiguo prestigio.

(*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, p. 24)

In Stoic doctrine Nature is ruled by reason (the *Logos*), which manifests itself as Fate (*heimarmene*); hence whatever happens, happens in accordance with divine reason. In the work of the Stoics the Greek idea of *logos* as the first principle changes into a law of nature which governs human life. Zambrano describes Seneca's interpretation of *logos* in the following terms: *razón pura* (here associated with 'Hellenic'/Heraclitean *logos*) is reduced to *razón dulcificada* or *razón mediadora*.<sup>9</sup> She supports her description with a metaphorical interpretation of Senecan reason: 'la razón en él [Séneca] tiene un aire de viuda que pide lo justo para no morir de hambre' (*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca*, p. 31). In its restorative or palliative quality, *razón mediadora* can be seen to foreshadow *razón poética*:

Al fin la razón mediadora que se hace ante todo moral para el inmediato consumo del hombre, se hace poesía para que su modo de penetrar sea más suave, para que su dulcificación sea más cumplida.

(*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 125)

Jorge Manrique's *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*, 'una consolación de estilo senequista' (*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 118), provide perhaps the finest example of the meeting of stoic reasoning and poetry outlined by Zambrano above. In her essay '«La guerra» de Antonio Machado' she spelt out this association:

Esta unidad de razón y poesía, pensamiento filosófico y conocimiento poético de la sentencia popular y que encontramos en todo su austero esplendor en Jorge Manrique ¿de dónde viene? ¿Dónde se engendra? Una palabra llega por sí misma no más se piensa en ello: estoicismo;

---

<sup>9</sup> See also 'La razón mediadora, aparecida también en un singular estoico llamado Séneca, tan cerca del pitagorismo, es ya explícita y está enlazada con la música. La música, inaudible a veces, que sostiene en su abismo a la vida, la elevada a razón mediadora -que sería un modo de definir la música-. La razón mediadora no pretende llegar al ser, nace de una renuncia tan fecunda que hace oír la música del pensamiento, en un instante que no lleve tiempo, salvando a la vida de su condena a la temporalidad, al mismo tiempo que la acepta, que la trasciende, no que la supera. Toda razón ha de ser mediadora entre la nada y el ser, entre la soberbia de la vida y su acabamiento, su humillación, tal como sucede en las razones constructivas, que pretenden suplantar a la misma vida con su construcción', *Notas de un método*, p. 129.

la popular sentencia y la culta copla del refinado poeta del siglo XV, parecen emanar de esta común raíz estoica, que aparece no más intentamos sondear en lo que se llama nuestra cultura popular.

(Senderos, p. 66)

The influence of Seneca's teachings on Zambrano's work is prominent during the period of conflict in Spain and Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and her close consideration of the validity of Stoic doctrine in early collections of essays serves as valuable ground work for the development of her thought. As Moreno has noted, *razón poética* draws essential force from ancient conceptions of reason:

Se manifiesta así una razón lograda desde el sentir originario y oscuro, razón que si es 'creadora', poética, lo es en virtud de haber sido engendrada y germinante - aquel logos spermatikos, semillas del logos heraclitiano cosechadas por los estoicos - en los infiernos de las entrañas.<sup>10</sup>

As well as finding its source in ancient philosophies, María Zambrano's poetic thought has many points of contact with the work of modern European thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno. As for Nietzsche, the stamp of his work on modern Spanish writing has been well-documented by Sobejano in his comprehensive study.<sup>11</sup> In his critical history Sobejano refers to one of the two articles María Zambrano devoted to the consideration of Nietzsche's thought, 'La destrucción en la filosofía de Nietzsche' (1945), which along with 'Lou Andreas Salomé: Nietzsche' (1933) was published in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*. The implication is that Zambrano's interest in Nietzsche's thinking resides exclusively in her analysis in the <sup>artículos</sup> two. A closer study of her work reveals, however, that the influence of the German thinker on Zambrano is much more far-reaching than Sobejano suggests, although it is clear that she did not endorse the highly

---

<sup>10</sup> Jesús Moreno Sanz, 'María Zambrano: del punto oscuro al centro creador', *Ínsula*, 509 (1989), 9-10 (p. 9).

<sup>11</sup> Gonzalo Sobejano, *Nietzsche en España*, Estudios y ensayos, 102 (Madrid: Gredos, 1967), p. 636.

questionable political stance he adopted, especially in relation to gender, as will be discussed in a later chapter.

In 'La destrucción de la filosofía en Nietzsche', as the title of the essay suggests, Zambrano was principally concerned with the breakdown of traditional forms of philosophical discourse in Nietzsche's highly personal, aphoristic, lyrical and anti-systematic writings. Zambrano displayed an awareness of the extreme nature of his doctrine though there is no explicit reference in her writing to the fact that his art lent itself to exploitation by fascism. She described him as 'un héroe del extremismo' who 'sólo puede afirmarse a sí mismo en la tenacidad y en la audacia' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 134). For her, Nietzsche's radicalism led to the destruction of philosophical discourse in his writings in an attempt to return to the origins of the discipline:

Tal extremismo le hizo recorrer hasta el final, el proceso de destrucción de la Filosofía misma. Quizá fue el primero de esos geniales destructores, los más infatigables trabajadores de este tiempo, los más exasperados, al menos. Lo que a Nietzsche tocó en suerte fue destruir la Filosofía. El propósito asoma en su obra con bastante claridad y sin embargo, no es solamente la existencia de este propósito lo que le hace consumirlo, sino algo sumamente filosófico, que le es común con los filósofos todos y especialmente con los filósofos de la actualidad: el afán de buscar los orígenes.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 134)

She then represents Nietzsche's lyricism; placing an emphasis on the poetic over the rational in his thought. This is an interesting interpretation in the context of *razón poética*, for reason here is described as subordinate to poetry:

Mas, en Nietzsche la poesía ha tenido que aguardar a que el lenguaje racional, en su arquitectura de siglos, haya sido destruido. ¿No habrá sido el poeta asfixiado por el filósofo, quien en el complejo corazón de Nietzsche obligara a esa disolución sin tregua que la razón hace de sí misma? Pues la poesía en él se siente libertada y vive sus mejores días cuando ya la razón descende.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 137-8)

Zambrano most resembles Nietzsche in his dismantling of traditional philosophical concepts of the Hellenic *logos* outlined in his discussion of the terms Apolline and Dionysiac in *The Birth of Tragedy*. These are forces or categories in a metaphysical sense. The Dionysiac pertains to the nature of reality, while the Apolline is connected with modes of its appearance. In a way they are opposites, but they are not mutually hostile as is commonly held. Nietzsche was interested in overcoming the dichotomy that exists between them:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*; just as the reproduction of the species depends on the duality of the sexes, with its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliations. These terms are borrowed from the Greeks, who revealed the profound mysteries of their artistic doctrines to the discerning mind, not in concepts but in vividly clear forms of deities. To the two gods of art, Apollo and Dionysius, we owe our recognition that in the Greek world there is a tremendous opposition, as regards both origins and aims, between the Apolline art of the sculptor and the non-visual, Dionysiac art of music. These two very different tendencies walk side by side, usually in violent opposition to one another, inciting one another to ever more powerful births, perpetuating the struggle of the opposition only apparently bridged by the word 'art'; until, finally, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic 'will', the two seem to be coupled, in this coupling they seem at last to beget the work of art that is as Dionysiac as it is Apolline -Attic tragedy.<sup>12</sup>

Nietzsche celebrates the joyous, intuitive, 'Dionysiac' aspects of human nature 'most immediately understandable to us in the analogy of *intoxication*'<sup>13</sup> over Apollonian reason and reasoning, which he sees as pertaining to the world of illusion or appearance, and which is powerless to instruct us about the nature of reality. In a number of ways the dynamic

---

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 17.

between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, that Nietzsche finds central to Greek life, is re-enacted in Zambrano's paradoxical term *razón poética*. Zambrano gives prominence to the Dionysian spirit, associated with the epithet 'poética'. In 'Pasos', the third section of *Claros del bosque*, she describes the god Dionysius in a dense, encyclopedic passage, with the strong suggestion of sensuality, entitled 'El delirio-el Dios oscuro':

Es el dios que nace y el dios que vuelve. Embriaga y no sólo por el jugo de la vid, su símbolo sobre todos, sino ante todo por sí mismo. La comunicación es su don. Y antes de que ese su don se establezca hay que ser poseído por él, esencia que se transfunde en un mínimo de sustancia y aun sin ella, por la danza, por la mímica, de la que nace el teatro; por la representación de lo que es y que sólo así se da a conocer, no en conceptos, sino en presencia y figura; en máscara que es historia. Signo del ser que se da en historia. La pasión de la vida que irremediamente se vierte y se sobrepasa en historia. Y se embebe sólo en la muerte. El dios que se derrama, que se vierte siempre, aun cuando en los 'Ditirambos' se dé en palabras. Las palabras de estos sus himnos siguen teniendo grito, llanto y risa al ser expresión incontenible. Expresión que se derrama generosa y avasalladoramente.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 43)

This passage represents a step along the poetico-philosophical path Zambrano lays down in *Claros del bosque*. She underscores the enduring symbolic qualities of the mythological Greek god; namely life force, intoxication, literary creation and, in particular, tragedy. All of these are elements which inform her poetic vision of reality.

Zambrano's drama *La tumba de Antígona* provides a further example of the connection between Nietzsche's idea of the Dionysiac and her concept *razón poética*. In many ways Zambrano's text can be seen as a modern continuation or further unravelling of the Antigone myth dramatized by Sophocles. It is one of her most literary works and, as Julia Castillo has observed, 'es uno de los lugares de su pensamiento donde más obstinadamente y con más amor sueña la autora con una reconciliación entre filosofía y poesía' (*La tumba de Antígona*, p. 10). The action in *La*

*tumba de Antígona* takes place exclusively in the tomb where the Greek heroine is buried alive.<sup>14</sup> Zambrano omits the suicide scene which takes place in Sophocles's tragedy and thus heightens Antigone's status as a tragic figure or, as Zambrano puts it: 'la doncella sacrificada a los *ínferos*' (*La tumba de Antígona*, p. 18). In her play Zambrano focuses on Antigone's pious love which governs the passage of her life: 'Seguiré viva entre los muertos hasta que el Amor y la Piedad, uno solo, lo quiera' (p. 70). Through her experience of the various states of love (solitude, delirium and passion) Antigone is cast as the messenger of conscience. As Zambrano writes in her prologue:

El dado al amor ha de pasar por todo: por los infiernos de la soledad, del delirio, por el fuego, para acabar dando esa luz que sólo en el corazón se enciende, que sólo por el corazón se enciende. Parece que la condición sea ésta de haber de descender a los abismos para ascender, atravesando todas las regiones donde el amor es el elemento, por así decir, de la trascendencia humana; primeramente fecundo, seguidamente, si persiste, creador. Creador de vida, de luz, de conciencia.

(*La tumba de Antígona*, p. 20)

Antigone's blighted family look to her for purification; they come to her in order to be fully born. The conscience that directs Antigone's heroic act of piety towards Polyneices is extended towards the family as a whole: '¿Cómo voy a hacerlos nacer a todos? Pero sí, yo, yo sí estoy dispuesta. Por mí, sí; por mí, sí. A través de mí' (p. 53). Zambrano's heroine is also aware of the cathartic effects of her death on the people of Thebes. She is sacrificed for 'la Ley Nueva' (*La tumba de Antígona*, p. 90), she transgresses the law so that through her punishment the law may be purified. In Zambrano's play Antigone's tragedy becomes a *catalyst*: through

<sup>14</sup> See Carlos Fuentes's comments on this interval. He writes: 'Tiempo. Tiempo y deseo. Pausa para transformar la información en experiencia y la experiencia en conocimiento. Tiempo para reparar el daño de la ambición, el uso cotidiano del poder, el olvidado, el desdén. Tiempo para la imaginación. Tiempo para la vida y para la muerte. Antígona está sola, recuerda su hermana, María Zambrano. Necesita tiempo para vivir su muerte. Necesita tiempo para morir su vida', *Geografía de la novela* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1993), p. 16.

her death true understanding is reached.<sup>in Thebes</sup> This can be related to the distinctions Nietzsche drew between 'wisdom' (*Weisheit*) and 'knowledge' (*Wissenschaft*). The Dionysiac is associated with the former and it leads to the knowledge of the unchangeable nature of things. Castillo defines the poetic nature of Zambrano's drama as follows: 'poesía, en ese absorber culpabilidad e inocencia al mismo tiempo que vida y muerte'; and the philosophical nature 'en lo que tiene de alumbramiento: la conciencia, en medio de esa lucidez, de esa cordura en que se unen sueño y vigilia'.<sup>15</sup> The meeting of these elements in the play suggests a literary exposition of *razón poética* which is derived from Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysiac. In her re-working of the classical myth Zambrano plays down the role of authority, order and unity and foregrounds Antigone's passionate spirit. In this context the emphasis of the exiled Republican writer is diametrically opposed to Nationalist interpretations of classical Greek literature.

The second major modern influence on this aspect of Zambrano's thought is the Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset. Ortega exercised a decisive influence on the following generation of writers both in Spain and Latin America. There has never been any doubt that María Zambrano numbered herself amongst his disciples. However, there has been some imprecision, often in the form of over-emphasis, about the extent of his influence over her. On a political level, for example, Zambrano's steadfast commitment to Republican ideals in her thought separated it from Ortega's more ambiguous position. Still, Zambrano herself fully recognised an Ortegian apprenticeship. For her it began before the Civil War at the University of Madrid, when as a student she attended lecture courses given by the philosopher and completed her doctoral thesis under his supervision. In 'Ortega y Gasset universitario' (1936), the first of half a dozen articles she dedicated to the thinker, she recalled the extraordinary impact of his lectures on her student contemporaries: 'damos por sabido que la enseñanza universitaria de D. José Ortega y Gasset ha transcendido para

---

<sup>15</sup> Castillo, 'La tumba de Antígona: Tragedia y misericordia', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 105-110 (p. 108-109).

nosotros de lo que se cree que es la Universidad'.<sup>16</sup> Zambrano's intellectual relationship with Ortega y Gasset grew more complex after the watershed of the Civil War. In 'Ortega y Gasset, filósofo español', a lecture she gave in exile at the University of La Habana, it is significant that her open acknowledgement of Ortega's status as her 'maestro' is mixed with a keen awareness of independence of mind:

Pocas tareas tan difíciles como la de hablar del pensamiento de un maestro.

Si hemos sido en verdad sus discípulos, quiere decir que ha logrado de nosotros algo al parecer contradictorio; que, por habernos atraído hacia él, hayamos llegado a ser nosotros mismos.

(*España, sueño y verdad*, p. 93)

Equally, her discipleship is undisputed by critics; Abellán, for instance, places her in a group of exiled Ortegian followers which includes Gaos, Recasens Siches, Granell and Ayala. And Aranguren makes the unequivocal statement: 'María Zambrano fue y es discípula de Ortega.'<sup>17</sup> Aranguren goes on to qualify his assertion by referring to Zambrano's account of the day of her departure from Spain on the eve of the Republican defeat:

María Zambrano nos cuenta que en el último momento de su estancia en España, aprestándose ya para cruzar la frontera, hubo de elegir unas pocas cosas para llevárselas consigo. Y en efecto, 'allí estaban, cuidadosamente ordenados en unas cajas de fácil transporte, todos mis apuntes de los numerosos cursos de Ortega', junto con otros papeles, también de gran valía. Y agrega: 'Nunca he logrado explicarme hasta ahora por qué corté mi gesto de recogerlos, por qué los dejé abandonados allí, en aquella casa sola, cuyo vacío resonó, al cerrarse la puerta, de modo inolvidable'.<sup>18</sup>

This critical anecdote, as Aranguren suggests, goes some way towards explaining the nature of the philosophical debt Zambrano owes to Ortega.

---

<sup>16</sup> 'Ortega y Gasset universitario', *El Sol*, 8 March 1936, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Abellán, *Panorama de la filosofía española actual: una situación escandalosa*, p. 127; Aranguren, 'Los sueños de María Zambrano', *Revista de Occidente*, 35 (1966), 207-12 (p. 208).

<sup>18</sup> Aranguren, 'Los sueños de María Zambrano', p. 208.

Writing in exile, unable to consult her lecture notes, she relied on what she had already absorbed of Ortega's teachings: 'ha ido surgiendo su contenido del fondo de mi mente, según mi pensamiento los llamaba, en esa medida tan grata a Ortega, la de la necesidad' (*España, sueño y verdad* p. 95). This comment provides a clear indication of the general nature of Ortega's influence. Zambrano follows his teachings in a broad sense. In her introduction to *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* (1986) she again alluded to her inconstant discipleship, as well as indicating the common ground in their work. The first meeting point she identified is an obvious but a significant one, given the notable absence of a strong philosophical tradition in Spain: the Spanish language. A further alliance is established in the writers' common roots in Platonic philosophy:

Aunque haya recorrido mi pensamiento lugares donde el de Ortega y Gasset no aceptaba entrar, yo me considero su discípula. Por este salvar las circunstancias platónicamente (para no adaptarse a ellas como después se ha entendido), y por esta fidelidad al idioma, que podría parecer una limitación y que es fidelidad al verbo que se nos ha entregado al idioma español.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 13)

The critic Alain Guy summarizes Ortega's influence on Zambrano in terms a little more specific than the ones used by herself, although they are still very general:

Hostil al naturalismo como al intelectualismo, aspira a prolongar el orteguismo en el sentido de una apertura mayor a la trascendencia y a la introspección integral.<sup>19</sup>

But it is in Ortega's critique of reason, the central tenet of his thought, as Zambrano asserts, 'pues que la filosofía de Ortega es la de la Razón Vital, Histórica o Viviente' (*España, sueño y verdad* p. 97), that the imprint of the 'maestro' is most striking and pertinent. In the early stages of his thought Ortega saw reason as a limited and insufficient tool, capable only of a reality contingent upon our ideas and not of a reality linked to the

---

<sup>19</sup> *Los filósofos españoles de ayer y de hoy: Épocas y autores*, trans. Luis Echávarri (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1966), p. 211.

authenticity of life. He advanced a theory of reality, encapsulated in 'razón vital'; by recognising life as 'la realidad radical' he re-interpreted reason through experience. In his essay 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo' (1924) Ortega clarified his interpretation of reason previously outlined in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*. He drew a distinction between reason and what he called the philosophical dogma of rationalism and his criticism was directed at the latter. He wrote: 'Mi ideología no va en contra la razón, puesto que no admite otro modo de conocimiento teórico que ella: va sólo contra el racionalismo'.<sup>20</sup> Zambrano adopted a similar position in her thought, questioned the superior value given to rationalist or systematic ideas of reason in modern culture and suggested that human kind should rediscover other forms of interpreting reality which are described as poetic, liturgical or metaphysical:

La razón racionalista, esquematizada, y más todavía en su uso y utilización que los textos originarios de la filosofía correspondiente, da un solo medio de conocimiento. Un medio adecuado a lo que ya es o a lo que a ello se encamina con certeza; a las 'cosas' en suma, tal como aparecen y creemos que son. Mas el ser humano habría de recuperar otros medios de la visibilidad que su mente y sus sentidos mismos reclaman por haberlos poseído alguna vez poéticamente, o litúrgicamente, o metafísicamente.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 147)

Moreover, she advocated a 'reformation' of reason which would incorporate 'forms of knowledge' independent of rationalist thinking: 'La razón, reformándose ella misma, debe aceptar formas de conocimiento que le son ajenas e incluso tradicionalmente hostiles'.<sup>21</sup> It is her interpretation of the nature of this knowledge or 'medio de visibilidad' that marks the shift away from Ortegian doctrine. In a late interview, Zambrano explained the origin of the rift between their ideas. She maintained that her work began to diverge from Ortega's in her early essay 'Hacia un saber sobre el alma'

---

<sup>20</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo', in *Obras completas*, 12 vols. (Madrid: Alianza & Revista de Occidente, 1983), III, 270-80 (p. 273).

<sup>21</sup> Guy, *Los filósofos españoles de ayer y de hoy*, p. 209

where the seeds of her idea of *razón poética* were sown. Interestingly, Zambrano's concept emerged from a conscious attempt to put into practice Ortega's idea of 'razón vital':

Yo siempre he ido al rescate de la pasividad, de la receptividad. Yo no lo sabía, pero desde hacía muchos años yo también andaba haciendo alquimia. La cosa comenzó hace ya muchos años. Mi razón vital de hoy es la misma que ya aparece en mi ensayo 'Hacia un saber sobre el alma', libro que se va a reeditar. Yo creía, por entonces, estar haciendo razón vital y lo que estaba haciendo era razón poética. Y tardé en encontrar su nombre. Lo encontré precisamente en 'Hacia un saber sobre el alma', pero sin tener todavía mucha conciencia de ello. Yo le llevé este ensayo, que da título al libro, al propio don José Ortega, a la *Revista de Occidente*. Él, tras leerlo, me dijo: 'Estamos todavía aquí y usted ha querido dar el salto más allá'. Esto lo cuento por primera vez, es inédito. [. . .]

Exactamente. Desde ese momento. Yo salí llorando por la Gran Vía, de la redacción de la *Revista*, al ver la acogida que encontró en don José lo que yo creía que era la razón vital. Y de ahí parten algunos de los malentendidos con Ortega, que me estimaba, que me quería. No lo puedo negar. Y yo a él. Pero había como una posibilidad. Es obvio que él dirigió su razón hacia la razón histórica. Yo dirigí la mía hacia razón poética.<sup>22</sup>

Ortega's exposition of his conception of reason in the essay 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo' is central to an understanding of the genesis of Zambrano's *razón poética*. Taking his lead from Bergson, Ortega proposed a method of perceiving reality which combined reasoning with intuition:

Para Leibniz, como antes para Platón, y entre medias para Descartes, la racionalidad radica en la capacidad de reducir el compuesto a sus postreros elementos, que Leibniz y Descartes llamaban *simplices* – pero no Platón, tal vez por una honda y aguda cautela.

Lo 'lógico', racional por excelencia, es, pues, siempre la operación de inventario que hacemos descomponiendo lo complejo en términos últimos. Por eso Leibniz define formalmente la lógica como la ciencia de *continente et contenido*, de la relación entre el continente y el contenido, el compuesto y sus ingredientes. Al llegar a éstos la lógica

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Sobre la iniciación: conversación con Antonio Colinas', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 38 (1986) 2-9 (p. 6).

termina y tiene que reducirse a contemplarlos. Definido el compuesto se encuentra ante los últimos elementos indefinibles.

La idea racional es la idea 'distinta' frente a la 'confusa'. Distinta es la idea que podemos anatomizar en todos sus componentes internos, y, por tanto, penetramos por completo. Al distender los poros de la idea compleja penetra *entre ellos* nuestro intelecto y la hace transparente. Esa transparencia cristalina es el síntoma de lo racional. Pero los poros se hallan entre los elementos o átomos de la idea: *sobre ellos* rebota nuestra intelección y, exentos de intersticios, no los puede a su vez penetrar. Leibniz no tiene otro remedio que aceptar lo que más dolor podía ocasionarle: que la definición o razón descansa a la postre en simple intuición, que la actividad disectriz y analítica termina en quietud intuitiva. El racionalismo quisiera que toda cosa fuese conocida por otra (su 'razón'); pero es el caso que las últimas cosas sólo se conocen por sí mismas, por tanto *irracionalmente*, y que de este saber intuitivo e irracional depende, a la postre, el racional.<sup>23</sup>

Ortega observed that reason is knowledge that leads to the innermost depths of an object and permits the breaking down of an object into its essential elements so that we seem to see it from within itself. However, he argued that there are irreducible elements of an object which cannot be known through reason. They can only be known through intuition, which is irrational as it excludes proof or reason. He surmised that 'la razón es una breve zona de claridad analítica que se abre entre dos estratos insondables de irracionalidad', and that the reductive character of reason leads it to 'un método intuitivo, opuesto a ella, pero que de ella vive'. Therefore the act of reasoning becomes 'un puro combinar visiones irrazonables'.<sup>24</sup>

As for Zambrano, the first use of the term *razón poética* in her published writing gives an indication of the similarities between her concept and 'razón vital' as outlined by Ortega above. It also suggests the ways in which their paths diverge. In '«La guerra» de Antonio Machado' Zambrano endorsed Machado's conception of poetry as a superior form of thought which is capable of capturing the inner reality of an object or the

---

<sup>23</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo', 274-75.

<sup>24</sup> Ortega y Gasset, 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo', 277.

heterogeneity of being. This she called 'razón poética, de honda raíz de amor. [. . .] esta razón de amor reintegradora de la rica sustancia del mundo' (*Senderos*, p. 68-69). For Zambrano, then, it is through poetic creation, which to a large extent incorporates Ortega's ideas of intuition, that the essential elements of an object can be perceived.

A consideration of the meanings invested in the word *poética* by Zambrano helps to elucidate the import of its application in her writing and the ways in which her work develops independently from Ortega. What María Zambrano understands by the term 'poetry', and in turn the epithet *poética* in the concept *razón poética*, bears many of the hallmarks of the work of the Generation of 1927. Zambrano, in agreement with the poet Jorge Guillén, places emphasis on the Greek etymon of the word *poiesis*, and highlights the creative process or act. In his critical essay *Lenguaje y poesía* Guillén describes the importance of creation for the poets of his generation:

El poeta siente en su plenitud etimológica el vocablo 'poesía'. (Pero esta "creación" será, quiéralo o no, segunda respecto a la del primer creador del Génesis. Todos los poetas son "poètes du dimanche", del domingo que sigue al sábado en que descansó Jehová). Hay que recoger, para evocar la atmósfera de aquellos años, esta voluntad de poesía como creación, de poema como quintaesenciado mundo.<sup>25</sup>

In Zambrano's thought the word is most commonly found in adjectival form -'razón poética', 'un método de un vivir poético'- and unless understood in a broad sense tends to misdirect the reader. In *Claros del bosque* the author clarified the meaning she ascribed to the word by reference to its etymological root: 'Y nada habrá que objetar si por poético se entendiera lo que poético, poema o poetizar quieren decir a la letra' (p. 16); hence it becomes 'poética siempre por creadora, aunque no se llama poesía' (*España, sueño y verdad*, p. 129).

As a creative force, poetry for both the Generation of 1927 and María Zambrano is not an instrument of dialéctic; it is not polemical, reactionary

---

<sup>25</sup> Guillén, *Lenguaje y poesía: algunos casos españoles* (Madrid: Alianza, 1969), p. 189.

or antagonistic. It is interesting to compare the following comment by Dámaso Alonso on the rise of 'poesía pura' as part of the output of the Generation of 1927:

Lo primero que hay que notar es que esa generación no se alza contra nada<sup>26</sup>

with Zambrano's comment on the origins of poetry:

La poesía no nació en la polémica, y su generosa presencia jamás se afirmó polémicamente. No surgió frente a nada.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 25)

A consciousness of the wide-ranging nature of poetic experience is also common to Zambrano and Pedro Salinas. Salinas described poetic creation as a total process in which the poet draws on all of his/her perceptions:

Hoy día miramos la creación poética como una operación total, inclusive de todas las potencias psíquicas del individuo; el poeta se pone en su poema con todo lo que lleva dentro de sí y al entrarse en las galerías por donde busca el poema no se deja fuera ninguna capacidad de su alma.<sup>27</sup>

Zambrano contrasted the poet's celebration of the diversity of human experience with the philosopher's aim for unity of thought:

La poesía perseguía, entre tanto, la multiplicidad desdeñada, la menospreciada heterogeneidad. El poeta enamorado de las cosas se apega a ellas y las sigue a través del laberinto del tiempo, del cambio, sin poder renunciar a nada: ni a una criatura ni a un instante de esa criatura, ni a una partícula de la atmósfera que la envuelve.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 19)

She argued that through poetic understanding human kind maintained contact the surrounding universe. <sup>with</sup> <sup>It is linked to</sup> Human participation in the universe, the relationship between human beings and nature:

Por el conocimiento poético el hombre no se separa jamás del universo y conservando intacta su intimidad, participa en todo, es miembro del universo, de la naturaleza y de lo humano y aun de lo que hay entre lo

---

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Guillén, *Lenguaje y poesía*, p. 185.

<sup>27</sup> Pedro Salinas, *Jorge Manrique o tradición y originalidad*, 3rd edn (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1962), p. 220.

humano y más allá de él.

(*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 76)

These are the three main strands of meaning woven into the adjective *poética* in Zambrano's thought; it refers to a process which is creative, heterogeneous, and without polemic.

In an early work María Zambrano described poetic knowledge as a revelation, and though her explanation of this notion closely resembles Ortega's concept of *alétheia* or momentary insight, she rejected his term in favour of *razón poética*.<sup>28</sup> She wrote:

El conocimiento poético se logra por un esfuerzo al que sale a mitad de camino una desconocida presencia. A mitad de camino porque el afán que busca esa presencia jamás se encontró en soledad, en esa soledad angustiada de quien ambiciosamente se separó de la realidad. A ése difícilmente la realidad volverá a entregársele. Pero, a quien llega a poseer por fuerza lo que es inagotable, la realidad le sale al encuentro y su verdad no será nunca verdad conquistada, verdad raptada, violada; no es *alétheia* sino revelación graciosa y gratuita; razón poética.

(*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 75)

With echoes of Dante ('a mitad de camino'), Zambrano defined poetic knowledge or *razón poética* as an act of will, 'un esfuerzo', or striving after the inexhaustible. She suggested that through this endeavour the nature of reality is revealed freely to humankind.<sup>29</sup> Her privileging of poetic

---

<sup>28</sup> Ortega y Gasset described his notion of *alétheia* as follows: 'Esa pura iluminación subitánea que caracteriza a la verdad, tiénela ésta sólo en el instante de su descubrimiento. Por eso su nombre griego, *alétheia* [. . .] es decir, descubrimiento, revelación, propiamente desvelación, quitar de un velo o cubridor' in 'Meditaciones del Quijote' in *Obras completas*, 12 vols (Madrid, Alianza/Revista de Occidente, 1983), I, pp. 309-400 (pp. 335-336). Jacques Maritain's description of his idea of knowledge through *connaturalité* provides another interesting reference in this field. He wrote 'Poetic knowledge is non-conceptual and non-rational knowledge; it is born in the preconscious life of the intellect, and it is essentially an obscure revelation, both the poet and some flash of reality coming together out of sleep in one single awakening', *The Range of Reason* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1953) pp. 25-26.

<sup>29</sup> Zambrano's ideas here are after the manner of Martin Heidegger who wrote '*Poética*, es, en su fondo, nuestra realidad de verdad; lo cual viene a decir: que estar fundada y fundamentada no es mérito suyo; es un don', *Hölderlin y la esencia de la poesía*, ed. & trans. Juan David García Bacca, *Pensamiento crítico*, 46 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989), p. 31.

perception as a free discovery, 'encuentro, don, hallazgo por gracia' (*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 13), is given fuller development in José Ángel Valente's essay 'Conocimiento y comunicación'. In this essay he makes a detailed comparison of what he calls 'scientific knowledge' and 'poetic knowledge'. His discussion of the latter plainly relates to Zambrano's concept of poetic perception whereas the former provides an indication of what lies behind her rejection of scientific method in her thought.<sup>30</sup> He writes:

Lo dado, lo experimentado, la experiencia, puede conocerse de modo analítico, estudiando su carácter y origen e incluyéndolo en un mecanismo total cuyas leyes cumple o permite establecer (conocimiento científico). Lo que el científico trata de fijar en la experiencia es lo que hay en ella de repetible, lo que puede capacitarle para reproducir una cadena determinada de experiencias a fin de obtener un determinado tipo de efectos previsibles. [. . .] La experiencia como *elemento dado*, como dato en bruto, no es conocida de modo inmediato.<sup>31</sup>

Valente contrasts a practice fundamental to the formulation of scientific laws, namely repeated observation and experiment, with the immediacy of poetic insight. He emphasizes the singular quality of poetic knowledge:

Pero la experiencia puede ser conocida en su particular unicidad, en su compleja síntesis (conocimiento poético). Al poeta no le interesa lo que la experiencia pueda revelar de constante sujeta a unas leyes, sino su carácter único, no legible, es decir, lo que hay en ella de irrepetible y fugaz.<sup>32</sup>

Zambrano's ideas of 'un vivir poético' (*Claros del bosque* p. 16), identified with *razón poética*, mark a further development away from

---

<sup>30</sup> In María Zambrano's writings there is a clear dissociation made between science and the concept *razón poética*. This view is made explicit in *De la Aurora* where she wrote: 'No sería, pues, ciencia ni tiene posibilidad de serlo este conocimiento', p. 30. In her early article '«La guerra» de Antonio Machado' she had indicated already her view of the limitations of scientific knowledge: 'El pensamiento científico, descualificador, desubjetivador, anula la heterogeneidad del ser, es decir, la realidad inmediata, sensible, que el poeta ama y de la que no puede ni quiere desprenderse', *Senderos*, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> Valente, 'Conocimiento y comunicación', in *Palabras de la tribu*, pp. 3-10 (p. 5).

<sup>32</sup> Valente, 'Conocimiento y comunicación', in *Palabras de la tribu*, pp. 3-10 (p. 5).

Ortega's concept of reason. She associated the reformation of reason with new life or in Dante's words, 'vita nuova'. She wrote, 'una razón sin paradojas, sin agonías, sin parecerse a sí misma, casi sin juicio, mas no sin orden; y tanto como ser una razón nueva habría de ser una 'vita nuova' (*De la Aurora*, p. 27). In her ratio-poetic theory Zambrano postulates a return to 'un sentir originario.'<sup>33</sup> She employs the classical trope of 'aurora' to convey the sense of new life or rebirth inherent in her thinking. Zambrano thereby set up a correlation between 'un vivir poético' and original purity:

Lo que aparece, o el resultado a que hemos llegado en estas breves páginas, que más breves aún querrían serlo, es que la Aurora, que nos ha ofrecido la posibilidad de ser un conocimiento propiamente filosófico, una episteme, nos impone inexorablemente su condición de pertenecer al mundo de lo cognoscible. Desde el primer momento en que se la mira nos mira ella a su vez pidiéndonos, requiriéndonos, el que la miremos como la clave de la fisis, del cosmos, pues, y de este su habitante; que aquel que la mira siguiéndola vaya encontrando a través de ella un 'puesto en el cosmos'. Por tanto exige ella una actitud del hombre acerca de su propio ser, un conocimiento de su lugar que le conduce al encuentro de su propio ser. Guía pues, si por guía entendemos la aparición de algo, un suceso, una presencia que saca al sujeto de sí, de la situación en que estrictamente está apresado en una ignorancia que es inmovilidad, y la inmovilidad en el ser humano es intrascendencia. Conocerse es trascenderse. Fluir en el interior del ser. Qué inmensa soledad la del que no ha contemplado, ni siquiera por una sola vez, la Aurora: aunque se le diera al encontrarse en la luz, en la inmensidad de la luz en toda su pureza, qué inmensa soledad sin aurora, qué desorientación. Qué privación del propio ser en cualquiera de los múltiples mundos, pues que se trata de un encontrarse sin sentirse viendo y hasta pensando, si esto fuera posible, desprovisto de un sentir originario.

---

<sup>33</sup> It is a small step from Zambrano's rejection of scientific knowledge to the identification of science with the fall of humankind from grace. In her response to this onto-theological question she follows a similar course to writers of the Generation of 1898, most notably Pío Baroja (*El árbol de la ciencia*) and Unamuno. In *El sentimiento trágico de la vida* Unamuno spelt out the link made between the acquisition of scientific knowledge and a loss of innocence prominent in the work of his generation: 'la curiosidad o deseo de saber, lo que, según el Génesis, llevó a nuestra primera madre al pecado, es el origen de la ciencia, in *Obras completas*, ed. Manuel García Blanco, 16 vols (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado, 1958), XVI, 148.

La Aurora, pues, es guía, también porque es raíz, flor, árbol, alma del sentir originario. Presencia que nace de una insoslayable atención, de una sostenida mirada. Un conocimiento, pues, sostenido únicamente por la atención. Y la atención, aun a solas, es fuente de conocimiento, si bien este conocimiento sea considerado incompleto y sobre todo infundamentable, no a la altura de la razón; por la cual también se le figura al autor de estas breves confesiones que un nuevo modo de razón -por ejemplo, la razón poética- sea necesaria.

(*De la Aurora*, pp. 25-26)

In this passage, which opens the chapter 'Guía Aurora', Zambrano's understanding of 'original' knowledge is formulated in language characteristic of her work as a whole indicating her stylistic, as well as her conceptual, divergence from Ortega. Here, Zambrano commenced by employing a modesty topos, a rhetorical device she has frequent recourse to in her writing, in her summing up of the preceding argument. She explained the symbolic meaning of the Aurora (always capitalized in this text); for her, it represented, with utopian overtones, the possibility of a form of philosophical knowledge or a theory of knowledge. Her use of hyperbaton, with strong resonances of the Baroque, in the sentence beginning 'Desde el primer. . .', serves to entangle subject and object so that the sense of mystic union conveyed subsequently in the phrase 'una presencia que saca al sujeto de sí' is fully anticipated. With the emphasis firmly placed on vision (in itself a metaphor for philosophy), she suggested that the Aurora ('ella/la') offers humankind a key to the understanding of the cosmos. As the title of the chapter implies, she equated the Aurora with a guide, described in this passage in the language of mystical writing.<sup>34</sup> Her idea of self-knowledge as a transcendental process, 'conocerse es trascenderse', marks a clear break with Ortega's thought.

Through metaphor and paradox, Zambrano then developed her idea of the association between original purity and the form of knowledge

---

<sup>34</sup> Zambrano use of the guide as a synonym for her philosophical approach is made more explicit in her essay 'La «Guía», forma de pensamiento' where she wrote: 'Una Guía es algo parecido a un método; de no ser así carecería de unidad o sería un montón de refranes o una colección de fragmentos', *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 73.

connoted by the Aurora/Guide. First, the light of the Aurora is presented as a pure light, ‘una luz en toda su pureza’, which is accorded the power to orient humankind. This, in turn, represents a paradoxical state of being, ‘un encontrarse sin sentirse viendo y hasta pensando’ or a discovery without vision or thought, which is pushed to the limits of possibility in the phrase ‘desprovisto del sentir originario’. For it becomes knowledge which, notionally, even foregoes original feeling. In the opening sentence of the second paragraph, the metaphorical sequence which overlays the central metaphor of the Aurora (typically taken from the natural world, ‘raíz, flor, árbol’) serves to underscore the poetic character of her philosophical vision. A further instance of authorial intrusion accents her main philosophical point at the close of this section. For Zambrano, placing the emphasis on the subjective, described her writing as a confession.<sup>35</sup> The central question at this juncture is, of course, her proposal for the reformation of reason ‘que un nuevo modo de razón -por ejemplo -*razón poética*- sea necesaria’.

The densely metaphorical style Zambrano employed in this passage, is punctuated<sup>by</sup> the words ‘pues, por tanto, por ejemplo’, as above. The sense of formulation and reformulation these words convey, in particular the more colloquial ‘pues’ which suggests a nuance of doubt, indicates the influence of the tradition of philosophical writing, as does the deployment of qualifying structures and phrases such as ‘Y la atención, aun a solas [. . .]’ and ‘si bien’. The texture of her writing involves a style of philosophical argumentation, the rhetorical complexity of the Baroque and metaphorical structures often drawn from mystical writing.

This key passage therefore, taken from one her mature works, indicates the shift of focus in Zambrano (by this stage in her trajectory fully realised) away from Ortega’s *razón vital/histórica*. For whereas Ortega adopted a historicist stance in his reinterpretation of reason, she pursued a

---

<sup>35</sup> ‘Las Guías y las Confesiones muestran un extremo de la existencia subjetiva en el acto del escribir. La Confesión es el descubrimiento de quien escribe. . .’, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 65.

metaphysics in which a state of original purity is at the fore, although this does not completely exclude a historical perspective. In *Claros del bosque*, for example, Zambrano's poetic method is described as 'una vida de verdad o verdaderamente vida, sin todavía mella alguna de su inevitable hija, la historia' (*Claros del bosque* p. 44). Subsequently, in 'Antes de que se profiriesen las palabras', the first section of the chapter 'Palabras', Zambrano evoked a nostalgia for a state of innocence, 'un tiempo de plenitud':

Antes de los tiempos conocidos, antes de que se alzarán las cordilleras de los tiempos históricos, hubo de extenderse un tiempo de plenitud que no daba lugar a la historia. Y si la vida no iba a dar a la historia, la palabra no iría tampoco a dar al lenguaje, a los ríos del lenguaje por fuerza ya diversos ni aun divergentes. Antes de que el género humano comenzara su expansión sobre las tierras para luego ir en busca siempre de una tierra prometida, rememoración y reconstitución siempre precaria del lugar de plenitud perdido, las tierras buscadas, soñadas, reveladas como prometidas venían a ser engendradoras de historia, inicios de la cadena de una nueva historia.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 81).

This extract indicates that the yearning for a state of innocence free of history, 'antes de que se alzarán las cordilleras de los tiempos históricos', is more complicated than it first appears and less ingenuously 'poetic'. For Zambrano's paradisiacal land does not simply, or even, represent 'un jardín sin historia, donde todo se habrá olvidado, en una lírica ceremonia de perdón y de regeneración del mundo' as Blas Matamoro has suggested.<sup>36</sup> In the same way that Zambrano's poetic vision rejects rationalism only to engender a new poetico-rational approach to reality<sup>37</sup> so her quest for paradise, 'las tierras buscadas, soñadas, reveladas como prometidas', ends

---

<sup>36</sup> Matamoro, 'El arrabal de los santos', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 413, (November, 1984) 66-71 (p. 70).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example the following pasage: 'así pues, el conocimiento que aquí se invoca, por el que se suspira, este conocimiento postula, pide que la razón se haga poética sin dejar de ser razón, que acoja al «sentir originario» sin coacción, libre casi naturalmente, como una fysis devuelta a su original condición. Así la aurora se nos aparece como la fysis misma de la razón poética', *De la Aurora*, p. 30.

up generating new history, 'venían a ser engendradoras de historia, inicios de la cadena de una nueva historia' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 81).<sup>38</sup>

In her thought María Zambrano also examines questions of human existence already studied in Spain by Miguel de Unamuno in his highly personal and meditative writings. Unamuno's work covers diverse fields from philosophico-religious thought to the novel or poetry. It is therefore no surprise that <sup>he</sup> shares Machado's disinclination to draw exact distinctions between a philosophical and poetic vocation, <sup>he</sup> Instead he highlights the identity of <sup>the</sup> two; 'poeta y filósofo son hermanos y gemelos, si es que no son la misma cosa.'<sup>39</sup> In 'La religión poética de Unamuno', Zambrano focused on the multi-faceted nature of the writer. She disputed Unamuno's status as a philosopher on the basis of 'su cuestión personal, estrictamente personal con la filosofía' and considered his short novels, *Niebla*, *Abel Sánchez* and *Historia de don Sandalio, jugador de ajedrez* his work of greatest metaphysical import; 'Pues es la novela el lugar privilegiado de la metafísica de don Miguel de Unamuno' (*España, sueño y verdad*, p. 139).

Unamuno's meditative work *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*, 'la obra de mayor tesis' (*España, sueño y verdad* p. 138) in Zambrano's view, is a manifest source of her poetic thinking. In this work, Unamuno gave weight to feeling ('el sentimiento') in philosophical thought. He argued that human sensibility shapes our philosophical conception of reality, forming a 'sentimiento de la vida' or philosophical feeling towards life:

La filosofía responde a la necesidad de formarnos una concepción unitaria y total del mundo y de la vida, y como consecuencia de esa concepción, un sentimiento que engendre una actitud íntima y hasta una acción. Pero resulta que ese sentimiento, en vez de ser consecuencia de aquella concepción es causa de ella.<sup>40</sup>

Zambrano took up these ideas in her semi-autobiographical work where,

---

<sup>38</sup> In this way Zambrano's thought echoes in part Heidegger's ideas on poetry and history: 'La Poesía es el fundamento y soporte de la historia', *Hölderlin y la esencia de la poesía*, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Unamuno, *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Unamuno, *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*, 128-29.

through metaphors of darkness and light, she supported the meeting of feeling and intellect:

Pues vivir humanamente debe de ser ir sacando a la luz el sentir, el principio oscuro y confuso, ir llevando el sentir a la inteligencia. Si la inteligencia no 'rescata', ¿entiende en verdad?

Si se pudiese lograr que sentir y pensar fuesen la misma 'cosa', el mismo acto, entonces sí, con Aristóteles, 'el acto de pensamiento es vida'. Y pensamiento, sólo que el nuestro es estrecho, oscuro, disperso; el nuestro no es pensamiento de verdad.

(*Delirio y destino*, p. 93)

The stamp of personality is also displayed in *Claros del bosque* where, with distinct Unamunian echoes, Zambrano advocates a union of thought and feeling 'que el pensamiento y el sentir se identifiquen sin que sea a costa de que se pierdan el uno en el otro o de que se anulen' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 14). She designated this alliance of thought and feeling 'el sentir iluminante', near to *razón poética*, and resonant of Zubiri's concept<sup>41</sup> 'la inteligencia sentiente'.

In the development of her thought María Zambrano drew on many different proponents of unsystematic philosophy, both ancient and modern. In particular, it may be posited that the writings of Parmenides of Elea, Seneca, Nietzsche, Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno are primary influences on the formulation of Zambrano's concept of *razón poética*. As a result her work is more heterodox than eclectic. José Ángel Valente makes this point in an early critical essay. He observes that Zambrano's thought shares common ground with the work of both ancient philosophers and contemporary European thinkers:

Este transparente saber, en apariencia tan exento, hunde muy vigorosas raíces en el saber tradicional, entendido éste como órbita de radical no disociación entre pensamiento filosófico y experiencia espiritual, pero guarda también relación muy viviente con muchos elementos centrales de la evolución contemporánea del pensamiento europeo.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Valente, 'Del conocimiento pasivo o saber de quietud', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 101-10 (p. 105).

Valente also suggests here that her work straddles philosophical tradition and spiritual experience, and specifically mystical experience. Just how a sense of mystical experience is conveyed in Zambrano's work and its relationship to *razón poética* is a question which will be examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### Mysticism and 'la metáfora del corazón'

In Western tradition, María Zambrano's style of writing arguably comes closest to mystical literature. Zambrano's idea of *razón poética* is indebted to principles of mystical thought and in her writing she often reproduced the metaphorical strategies employed by mystic writers. The term mysticism, rooted in the Greek *mysterion*, is an elusive one and, as Elizabeth Teresa Howe has pointed out, today tends to be 'applied almost indiscriminately to any and all writers, works, experiences, or sects whose exact nature eludes definition'.<sup>1</sup> Critical works on mysticism reveal a variety of definitions of mystic and its related terms. In her seminal study of the subject, Evelyn Underhill summed up the main characteristics of mysticism as follows:

Mysticism is seen to be a highly specialized form of that search for reality, for heightened and complete life, which we have found to be a constant characteristic of human consciousness. It is largely prosecuted by that 'spiritual spark', that transcendental faculty which, though the life of our life, remains below the threshold in ordinary men. Emerging from its hiddenness in the mystic, it gradually becomes the dominant factor in his life; subduing to its service, and enhancing by its saving contact with reality, those vital powers of love and will which we attribute to the heart; rather than those of mere reason and

---

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Howe, *Mystical Imagery: Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz*, American University Studies: Series II: Romance Languages and Literature, 76 (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 35.

perception, which we attribute to the head. Under the spur of this love and will, the whole personality rises in the acts of contemplation and ecstasy to a level of consciousness at which it becomes aware of a new field of perception. By this awareness, by this 'loving sight', it is stimulated to a new life in accordance with the Reality which it has beheld.<sup>2</sup>

Underhill emphasized the sense of philosophical inquiry which informs mysticism and the role of the powers of love and will in mystical experience. Both of these key characteristics are reflected in Zambrano's writing.

Mysticism seems to have formed one area of onto-theological thought where women writers are outstanding. In the Spanish literary tradition, Santa Teresa de Ávila provides the striking example. To place María Zambrano in a mystical tradition is, therefore, perhaps easier than to designate her a place in Western philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, it would be to assert a great deal to say that hers is an expression of mystical experience. Seldom does she evoke the ecstatic or rapturous quality of mystical experience in her writings rather, as she has written of Miguel de Molinos's *Guía espiritual*, 'un movimiento imperceptible del pensar nos conduce a los lugares últimos de la existencia humana, sin éxtasis ni raptos ni visiones'.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to compare two markedly different views as to why women participate in this area of spiritual endeavour. Bernardino de Laredo, writing before Santa Teresa de Ávila, referred to the participation of women in simple terms, and not without overt sexism, 'hase de notar que no hay ningún pobrecito, ni varón, ni mujercita si quisiere ser su discípulo, que no la pueda aprender'.<sup>4</sup> Laredo placed emphasis on the accessibility of mystical theology. A subtler explanation is offered by the contemporary feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray, for whom the loss of subjecthood which occurs in mystical experience represents a release from the patriarchal

---

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen, 1911), pp. 111-12.

<sup>3</sup> 'Miguel de Molinos, reaparecido', *Ínsula*, 338 (1975), 3-4 (p. 4).

<sup>4</sup> Bernardino Laredo, 'Subida del Monte Sión', in *Místicos franciscanos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1965) ii. 25-442, 3.15, 41.

discourse of philosophy; hence mystical discourse becomes the only place in Western history where woman speaks and acts in such a public way:

Ce lieu, le seul où dans l'histoire de l'Occident la femme parle, agit, aussi publiquement. Sans compter que c'est pour/par elle que le masculin s'y hasarde, y descend, y condescend, quitte à s'y brûler. C'est pour parler femme, écrire à des femmes, <sup>se sont</sup> sermonner ou confesser des femmes, que les hommes le plus souvent ~~ont~~ avancé jusqu'à de tels excès. A accepté le recours, le détour de telles métaphores qui n'ont plus qu'à peine le statut de figures. A renoncé à son savoir pour se mettre à l'écoute de leurs folies. Tombant - dirait sans doute Platon - dans le piège de les mimer, de prétendre jouir comme 'elle'. Jusqu'à ne plus s'y retrouver comme 'sujet', et se laisser mener là où il ne voulait surtout pas aller: à sa perte dans cette atypique, atopique, mystérie. Où on aura remarqué déjà - à l'étonnement (du) général - que les plus pauvres en science, les plus ignorants, y furent les plus éloquents, les plus riches de/en révélations. Historiquement, donc, les femmes. Ou, du moins, le 'féminin'.<sup>5</sup>

For a woman writer, such as Zambrano, familiar with the history of Western philosophy, the accessibility of mysticism is unlikely to be an overriding concern. Irigaray's theory, however, in which the *logos* ceases to dominate philosophical discourse may hold more attraction for Zambrano.

Few critics have failed to refer to the decisive influence of mysticism or the mystical quality in Zambrano's thought, culminating in Cintio Vitier's enthusiastic suggestion that *Claros del bosque* is 'el texto espiritual más profundo y más lleno de gracia que se ha escrito en español desde los tiempos de San Juan de la Cruz'.<sup>6</sup> There is, nonetheless, a surprising dearth of detailed criticism in this field. The works of María Zambrano present a wide range of affinities with mystical literature, and especially with the output of the mystic writers of the Spanish Golden Age. The two most influential writers on Zambrano were San Juan de la Cruz and Miguel de Molinos. As Jesús Moreno observes:

Mas si de mística se trata, con referencia a María Zambrano, ninguna

---

<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Spéculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974), pp. 238-239.

<sup>6</sup> Vitier, 'Lecciones de María Zambrano', *Litoral*, 124-126 (1982), 195-196 (p. 196).

por encima de la española y sobremanera dos "experiencias", más que influencias para ella: San Juan de la Cruz y Miguel de Molinos.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting that these two writers should take precedence over Santa Teresa in Zambrano's work. There are, of course, references to Santa Teresa in Zambrano's prose and a number of metaphorical structures are common to both San Juan and Santa Teresa. The focus, still, falls on the writings of San Juan, in particular his three principal mystical poems; *Noche oscura*, *Cántico espiritual* and *Llama de amor viva* and on the writing of Miguel de Molinos.<sup>8</sup>

Miguel de Molinos was born in Muniesa in Aragón in 1628. He took orders in Valencia and was sent to Rome by the Church in 1663. During his stay in the Italian capital, Molinos published his *Breve tratado de la comunión frecuente* and his best known work the *Guía espiritual*. His *Guía espiritual* enjoyed a wide readership from the date of its publication (in the seventeenth century alone twenty editions of the text were produced and it was translated into eleven languages). His teachings, based on the theological doctrine of Quietism which he founded, were condemned by the Church in Rome. Molinos was detained in 1685 and two years later he was sentenced to incarceration. He died in prison in 1696.

Reading the works of María Zambrano we become aware of the importance of the Spanish mystical tradition in a number of ways. First, Zambrano devotes two articles exclusively to the study and exegesis of the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz and Miguel de Molinos's *Guía espiritual*. Zambrano's essay 'San Juan de la Cruz: de la *noche oscura* a la más clara

---

<sup>7</sup> Jesús Moreno Sanz, 'Sub quadam aeternitatis especie', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November 1984), 32-54 (p. 34).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to refer to F.C. Happold's comparison of San Juan and Santa Teresa, 'These two were intimately associated in the work of the reform of the Carmelite Order. Yet how different they are. St. John of the Cross, the 'mystic's mystic', was withdrawn, austere, of brilliant and keen intellect, a poet who is numbered among the great poets of Spain. Teresa was a typical woman, practical and vigorous, humorous and attractive, a born leader and organizer, and, at the same time, a contemplative saint whose writings on the spiritual life stand high in the literature of mysticism'; *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 342.

mística' (1939) dates from an early period in her writing and it is contemporary to *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* and *Filosofía y poesía* which both touch on the subject of mysticism. In the articles 'Apuntes sobre el tiempo y la poesía', 'Poema y sistema' and 'La destrucción de la filosofía en Nietzsche' in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, for example, Zambrano explored the relationship between poetry, philosophy and mystical discourse. In 'Poema y sistema' she advocated the close union of religion, poetry and philosophy. She asserted that, like poetry, religious expression may form part of a philosophical system:

Y más allá de la Poesía y Filosofía, está la unidad última de la Religión. En el Sistema, aparece tanto como la poesía, la expresión religiosa, aunque de modo muy diferente: Religión, Poesía y Filosofía han de ser miradas de nuevo por una mirada unitaria en que los rencores crecidos con la prolijidad de la ortiga estén ausentes; sólo ante una mirada así la Filosofía podrá justificarse. [. . .] Filosofía, Poesía y Religión necesitan aclararse mutuamente, recibir su luz una de otra, reconocer sus deudas, revelar al hombre medio asfixiado por su discordia, su permanente y viva legitimidad; su unidad originaria.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 47-48)

She also suggested that a vision in which philosophy, poetry and religion merge may shed light on the human condition. Mystical thought, which occupies a marginal position in philosophical, theological and poetic tradition, arguably represented this tripartite alliance for Zambrano.

María Zambrano developed her discussion of mystical writing in more specific terms in her essay 'San Juan de la Cruz: de la *noche oscura* a la más clara mística'. In this essay, she delineated the various states or stages in the mystical way followed by San Juan. She gave prominence to an important constituent of mystical experience, namely union or transformation as it is commonly termed in mystical discourse. First, she described the process of transformation in San Juan in which 'el alma se ha devorado a sí misma, transformándose en alguna otra cosa' (*Senderos* p. 187). She made it clear that the dissolution of self that this image implies not only involves transformation into another but also creates a void:

La destrucción de sí mismo, para que en este desierto, en este vacío, venga a habitar por entero otro; ha puesto en suspenso su propia existencia para que este otro se resuelva a existir en él. Y hay por fuerza un espacio en esta transmutación en que nada hay, en que es la nada absoluta.

(*Senderos*, p. 190).

However, in this essay the process of destruction in San Juan is paradoxically seen as creative. She represented the idea of the void or nothingness in his writing as an idyllic, paradisiacal land, evoked, in an alliterative sequence, by imagery culled from his poetry. Hence 'la nada' is replete with poetic presence:

Por eso no es la *nada*, el vacío lo que aguarda al alma a su salida; ni la muerte, sino la poesía en donde se encuentran en entera presencia las cosas: 'las montañas, las valles solitarios nemorosos, las ínsulas extrañas, los ríos sonoros, el silbo de los aires amorosos. La noche sosegada, en par de los levantes de la aurora, la música callada, la soledad sonora'. . . Todo, todo está presente con una fragancia, como recién salido de manos del creador.

(*Senderos*, p. 192)

For Zambrano then, annihilation in San Juan's writings, culminates in a creative act: 'la destrucción que vemos en San Juan de la Cruz está de lleno en la esencia de la creación' (*Senderos*, p. 190). In this light, Zambrano's comments in *Filosofía y poesía* on the poet's notion of nothingness or the void become clear as it is seen as ultimately creative. She posited that the poet perceives an all-embracing reality, as both being and non-being are evinced in the poetic work:

Quiere la realidad, pero la realidad poética no es sólo la que hay, la que es; sino la que no es; abarca el ser y el no ser en admirable justicia caritativa, pues todo, todo tiene derecho a ser hasta lo que no ha podido ser jamás. El poeta saca de la humillación del no ser a lo que en él gime, saca de la nada a la nada misma y le da nombre y rostro. El poeta no se afana para que de las cosas que hay unas sean, y otras no lleguen a este privilegio, sino que trabaja para que todo lo que hay y lo que no hay, llegue a ser. El poeta no teme a la nada.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 22-23)

Zambrano's article 'Miguel de Molinos, reaparecido' (1975) follows the publication of José Ángel Valente's edition of the *Guía Espiritual*.<sup>9</sup> It predates the appearance of *Claros del bosque* by two years. In her essay on Molinos Zambrano indicated the importance of *la nada* or *la nadificación* in his *Guía Espiritual*. Through a number of metaphorical structures borrowed from mystical discourse, she described how his thought centres on the very beginnings of human existence; depicted variously as the absolute zero of being, the void or original darkness. This nothingness or darkness is then transformed into the place of mystical union or diaphanous, transparent light:

Pues que su mística, por su contenido y por su lenguaje [. . .], conduce a ese punto cero de la existencia humana, a esa nada, lugar de encuentro del hombre con su Dios, donde -diríamos- los dos se aniquilan y nadifican. Y así, las tinieblas iniciales de donde todo místico parte se van haciendo diáfanos, transparentes, y el que ese camino sigue entra, como José Ángel Valente dice, 'en el aposento de la transparencia'.<sup>10</sup>

Zambrano's portrayal of *la nada* as a meeting place of luminous darkness here and earlier as a poetic, creative landscape in San Juan direct the reader to her concept of *razón poética*. They both involve theistic union, conveyed in paradoxical language, where an essential degree of self-identity is retained -'que la razón se haga poética sin dejar de ser razón'- (*De la Aurora*, p. 30). In this context, Zambrano's definition of mystical consciousness in Molinos as an extension of rationalist consciousness, 'un renunciar, pues, de la razón a ensancharse',<sup>11</sup> is an interesting one. For although it appears that reason is disenfranchised in this phrase the idea of broadening the range of reason necessarily includes its operations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual: Defensa de la contemplación*, ed. José Ángel Valente (Barcelona: Barral, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> 'Miguel de Molinos, reaparecido', *Ínsula*, 338 (1975), 3-4 (p. 3).

<sup>11</sup> 'Miguel de Molinos, reaparecido', p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> In this way Zambrano's ideas of reason in mystical writing most closely correspond to the fifth of the six kinds of contemplation identified by Richard of St. Victor (although they may be related to the second and third kinds too): '(1) through the imagination

In her longer texts, references to San Juan de la Cruz, Miguel de Molinos (and to a lesser extent Santa Teresa) abound, some more explicit than others, varying from direct textual quotation, more than often unattributed, to submerged references or intertextualities.<sup>13</sup> The vocabulary Zambrano employs bears the mark of Spanish mystics, a correspondence between individual words and phrases as well as images and motifs can be traced. Ciocchini makes this point in an article on *Claros del bosque*:

Naturalmente que por debajo de esta exploración transita la evidencia de un San Juan de la Cruz, de una Santa Teresa, de un Miguel de Molinos, en una coincidencia idiomática redescubridora.<sup>14</sup>

In 'San Juan: de la *noche oscura* a la más clara mística', for instance, she employed a stock image of mystical writing, the chrysalis, to convey the process of transformation in his poetry. She referred to 'la crisálida que deshace el capullo donde yace amortajada, para salir volando y que devoró su propio cuerpo para transformarlo en alas' (*Senderos*, p. 188). This is an image which recurs particularly in the works of St. Teresa, for example in the fifth *Morada* she describes the process of transformation of a silkworm into 'una mariposica blanca muy graciosa'.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere in Zambrano's work, images such as 'la fuente', 'la noche oscura' and 'la llama' are repeated, with obvious reference to the poetry of San Juan. The texts 'El ser escondido-la fuente' and 'Los cielos' in *Claros del bosque* provide examples of the first two motifs and 'La llama' in *De la Aurora* represents the third. Her predilection for mystical discourse is also displayed by her use of nouns such as 'el recogimiento', 'la entrega', 'la

---

alone; (2) through imagination according to reason; (3) in the reason but according to the imagination; (4) in the reason and according to reason; (5) above but not contrary to reason; (6) above reason and beyond it', quoted in Otis H. Green, *Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian mind in literature from El Cid to Calderón*, 4 vols (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1963-66), II, 177.

<sup>13</sup> 'Intertextuality' is a term coined by Julia Kristeva, see 'Word, dialogue and novel' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 34-62 (p. 37).

<sup>14</sup> Hector Ciocchini, 'La santa realidad sin nombre en torno a *Claros del bosque* de María Zambrano' *Ínsula*, 388 (March 1979), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Las moradas del castillo interior*, V, 2, ii.

aniquilación' which recall the writings of Miguel de Molinos as well as San Juan. In many ways, Zambrano's language can be seen as a modern extension of the borrowing process identified by Colin Thompson in the writings of San Juan:

Certainly his is a borrowed language, but he has made it his own, because he controls the images and redirects their tremendous power into the channels he has prepared for them.<sup>16</sup>

If San Juan integrates the language of Scripture into his work then Zambrano, in turn, integrates the images of San Juan and Miguel de Molinos and then redirects them into her modern poetico-philosophical channels.

María Zambrano's exploitation of mystical tradition in her poetic thought is perhaps illustrated most clearly by her interpretation of 'la metáfora del corazón' and its concomitant imagery. As José Ángel Valente outlined in his edition of Molinos's guide 'la metáfora del corazón' is a deep-seated religious and mystical metaphor:

Pues bien claro está que todo el proceso místico reproduce en grado sumo la metáfora esencial de la experiencia religiosa: la metáfora del corazón.<sup>17</sup>

The essay 'La metáfora del corazón' in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* and the section with the same title in *Claros del bosque* are central to both texts and to an understanding of Zambrano's work as a whole. For into the rhetorical figure of 'la metáfora del corazón' are woven many of the main strands of her thought. As Amparo Amorós has argued 'resume en ella una *visión* del mundo, una manera de ver y de entender la realidad'.<sup>18</sup> Her representation of the heart is composed of elements drawn from a variety of philosophical sources but the principal doctrine is that of mysticism.

---

<sup>16</sup> *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the Cántico Espiritual of San Juan de la Cruz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> José Ángel Valente, 'Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos', in *Guía espiritual*, pp. 11-51 (p. 23).

<sup>18</sup> Amparo Amorós, 'La metáfora del corazón en la obra de María Zambrano', *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 39-73 (p. 46).

Zambrano's discussion of 'la metáfora del corazón' began in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* where she considered the weight of metaphor in the history of philosophical thought. She indicated that, in the philosophical field, if metaphors have been acknowledged as useful they have also been rejected. Rationalism, for example, suppressed metaphor as it was seen as a disruptive element which undermines the illusion that reason can attain to a self-authenticating method or truth. Her view is that metaphor lies at the very centre of 'la Filosofía más pura':

No sólo de pan vive el hombre, es decir, no sólo de Ciencia y Técnica. También podría decirse que no sólo de Filosofía, pero tal cosa al hablar de las metáforas no tiene sentido, porque la Filosofía más pura se ha desenvuelto en el espacio trazado por una metáfora, la de la visión y la luz inteligible.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 49)

She supported her contention by refuting the notion that thought infused by metaphor represents an imprecise form of thought. Furthermore, she suggested that metaphor arrives at a definition of reality which extends beyond the parameters of reason. Metaphor, here, also reflects the Pre-Socratic world or the sacred. She then proposed, with a strong suggestion of her concept *razón<sup>of</sup> poética*, the parallel development of Reason and other forms of knowledge, symbolised by metaphor, in modern thought:

Es la función de definir una realidad inabarcable por la razón, pero propicia a ser captada de otro modo. Y es también la supervivencia de algo anterior al pensamiento, huella de un tiempo sagrado, y por tanto, una forma de continuidad con tiempos y mentalidades ya idas, cosa tan necesaria en una cultura racionalista. Y la verdad es que en sus momentos de mayor esplendor, la Razón, no hubo de temer ante estas metáforas que podemos llamar fundamentales. O quizá es que al decir cultura, tengamos la imagen de una unidad entre la más pura razón y esos otros modos de conocimiento, entre los que se destaca éste de las metáforas.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 50)

The next step in Zambrano's argument in this essay was for her to differentiate between types of metaphor. She questioned the exclusive

validity of 'la metáfora de la visión intelectual' which prevails in philosophical discourse and which she equated with rationalist thinking. Instead she gave prominence to 'la metáfora del corazón' which she described as a stranger, more fallible, more mysterious and bolder vision, a poetic vision:

¿Será una simple metáfora la 'visión por el corazón'? La metáfora de la visión intelectual ha sido - nadie podrá negarlo - la definición de una forma - hasta ahora la más decisiva y fundamental - de conocimiento. ¿Podremos pasar de largo junto a esta gran metáfora porque sea, al parecer, más extraña, más dada al equívoco, más misteriosa y audaz? ¿No habrá existido una forma de conocimiento o visión que de manera más o menos fiel corresponda a esta poética expresión? No sería demasiado difícil el intento, si aceptamos ya desde el comienzo una metáfora, la que implica el nombre de esa víscera secreta y delatora: corazón.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 51)

Alain Guy has observed that she engaged in a search for 'un nuevo género de conocimiento que pueda dar cuenta del alma, esta realidad irreductible intermediaria entre el cosmos y el yo puramente intelectual'.<sup>19</sup> In these early essays Zambrano sought a knowledge which finds its origin in the human heart, a spiritual understanding even, but one which is not divorced from reason. As Amorós has observed, Zambrano represented the heart as a meeting place of the intellect, 'ámbito de la inteligencia', and feeling, 'lugar de amor' hence drawing on a variety of symbolic traditions in philosophical and literary discourse.<sup>20</sup>

In Greek civilisation the heart did not metonymically refer to the emotions as it does in modern Western tradition. Aristotle, for example, represented the heart as the seat of the intellect. Zambrano indicated that 'el corazón lo ha sido todo, hasta sede del pensamiento en Aristóteles' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma* p. 51). Mystical interpretation of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Guy, *Los filósofos españoles de ayer y de hoy: Épocas y autores*, trans. Luis Echávarri (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1966), p. 209.

<sup>20</sup> Amorós, 'La metáfora del corazón en la obra de María Zambrano', *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, p. 42.

symbolism of the heart closely resembles those found in Biblical tradition. As in ancient tradition, the heart is attributed a dual role in spiritual works; the intellectual properties of the heart are emphasized as well as the emotional life of the heart. San Juan and Santa Teresa equated the heart with will or understanding in their writings. Molinos described the soul or heart as a spiritual centre which should be purged of emotions:

Has de saber que es tu alma el centro, la morada y reino de Dios; pero para que el gran Rey descanse en ese trono de tu alma, has de procurar tenerla limpia, quieta, vacía y pacífica. Limpia de culpas y defectos; quieta de temores; vacía de afectos, deseos y pensamientos; y pacífica en las tentaciones y tribulaciones. [. . .] Debes, pues, tener siempre pacífico el corazón para conservar puro ese vivo templo de Dios.<sup>21</sup>

In 'Por qué se escribe', Zambrano described the act of writing in similar terms. She advocated the purification or quietening of the passions in philosophical writing. Writing is portrayed in quasi-religious terms as an act of faith and fidelity. And this sense of authenticity is shown to be clouded by the intrusion of the writer's passions. Therefore, she maintains that human passions must be purged in order for truth to be conveyed on the page. Her use of poetic language in this passage reinforces, once more, the references to mystical discourse; exemplified by her play on opaqueness and transparency and the phrases 'un gran vacío', 'un silencio donde pueda aposentarse'. Moreover, the exhortative tone conveyed by the deployment of words such as 'debida', 'exige', 'necesita' as well as the structures 'no ha de ponerse a sí mismo' and 'han de ser acalladas' reflect the style of Molinos's guide:

Acto de fe el escribir, y como toda fe, de fidelidad. El escribir pide la fidelidad antes que cosa alguna. Ser fiel a aquello que pide ser sacado del silencio. Una mala transcripción, una interferencia de las pasiones del hombre que es escritor destruirán la fidelidad debida. Y así hay el escritor opaco, que pone sus pasiones entre la verdad transcrita y aquellos a quienes va a comunicarla.

---

<sup>21</sup> All quotations are taken from the following edition: *Guía espiritual*, ed. José Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Fundación Universitaria Española, 1976), p. 121.

Y es que el escritor no ha de ponerse a sí mismo, aunque sea de sí donde saque lo que escribe. Sacar algo de sí mismo es todo lo contrario que ponerse a sí mismo. Y si el sacar de sí con seguro pulso la fiel imagen de transparencia a la verdad de lo escrito, el poner con vacua inconsciencia las propias pasiones delante de la verdad, la empaña y obscurece.

Fidelidad que, para lograrse, exige una total purificación de pasiones, que han de ser acalladas para hacer sitio a la verdad. La verdad necesita de un gran vacío, de un silencio donde pueda aposentarse, sin que ninguna otra presencia se entremezcle con la suya, desfigurándola.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 35-6).

Zambrano's exposition of the heart as a symbol in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* likewise is informed by the philosophical thinking of two influential writers of the seventeenth century; Benedictus de Spinoza and Blaise Pascal. Spinoza's 'concept of positive freedom' which consists in the mastery of passions through the life of reason and 'Amor intellectualis Dei' underlie the formation of Zambrano's philosophical vision. Pascal's maxim which Zambrano renders as 'hay razones del corazón que la razón no conoce' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 21), serves as another point of departure for philosophy of an intuitionist nature. His much repeated dictum, 'hasta para hacerle decir lo contrario' (as the author comments and not without a trace of irony in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 21), however, becomes of much more interest and relevance when translated into the work of Max Scheler. It is no coincidence that María Zambrano's article 'Hacia un saber sobre el alma' should first appear in *Revista de Occidente* in 1934, the same year that the above press published posthumously *Muerte y Supervivencia, Ordo Amoris* by Scheler. In her essay the writer makes frequent reference to the work of the German thinker and more specifically to 'un orden del corazón' or 'un saber del corazón' postulated by Scheler. In Max Scheler's 'ordo amoris', the thinking of Spinoza and Pascal meet; the heart is not an entropic seat of the emotions

where untrammelled passions overwhelm.<sup>22</sup> The heart for Scheler is rather a place of order, it possesses, within its own realm, a strict analog of logic. Zambrano took Scheler's 'Ordo Amoris' as the philosophical basis to her 'saber del alma':

Max Scheler reclama enérgicamente un orden del corazón, un orden del alma, que el racionalismo, más que la razón, desconoce.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 21-22)

In his discussion of the symbolism of the heart in Zambrano, Jesús Moreno Sanz emphasizes the importance of the integration of discursive reason in her order of the heart, which can be seen as an extension of rationalist consciousness:

Y no es que semejante orden se oponga a la razón discursiva, que no se opone, sino que [. . .] hace que la propia razón discursiva se integre, se adentre, aquella experiencia de lo insoluble para encontrar allí las razones que le corazón otorga.<sup>23</sup>

Moreno's observations point to Zambrano's idea of *razón poética* and this link is strengthened in her essay 'Apuntes sobre el tiempo y la poesía' where this process of the integration of the rational and irrational is presented. Here she suggested that this synthesis, depicted as a transmutation or metamorphosis, could be achieved in the hearts of poets and philosophers:

[El filósofo y el poeta] han logrado una transmutación o metamorfosis: en que el alma se ha unido al espíritu o al intelecto, bien porque ella le absorba -en la poesía- o porque la inteligencia haya tomado dentro de sí el alma.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 47)

---

<sup>22</sup> Zambrano set a low value on Romantic exaltation of the heart, 'fórmula mágica y figura irradiante, algo así como el dogma central. Tal exaltación más bien le ha perjudicado', *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 52. She rejected Romantic extremes of emotion for they shut out 'the light of reason', 'el alma se busca a sí misma en la poesía, en la expresión poética [. . .] *Los abismos insondables, las simas sin fin, las tempestades fragorosas*, eran sus propios abismos, sus propias tempestades, entenebrecidos por el abandono de la luz de la razón, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Jesús Moreno Sanz, 'Las fórmulas del corazón', *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, p. 18.

The idea of the heart as a centre is fundamental in Zambrano's thinking, she portrayed the heart as a supreme centre, 'todo centro vital vivifica. Y de ahí que el corazón ya desde la 'fysis' sea el centro entre todos' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 69). In symbolic tradition the centre represents the origin and absolute reality of the universe. As Mircea Eliade wrote: 'the center [. . .] is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality'.<sup>24</sup> The dominant symbolism of the heart in mysticism is as a centre. For example, San Juan referred to 'aquel punto encendido del corazón del espíritu'<sup>25</sup> and Miguel de Molinos wrote 'has de saber que es tu alma el centro, la morada y reino de Dios'.<sup>26</sup> In *Claros del bosque* the heart forms part of a network of images that all refer to a centre. The most important of these images are the house, the clearing and the vessel.

Zambrano's comparison of the heart with a house reflects the metaphors employed in Spanish mystical literature. San Juan, for instance, compared the soul to a house in the *Noche oscura*. In his commentary on the lines 'salí sin ser notada, / estando ya mi casa sosegada', he considered the passage a metaphor; for he equated those sleeping in the house with the powers of the soul asleep at the moment of ecstasy. It is a 'dichosa ventura' to free the soul from the 'casa de sensualidad'.<sup>27</sup> And Molinos advocated a 'recogimiento interior' in his doctrine.<sup>28</sup> Zambrano compared the humble house, 'la modesta casa', with the simple tent or hut 'tienda o choza'. The house is depicted as a dwelling place in which the individual can reside rejoicing in the sense of freedom and quietness within. For, like the heart,

---

<sup>24</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> San Juan de la Cruz, *Llama de amor viva*, II, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual*, ed. José Ignacio Tellechea Idigoras, p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> San Juan de la Cruz, *Noche oscura*, II, 14, i.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: 'El recogimiento interior es fe y silencio en la presencia de Dios. Por aquí te has de habituar a recogerte en su presencia con una atención amorosa, como quien se entrega y une a Dios con reverencia, humildad y sumisión, mirándole dentro de ti misma en lo más íntimo de tu alma, sin forma, especie, modo ni figura, en vista y general noticia de fe amorosa y oscura, sin alguna distinción de perfección o tributo' in Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual*, p. 163.

it facilitates movement, 'deja circular que pide ser recorrida'. In contrast, the tent or hut is presented as a place of human confinement; a circle which limits and provides shelter or (at its strongest) a prison:

[El corazón] mueve moviéndose, tiene un dentro, una modesta casa, a cuya imagen y semejanza, se nos ocurre, han surgido las casas que el hombre ha ido a habitar dichosamente. Dichosamente porque es ya casa, y no la simple tienda, imagen, cierto es del firmamento y del hueco que le separa de la tierra. En ella, en la tienda o choza, primera morada fabricada por el hombre, el horizonte es confín, círculo que limita y abriga, es como un horizonte propio de su habitante. Y enseña que todo lo que el hombre tiene por propio es morada y cárcel, su dominio y su encierro a la vez. La casa, la modesta casa a imagen del corazón que deja circular que pide ser recorrida, es ya sólo por ello lugar de libertad, de recogimiento y no de encierro.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 63-4)

In 'Claros del bosque', the opening chapter of the book, the clearing of the title is presented as: 'un centro en toda su plenitud [. . .] porque el humano esfuerzo queda borrado' (p. 11); it is described as a sacred centre as human intervention is eliminated. The clearing becomes another realm in which an unidentified heart/soul has sovereignty. The dissolution of human identity in this dominion suggests a sense of mystical transformation. This is supported by Zambrano's ambiguous use of the word 'nada' in relation to the image of the clearing. Through a syntactical structure contrived to heighten the ambiguity, she indicated that what is found on reaching the clearing is nothing, (or rather) nothing which is not inviolate, instantaneous and singular. Again, further down in this passage, the negative 'nada' is employed to convey the positive; for she signalled that nothing determined, prefigured, time honoured is to be sought in the clearing. The clearing here serves as an image of union which echoes, at least in part, the paradoxical significance ascribed to 'la nada' in the writings of San Juan and Molinos. Zambrano wrote:

El claro del bosque es un centro en el que no siempre es posible entrar; desde la linde se le mira y el aparecer de algunas huellas de animales no ayuda a dar ese paso. Es otro reino que un alma habita y guarda.

Algún pájaro avisa y llama a ir hasta donde vaya marcando su voz. Y se la obedece; luego no se encuentra nada, nada que no sea un lugar intacto que daría así. No hay que buscarlo. No hay que buscar. Es la lección inmediata de los claros del bosque: no hay que ir a buscarlos, ni tampoco a buscar nada de ellos. Nada determinado, prefigurado, consabido.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 11)

In this extract she also specified that the discovery of the clearing, which acts as a metaphor for philosophical insight, is made unseekingly.<sup>29</sup> In this way it is explicitly linked to her concept of *razón poética*, as elucidated in *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, where truth appears unbidden in a 'revelación graciosa y gratuita; razón poética' (p.75).

The third prominent metaphor for the heart as a centre is the vessel or chalice, an image which is synonymous with religious practice. Zambrano stressed the heterogeneity of the heart: 'que es profundo, grande, ancho, inmenso, oscuro, luminoso' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 69) and it is described as a vessel, holds and sustains every reality that enters its domain. With echoes of Nicholas de Cusa, she conveyed this diversity through the use of mathematical terms ('punto, se mide, se pesa, cálculo, balanza') applied here to the divine act of Creation. She also referred to the process of unification or balancing postulated by the idea of multiplicity, in which none of the realities entering the vessel/heart are eradicated:<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> The function of the clearing as a metaphor <sup>for</sup> human understanding has strong resonances of Heidegger's *lichtung*: 'in the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. The open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know. That which is can only be, as a being, if it stands out within what is lighted in this clearing. Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are;' Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, Harper Row, 1971), p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Zambrano's writing in this passage is reminiscent of Octavio Paz's description of the search for a fixed and vibrant centre where contradictions are constantly eliminated and then reborn: 'Busco en la realidad ese punto de inserción de la poesía que es también un punto de intersección, centro fijo y vibrante donde se anulan y renacen sin tregua las contradicciones'. *Signos en rotación* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1965), p. 8.

Y es la condición del corazón como centro, en tanto que centro, la que determina, y hace surgir los centros que brillan iluminando, que si se refieren a la llamada realidad exterior o mundo, se reflejan en centros interiores y se sostienen sobre ellos. Ya que nada de afuera, nada de otro mundo o más allá del mundo que sea, deja de ser sostenido por el humano corazón, punto donde llega la realidad múltiple donde se pesa y se mide en impensable cálculo, a imagen del cálculo creador del universo. 'Dios calculando hizo el mundo', nos dice Leibniz. Si el universo es de hechura divina, al hombre toca sostenerla. Y ha de ser su vaso de inmensidad y punto invulnerable de la balanza.

Y de este modo la multiplicidad, antes de establecerse como tal, se unifica, en equilibrio sin que se borre ni se sumerja ninguna de las realidades que la integran. Pues que nada de lo que como real llega al corazón humano deber ser anulado ni mandado fuera o dejado a la puerta. . .

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 69)

In her texts Zambrano conveyed the diverse role she attributed to the heart in her poetic thinking by employing contrastive imagery, which often has parallels with mystical imagery, and in turn, supports the paradoxical idea of *razón poética*. An examination of 'la metáfora del corazón' in *Hacia un saber del alma* and *Claros del bosque* and in other texts reveals four fundamental paradoxes involving continuum and discontinuum, silence and the word, light and darkness and ascent and descent. These paradoxical figures overlap and follow on from one another as metaphorical representations of the idea *razón poética*.

Zambrano's use and development of the twin images of light and darkness closely resembles the mystic's. Writers from the time of the Pseudo-Dionysius have used the symbol of darkness to convey the union he/she experiences with a transcendent God. In Spanish mystical tradition the symbol of 'la noche oscura del alma' in the writings of San Juan provides a prominent example. Darkness in San Juan becomes a divine darkness in which paradoxically the mystic is illuminated. Miguel de Molinos defined two contrasting forms of darkness. The first is the darkness of sin and the second is darkness which is illuminated by the love of God:

Hay dos maneras de tinieblas: unas infelices, y felices otras. Las primeras son las que nacen del pecado; y éstas son desdichadas, porque conducen al cristiano al eterno precipicio. Las segundas son las que el Señor permite en el alma para fundarla y establecerla en la virtud; y éstas son dichosas, porque la iluminan, la fortalecen y ocasionan mayor luz.<sup>31</sup>

In Zambrano's essay 'La destrucción de la filosofía en Nietzsche' the symbolic significance darkness acquires in later, less explicative works is clearly set down. She identifies light with philosophical reason and poetry with darkness:

El *logos* de la Filosofía traza sus propios límites dentro de la luz. En la poesía, en cambio, cobra su fuerza en los peligrosos límites en que la luz se disuelve en las tinieblas, más allá de lo inteligible. Pero la poesía nació como ímpetu hacia la claridad desde esas zonas oscuras, por eso precede a la Filosofía, lenguaje meramente inteligible, y le ayuda a nacer. Sin poesía la razón no hubiera podido articular su claro lenguaje.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 137)

In her metaphorical scheme the poetic word is placed at the 'dangerous' threshold of darkness and light, from the obscurity of the irrational poetry reaches to the light, 'ímpetu hacia la claridad desde esas zonas oscuras' and creative expression is formed when poetry meets reason. Her vision therefore is one of obscurity and clarity, it involves a descent into the dark 'poetic' recesses of the soul and an ascent into the light of reason. For Zambrano, as has been said of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, 'writing becomes an alternation between obscurity and clarity rather than a pursuit of either, a rhythm of intelligibility and mystery, just as time is a rhythm of days and nights'.<sup>32</sup>

Zambrano's use of the complementary images of darkness and light, descent and ascent, are perhaps best conveyed in the text entitled 'Método' in *Claros del bosque*:

---

<sup>31</sup> Miguel Molinos, *Guía espiritual*, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 69.

Hay que dormirse arriba en la luz. Hay que estar despierto abajo en la oscuridad intraterrestre, intracorporal de los diversos cuerpos que el hombre terrestre habita: el de la tierra, el del universo, el suyo propio. Allá en "los profundos", en los íferos el corazón vela, se desvela, se reenciende en sí mismo. Arriba, en la luz, el corazón se abandona, se entrega. Se recoge. Se aduerme al fin ya sin pena. En la luz que acoge donde no se padece violencia alguna, pues que se ha llegado allí, a esa luz, sin forzar ninguna puerta y aun sin abrirla, sin haber atravesado dinteles de luz y de sombra, sin esfuerzo y sin protección.

*(Claros del bosque, p. 39)*

This fragment stands alone on the page and represents the first 'step' in 'Pasos', the third section of the book. The arrangement of the text on the page is worthy of further comment. It is one of five short texts, each under a printed page in length, which share many of the characteristics of the prose poem. It is not only the external structure which is suggestive of poetic forms. The internal structure, with its poetic rhythms and network of tropes, also reflects poetic practice. The title 'Método' is an interesting one in this context, for it appears Zambrano has chosen to elucidate her philosophical method in a highly lyrical passage. This is arguably a conscious ploy on the part of the writer to underscore the poetic dimension inherent in her thinking.

In 'Método' darkness is associated with consciousness, 'despierto', descent, 'abajo', and human existence; 'la oscuridad intraterrestre, intracorporal de los diversos cuerpos que el hombre habita'. As a corollary, light is linked with loss of consciousness, 'dormirse', ascent, 'arriba', and by implication the divine. In the obscure depths, 'los íferos', the (human) heart 'vela', a verb which has at least two possible meanings in this context: either it hides itself or keeps vigil, The second meaning reinforces the following reflexive verb 'se desvela', the heart stays awake and then it lights up from within again. Up in the light the heart yields itself, it withdraws and sleeps. There is no violence in this action, the heart reaches the light without forcing open any doors, without crossing a threshold of light and shadow. It is an effortless and unprotected motion. This sequence reflects, once more,

Zambrano's exploitation of mystical transformation in the formulation of her poetic method. The balance of this passage in which the focus shifts from light to darkness then darkness to light is indicative of the contrived duality of her vision.

The second paradox contains ideas of continuum and discontinuum. In 'Claros del bosque' Zambrano's philosophical vision, 'una visión nueva' (p. 14), is described in paradoxical terms as a continuous/discontinuous method. She carefully set up this paradox by equating method with continuum and conscience with discontinuum and then pointing to the interdependency of the two:

Lo propio del método es la continuidad, de tal manera no sabe pensar en un método discontinuo. Y como la conciencia es discontinua -todo método es cosa de conciencia- resulta la disparidad, la no coincidencia del vivir conscientemente y del método que se le propone.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 14)

In her interpretation of 'la metáfora del corazón' this contradiction is reinforced by the relationship between 'razón' and 'corazón', compressed in the rhetorical figure 'co-razón'. Reason denotes continuous method and the systolic and diastolic movement of the heart, discontinuum.<sup>33</sup> In Zambrano's thought the beating of the heart operates on two levels; on a primary level it indicates the actuality of life and on a symbolic level it represents a philosophical enterprise. The dual movement of the heart symbolises a life-giving principle upon which human existence depends:

Aunque no preste atención el hombre al incesante sonar de su corazón, va por él sostenido en alto, a un cierto nivel. Le bastaría quedarse sin ese latir sonoro para hundirse en una mayor oscuridad, para sentirse más extraño, más sin albergue, como privado de una cierta dimensión, o de una llamada que por sí misma crea la posibilidad de su existencia.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 65)

It is a small step in Zambrano's thinking from the sound of the heart

---

<sup>33</sup> See Ernst Fischer: 'Like the world itself, the history of mankind is not only a contradictory discontinuum but also a continuum', *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 12.

beating to patterns of speech. In *Claros del bosque* she assigned a prophetic role to the heart; it harbours the unspoken word(s) of truth. This word is described in metaphorical terms first as a marginal word, later, with resonances of *De la Aurora*, as an auroral utterance, 'el albor de la palabra'. It is said to be a word unlike the words we articulate and its issue is unsolicited:

Es profeta el corazón, como aquello que siendo centro está en un confín, al borde siempre de ir todavía más allá de lo que ya ha ido. Está a punto de romper a hablar, de que su reiterado sonido se articule en esos instantes en que casi se detiene para cobrar aliento. Lo nuevo que en el hombre habita, la palabra, mas no las decimos, o al menos como las decimos, sino una palabra que sería nueva solamente por brotar ella, porque nos sorprendería como el albor de la palabra.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 66)

By directing the focus onto an examination of language as a vehicle of thought, Zambrano enters into dialogue with texts from a number of literary and philosophical traditions, amongst them existentialism, deconstruction,  ~~pura poesía~~ and, of course, mysticism.

In her writing she often returned to a fundamental paradox in mysticism; the difficulty of expressing in words an experience that is beyond words.<sup>34</sup> As Valente wrote, 'la primera paradoja del místico es situarse en el lenguaje, señalarmos desde el lenguaje y con el lenguaje una experiencia que el lenguaje no puede alojar'.<sup>35</sup> Zambrano played on this paradox in her thought, drawing a parallel between the mystic's struggle with the inexpressible and the philosopher's struggle with principles of rational thought: 'la razón, cuando se deja llevar de un congénito imperialismo,

---

<sup>34</sup> Jacques Maritain elaborated on this point by considering the tension that exists between poetic creation and mystical experience: 'Poetic experience is distinct in nature from mystical experience. Because poetry emanates from the free creativity of the spirit, it is from the very start oriented toward expression, and terminates in a word proffered, it wants to speak; whereas mystical experience, because it emanates from the deepest longing of the spirit bent on knowing, tends of itself towards silence and internal fruition.' in *The Range of Reason* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1953) p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> José Ángel Valente, 'Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos, in Miguel de Molinos' in *Guía espiritual*, pp. 11-51, (p. 11).

olvida que si la mística lucha con lo indecible, el pensamiento lucha con lo impensable'.<sup>36</sup> As a corollary of the difficulty of expressing mystical experience, writers have set a high value on silence. Molinos, for instance, identified three forms of silence in his *Guía espiritual*; the silence of words, desires and thoughts. For him, a combination of these three gave a perfect, mystical silence in which God communicates to humankind.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, San Juan before him privileged silence symbolised by his paradoxical figure 'la música callada'. As Valente observed, the poetic word in San Juan is placed in limbo between silence and speech and that 'un indecible existente es función máxima de esa palabra que pone en tensión máxima al lenguaje entre el decir y el callar'.<sup>38</sup>

In many ways Zambrano's concept of *razón poética* may be summed up as the pursuit of the word/reason which (with biblical reference) she portrayed as 'este logos lleno de gracia y de verdad' (*Filosofía y poesía*, p.116). For her, this pivotal word, like mystical expression, falls between silence and sound. In 'Apuntes sobre el tiempo y la poesía', for example, she brought out the paradoxical nature of the word she sought 'la palabra se volvería hacia lo que parece ser su contrario y aun enemigo: el silencio. Querrá unirse a él, en lugar de destruirle' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 42). And the parallel with the mystic's dilemma here is completed by textual allusion to San Juan's preeminent oxymoronic figures: 'es "música callada", "soledad sonora", bodas de la palabra' (*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 42).

---

<sup>36</sup> 'Miguel de Molinos reaparecido', p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> 'Tres maneras hay de silencio: el primero es de palabras; el segundo de deseos, y el tercero de pensamientos. El primero es perfecto, más perfecto es el segundo y perfectísimo el tercero. En el primero, de palabras, se alcanza la virtud; en el segundo, de deseos, se consigue la quietud; en el tercero, de pensamientos, el interior recogimiento. No hablando, no deseando ni pensando, se llega al verdadero y perfecto silencio místico, en la cual habla Dios con el ánima, se comunica y la enseña en su más íntimo fondo la más perfecta y alta sabiduría', in *Guía espiritual*, p. 195.

<sup>38</sup> José Ángel Valente, 'Juan de la Cruz, el humilde sin sentido', in *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red precedido de La piedra y el centro*, Marginales, 194 (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1991), pp. 71-75, (p. 73).

This idea is developed in a broader context in the key section 'Palabras' which follows 'La metáfora del corazón' in *Claros del bosque*. In 'Sólo la palabra' she reiterated the notion of a quest for a word which is not fully articulated. In this extract she insisted on the singularity of this word and its uncertain position in relation to the barrier of sound. There is also the suggestion that this barrier is encountered by the mystic in a state of ecstasy ('al borde del paroxismo'):

Hay una palabra, una sola, de la que no se sabe de cierto si alguna vez ha traspasado la barrera que separa el silencio del sonido. Ya que por muy larga e inconteniblemente que se haya hablado, la barrera entre el silencio y el sonido no ha dejado nunca de existir, erizándose hasta llevar al que habla al borde del paroxismo.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 99)

In other texts from *Claros del bosque*, this 'mystical' conception of the word may be seen as being integrated into her thought in relation to modern poetics. Taking her lead from Heidegger, Zambrano associated the word she sought (depicted as the true word or the hidden word) with the poetic word.<sup>39</sup> In the following extracts, if she indicated the manner in which words construct and deconstruct themselves, she also suggested that the fallibility of language can be overcome in poetic or metaphysical texts where words may attain/retain an identity:

Las palabras de verdad y en verdad no se quedan sin más, se encienden y se apagan, se hacen polvo y luego aparecen intactas: revelación, poesía, metafísica, o ellas simplemente, ellas.

La palabra escondida, a solas celada en el silencio, puede surgir sosteniendo sin darlo a entender un largo discurso, un poema y aun filosófico texto, anónimamente, orientado el sentido, transformando el encadenamiento lógico en cadencia; abriendo espacios de silencios incolmables, reveladores.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 92 & p. 99)

---

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger wrote: <sup>in 1950</sup> 'to be sure, the poet also uses the word - not, however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to use them up, but rather in such a way that the word only now becomes and remains truly a word', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 47-48.

There is a smooth passage in her work from Heidegger's metaphysics to concepts of pure poetry/thought and deconstruction. For example, the word Zambrano referred to in 'Palabras' lies at the centre of what she termed 'pure knowledge', with more than a passing allusion, I suggest, to *poesía pura* of the Generation of 1927. The attempt writers such as Salinas and Guillén, amongst others, made to distill poetic language in order to express the essence of reality finds its echo in Zambrano's focus on the word in philosophical thought. However, she went one step further down this avenue in her thinking; for she signaled that this word paradoxically operates outside the limitations of language; it becomes, in a striking phrase, 'la palabra liberada del lenguaje':<sup>40</sup>

El conocimiento puro, que nace en la intimidad del ser, y que lo atrae y lo trasciende, 'el diálogo silencioso del alma consigo misma' que busca aún ser palabra única, la palabra indecible; la palabra liberada del lenguaje.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 58)

Her idea of a word present to our awareness outside the play of language reflects the concerns of post-structuralist theory and, in particular, Derrida's definition of logos or presence as an 'ultimate referent'. Zambrano, like Derrida, would seem to be striving towards a state where meaning could attain to self-sufficient intelligibility. As Christopher Norris comments this would be a state in which, 'language would no longer present any problem but serve as an obedient vehicle of thought'.<sup>41</sup>

In 'La palabra perdida', the diverse strands of Zambrano's depiction of the word associated with 'la metáfora del corazón' (here specifically located

---

<sup>40</sup> E.M. Cioran, 'María Zambrano no ha vendido su alma a la Idea, ha protegido su esencia única colocando la experiencia de lo Insoluble *por encima* de la reflexión sobre ello, ha dado en suma un paso más allá de la filosofía. [...] Para ella, nada es verdad salvo lo que precede o lo que sigue a lo formulado, únicamente el verbo que se hurta a las trabas de la expresión o, como ella misma ha dicho magníficamente, 'la palabra liberada del lenguaje'; 'El ensombrecido magisterio de Ortega', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo) 8 (1981), 14.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 30.

in the heart and related to patterns of breathing) are drawn together. In this dense text, which like 'Método' resembles a prose poem, she portrayed the lost word as a word to which all other words allude. Once more, it is represented metaphorically as an auroral utterance and this, reinforced by its condition as a 'lost' word, conveys a sense of a pre-lapsarian world.<sup>42</sup> Her vivid description of the lost word suppressing the one on the point of articulation, 'en la garganta misma', directs us back to the mystic's dilemma of expressing the inexpressible:

No sólo el lenguaje sino las palabras todas, por únicas que se nos aparezcan, por solas que vayan y por inesperada que sea su aparición, aluden a una palabra perdida, lo que se siente y se sabe de inmediato en angustia a veces, y en una especie de alborear que la anuncia palpitando por momentos. Y también se la siente latiendo en el fondo de la respiración misma, del corazón que la guarda, prenda de lo que la esperanza no acierta a imaginar. Y en la garganta misma, cerrando con su presencia el paso de la palabra que iba a salir. Esta puerta que el alba cierra cuando se abre. El amor que nunca llega, que desfallece al filo de la aurora, lo inasible que parte de los que van a morir o están muriendo ya, y que luchan –tormento de la agonía– por dejarla aquí y derramarla y no les es posible ya. La palabra que se va con la muerte violenta, y la que sentimos que la precede como guía, la guía de los que, al fin, pueden morir.

Perdida la palabra única, secreto del amor divino –humano. ¿Y no estará señalada por aquellas privilegiadas palabras apenas audibles como murmullo de paloma(?): *Diréis que me he perdido, –Que, andando enamorada –, Me hice perdidiza y fui ganada.*

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 87)

This passage, with its underlying dramatic tone, conveys a strong sense of requiem and emphasises Zambrano's dedication to the memory of her sister, Araceli, at the beginning of the book. In this context, the lost word is seen as the herald of both love and death; in spiritual terms it represents

---

(1953)

<sup>42</sup> In this way it reflects an early idea of Roland Barthes. He pursued 'a dreamed of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated', *Writing Degree Zero* (London: Cape, 1967), p. 94.

ascent into the heavens.<sup>43</sup> Through direct quotation of lines 22–24 of San Juan's *Cántico* in which the bride described her union with the bridegroom Zambrano linked the act of dying with mystical transformation.

*Razón poética*, then, the link between early and late texts by Zambrano, raises a question which also lies at the heart of mystical experience: how can the subject maintain an essential degree of identity in the process of union?<sup>7</sup> As in mystical writing, this question is often best answered through the deployment of paradoxical language, typically related to the central metaphor of the heart which is in itself symbolic of her thinking. For as Zambrano suggested, 'el conocimiento no es una ocupación de la mente, sino un ejercicio que transforma el alma entera, que afecta a la vida en su totalidad' (*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 56). Whether this displacement of the emotions into her thought affirms or refutes the uneasy notion of a 'feminine soul' is a question which will be touched on in the following chapter.

---

<sup>43</sup> Fanny Rubio has noted the importance of the beyond in Zambrano's interpretation of the writings of San Juan in 'San Juan de la Cruz: de la *noche oscura* a la más clara mística'. Rubio observed: Estamos pues, ante un proceso místico. No en vano ocurre a propósito de la poesía de San Juan de la Cruz. El místico que ve María Zambrano atraviesa los umbrales de la vida: 'Lo que sucede en el alma del místico es sencillamente un abandono de la vida; el místico no puede seguir viviendo', 'La palabra que va de vuelo', *Litoral*, 124-126 (1982), 162-164 (p. 163).

## CHAPTER 4

### Feminism: Zambrano and Cixous

There is little doubt that María Zambrano was not a feminist, Hers was not feminist thought but she was, of course, a woman thinker. Zambrano herself made this point in an interview in 1990:

No soy feminista, pero no he podido abdicar de la condición femenina. No he podido abdicar de pensar, aunque pareciera imposible; no he podido abdicar ante lo imposible.<sup>1</sup>

A contemporary of Simone de Beauvoir (1908), the feminist movement was still in its early stages of development in Spain and elsewhere in Europe during the larger part of Zambrano's life. Her active participation in the 1931 elections which brought the Republican party into power marked the culmination of the suffragist struggle in Spain.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Zambrano allied herself with women's groups either in Spain or during the forty-five years she spent in exile. Political engagement in her writing, circumscribed by left-wing ideology, seldom involved women's issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> Communicated in a private interview in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> In the chapters 'La hora' and 'Domingo 12 de abril' of *Delirio y destino* Zambrano recounted the electioneering role she played in 1931, which varied from making public addresses in Castilian villages to handing out pamphlets on behalf of the Republican party. She evoked the surprised reaction of the inhabitants of a Manchegan town, especially on the part of the women, when they saw such a young woman on the political platform: 'Grupos de mujeres se le acercaron curiosas a la salida: «Mira, nos habían dicho que iba a venir una muchacha». «¡Qué jovencita es, parece tener sólo veinte años!»', (p. 217).

Clearly any attempt to infiltrate Zambrano into the ranks of European feminist thinkers is set to fail and critics of her work (the majority of them male) have shown a degree of judiciousness by side-stepping the feminist question. The low value Jesús Moreno places on feminist interpretations of her writing, for example, is not untypical. He jettisons a feminist approach to her thought, described with loaded terms as an 'intento de reduccionismo feminista', as 'una tergiversación completa' (*La razón en la sombra*, p. 358). The good judgement of these critics though is called into question by even the most cursory glance at the relationship between Zambrano's work and the writings of European feminists. The correspondences that emerge suggest a number of avenues of thought concerning the ratio-poetical foundation of Zambrano's thought.<sup>3</sup>

Although there is a paucity of feminist readings of Zambrano's writings, critics have been quick to make the often spurious connection between her and other Spanish women writers and especially novelists; a link which is largely based on myopic concepts of gender and nationality and which fails to take into account the nature of her writing. For instance, one critic has written:

Al señalar su feminidad no se la reduce, simplemente se la sitúa en una estirpe decisiva (recordamos a María de Zayas, Emilia Pardo Bazán o Concepción Arenal) que con calidades exquisitas, ha hecho comparecer la mujer en nuestras letras otorgándole el máximo rango en la creación y en el pensamiento.<sup>4</sup>

This is a statement that is as inaccurate as it is patronising. There is certainly no evidence in Zambrano's work that she had read any of the writers mentioned and it is hard to see anything but a very loose relationship connecting their

---

<sup>3</sup> The following description of feminist criticism clarifies this point: 'All the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and at the same time, her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading system, but only their usefulness in recognizing the particular achievements of woman-as-author and their applicability in conscientiously decoding woman-as-sign', Annette Kolodny, 'Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism', *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 144-167 (p. 160).

<sup>4</sup> Opinión, *ABC*, 7 February 1991, p. 19.

output and Zambrano's work. The notable absence of María Zambrano's name in contemporary surveys of women's writing in Spain would seem to support this argument; for example, in one of the most comprehensive of recent studies, the critic Janet Pérez omits María Zambrano. It is interesting to consider the criteria which determine Pérez's evaluative selection in her survey:

Works by twentieth-century women writers in Spain comprise hundreds of authors and thousands of titles. Not all are equally meritorious or otherwise deserving of inclusion, and some prior evaluative selection has been made. As a rule, publications belonging to genres customarily perceived as sub-literary have been excluded, as have authors of no more than three works (the reasoning here is that their contribution is limited, but not necessarily that the quality is sub-literary). If exceptions occur, they are in the case of some of the most promising and recent writers, who have had brief careers to date.<sup>5</sup>

Two questions are raised here about the grounds upon which María Zambrano should have been omitted. First, the Spanish author has published a substantial body of work over a period of over fifty years and is generally considered an established, if not widely-known, figure in the world of Spanish letters. Zambrano's writings had certainly received wide-spread recognition by 1988, the date of publication of *Contemporary Women Writers of Spain*. Janet Pérez's critical study was published earlier in the same year that the author became the first woman writer to be awarded the Cervantes prize, and given the importance the American critic attaches to this prestigious award in her book, it seems unlikely that she should knowingly exclude such a promising candidate for the prize. The second question raised would appear to offer a more tenable explanation: Zambrano's publications may not belong to a sub-literary genre, but they do bridge the genres of literary prose and philosophy, and it could be argued that this departure from literature forms the basis of Pérez's decision not to include the writer.

A more fruitful comparison can be made between María Zambrano's output and the work of the Spanish writer Rosa Chacel (1898- ). Rosa Chacel, like

---

<sup>5</sup> Janet Pérez, in the Preface to her *Contemporary Women Writers of Spain*, TWAS, 798 (Boston: Twayne, 1988).

Zambrano, a contemporary of the Generation of 1927, shares the formative intellectual influence of Ortega y Gasset:

Ortega's tutelage is frequently apparent in the measured, logical manner of argument and development, as well as in the sustained, dispassionate and reasoned tone.<sup>6</sup>

Chacel's published work is principally fictional; she has written a considerable number of novels which include *Estación, Ida y vuelta* (1930), *Teresa* (1941), *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945), *La sinrazón* (1960) and the trilogy *Barrio de Maravillas* (1976), *Acrópolis* (1984) and *Ciencias naturales* (1988), several books of short stories, amongst them *Icada, Nevada, Diada* (1971), two books of poetry, *A la orilla de un pozo* (1936) and *Versos prohibidos* (1978), and a number of collections of essays such as *Saturnal* (1972), *La confesión* (1980) and *Los títulos* (1981). It is the construction of her prose and the sense of dialectical development in her narrative fiction which mark an Ortegan legacy. For example, her first novel *Estación, ida y vuelta* (1930) was written in accordance with the notions set down by Ortega in *Ideas sobre la novela*.<sup>7</sup>

Zambrano's semi-autobiographical narrative, *Delirio y destino*, shares most in common with Chacel's fiction, and in particular her novel *Acrópolis*. *Acrópolis* is the second book in Chacel's trilogy, based in large part on autobiographical materials. Like Zambrano's narrative, it is set in Madrid during the years preceding the Second Republic (1914-31). Chacel traces the lives of two female protagonists, Isabel and Elena, and evokes the cultural life and socio-historical reality of Spain at that time. Zambrano likewise recounts her experiences (often slipping into third person narrative) and those of her generation during the rise of the Second Republic. The thematic similarity of their fictions is supported by narrative technique. Absence of a strong plot, frequent use of interior monologue and discursive digressions from the narrative are common to both *Acrópolis* and *Delirio y destino*. Chacel's volumes of essays provide a further point of comparison between the two writers. In *La confesión* Chacel examines the confessions of St. Augustine, Rousseau and Kierkegaard as well as the work

---

<sup>6</sup> Pérez, *Contemporary Women Writers of Spain*, p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> See Rosa Chacel, 'Respuesta a Ortega: la novela no escrita', *Sur* (July-August 1956), 97-119.

of Cervantes, Galdós and Unamuno. Her discussion of confession reflects the ideas advanced by Zambrano in *La confesión: género literario*. In addition, Chacel dedicates one essay, 'Pentagrama' to the study of 'La metáfora del corazón' in *Claros del bosque*.<sup>8</sup> She also dedicated a sonnet to Zambrano.<sup>9</sup> Chacel, however, does not treat philosophical questions with the same rigour or intensity as Zambrano. Chacel summarized their difference of approach in an open letter addressed to María Zambrano entitled 'Rosa mística':

Tú, pertrechada con la estricta disciplina, icon las lenguas antiguas! - rezumantes como potes de arcilla de la fluidez del logos - excavaste como un minero o suscitaste sobre el humo de tu caldero mágico las formas no formadas, la virginal mudez. [. . .] Yo me desojé por arrancar del vago horizonte las formas enturbiadas por el espesor de la atmósfera, para someterlas a la táctil geometría de mi prosa. Con esto queda aclarada la falla de nuestro epistolario y el coloquio de nuestros vivires.<sup>10</sup>

In this letter, Chacel resumes correspondence publicly with Zambrano after a break of several decades. From the time of the Civil War through to the 1950s the two women corresponded regularly and in spite of their differences, often involving academic or political subtleties, they maintained a close friendship. Zambrano's strongly worded letter from Barcelona to Chacel in Paris dated 26 June 1938 highlights the differences that existed between them. Zambrano's resolve to remain in Spain until the bitter end of the Civil War was in conflict with Chacel's decision, amongst others including Unamuno and Ortega, to leave Spain for exile at an earlier stage:

No quiero discutir contigo. Pues el camino recorrido no me lleva a darte la razón; en todo caso, la razón, bueno, pero nada más, y para ti ésa es bien poca cosa. Pues ya ves que mi actitud sigue siendo extremadamente dispar que la tuya, lo cual quiere decir que *las mismas razones en mí* son una cosa distinta que en ti, pues las he descubierto aquí, bajo estas bombas, sintiéndome *beligerante*, enemiga de Giménez Caballero al que considero un miserable traidor, al que jamás daría la mano. Enemiga *hasta la muerte* de

---

<sup>8</sup> 'Pentagrama', in her *Los títulos* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1981), pp. 73-77.

<sup>9</sup> 'Una música oscura, temblorosa', in her *A la orilla de un pozo* (Valencia: Pre-textos, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> 'Rosa mística', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November 1984), 5-9 (p. 5-6).

todos los que han vendido a España, a quien jamás llamaré *mía* porque *soy yo de ella*, y ésta es diferencia de amor. No dudo de tu amor a España, a la manera de Unamuno, que no es la mía. Pero sí creo que en ti existe un extravío grande, como en Unamuno, como en Ortega, a quien he enviado una palabra, una sola, que no sé si entenderá, pues es muy clara. ¿Tú le ves? ¿No os habéis peleado y reconciliado? Yo no podría ya con él, ni lo uno ni lo otro.<sup>11</sup>

The association of the two women, and to a certain extent their parallel development, is summed up by Zambrano in an article dedicated to Chacel where she described her as follows: 'No digo juez, sino supremo testigo'.<sup>12</sup>

Moreno too, despite his distrust of feminist criticism, has proposed that Zambrano be placed in a women's literary tradition. Moreover, he has acknowledged the links between the writings of Zambrano and Chacel, as well as suggesting connections with a number of other women writers from Europe and Latin America, most of them her contemporaries and often personal friends:

No dejaría de ser significativa la posible comparación de los modos 'filosóficos' y 'literarios' de Zambrano con las de algunas mujeres contemporáneas suyas. Sobre todo, quizás, en uno y otro ámbito (filosófico y literario) con Simone Weil, a la que conoció durante la guerra civil española en Valencia y de la que fue atenta lectora, y Marguerite Yourcenar. [. . .] Pero también esta comparación podría resultar fructífera con H. Arendt, por no hablar ya de aquellas mujeres que, de un modo u otro, con mayor o menor intensidad, mantuvieron una relación directa, y una amistad, con María Zambrano como es el caso de Rosa Chacel, Lydia Cabrera, Reyna Rivas, Cristina Campos, Elena Croche, Laurette Sejourné. En todas ellas -al igual que en Zambrano- es notorio el ejercicio de lo que Alquié ha llamado la 'conciencia afectiva', y una sutilidad literaria cuya lógica parece radicar precisamente en la eficacia con que todas elaboraron, de un modo u otro, lo que Zambrano ha llamado una 'razón poética'.

(*La razón en la sombra*, p. 359)

He argues, with characteristic over-generalisation, that a common thread runs through the work of all of these women; namely a 'poetic', 'affective' interpretation of the *logos* (in Zambrano's terms *razón poética*) which, he

---

<sup>11</sup> 'Carta inédita de María Zambrano a Rosa Chacel', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Zambrano, 'Rosa', *Un ángel más* 3-4 (1988), 12.

believes, is reflected equally in their theoretical approach and in their practice of writing. Although Moreno clearly does little more than reinforce stereotypical representations of women's writing here, his comments do point to a more interesting theoretical question; what is the relationship between Zambrano's *razón poética* and the notion of the female aesthetic?

In the twentieth century women have entered the sphere of criticism, argument and theory through the emergence of feminism, and have developed an area of thought which casts its net over cultural constructs interpreting them in terms of gender. One of the principal objectives of feminist writers is to lay open patriarchal practices and in the field of philosophy they have found much to expose. Feminist writers have seen the discipline of philosophy, and in particular principles of rational thought, as an allegedly male domain. As Ann Rosalind Jones writes of four prominent French theorists, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig:

[They] share a common opponent, masculinist thinking; but they envision different modes of resisting and moving beyond it. Their common ground is an analysis of Western culture as fundamentally oppressive, as phallogocentric. 'I am the unified, self-controlled center of the universe,' man (white, European, and ruling-class) has claimed. «The rest of the world, which I define as the Other, has meaning only in relation to me, as man/father, possessor of the phallus». This claim to centrality has been supported not only by religion and philosophy but also by language.<sup>13</sup>

In their critique of philosophy as a masculine enterprise sustained by the repression or exclusion of femininity, a number of feminist theorists have argued that this tradition must be confronted. For any form of philosophical separatism can be seen as a dangerous and ensnaring trap for feminists, as M. le Doeff has warned. She asserts that women must work within philosophy in order to

---

<sup>13</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'Écriture féminine', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, pp. 361-377 (p.362); Cixous, for example, wrote: 'Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism' in 'Hélène Cixous', trans. Keith & Paula Cohen, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 245-264 (p. 249).

transform it:

Whether we like it or not, we are within philosophy, surrounded by masculine-feminine divisions that philosophy has helped to articulate and refine. The problem is to know whether we want to remain there and be dominated by them, or whether we can take up a critical position in relation to them, a position which will necessarily evolve through deciphering the basic philosophical assumptions latent in discourse about women. The worst metaphysical positions are those which one adopts unconsciously whilst believing or claiming that one is speaking from a position outside philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Feminist analysis of ideals of reason and philosophy, the examination of the structures that lie behind them, and the ways in which the writers propose to transform them provide a useful point of comparison with Zambrano's idea of *razón poética*. For in her thought she sought to re-interpret the dominant element of philosophical discourse; reason or the *logos*, in an explicitly poetic sense. Her distrust of 'la razón racionalista, esquematizada' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 147) provides a bridge between her writing and feminist ideas. In addition, the duality announced in Zambrano's term *razón poética*, especially in the context of her writing on women, serves as a point of departure for an exploration of the links between Zambrano and feminist unease about ideals of reason in philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

In her study of the Man of Reason, Genevieve Lloyd argued that the models of reason we have inherited do not transcend sexual difference but in fact help to constitute it:

The obstacles to female cultivation of Reason spring to a large extent from the fact that our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and femininity itself has been partly constituted through

---

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> María Zambrano gave prominence to women in her writing; the essay 'Eloísa o la existencia de la mujer' (1945), the play *La tumba de Antígona* (1967) and the prose fiction *Diótima de Mantinea* (1980) stand out as examples of her meditations on historical, classical and fictional figures. As Moreno has observed, 'ha sido una constante de la escritura de María Zambrano la presencia de la reflexión sobre múltiples figuras (reales y literarias) femeninas, así como, en general, sobre las diversas situaciones históricas y vitales de la condición de la mujer', *La razón en la sombra*, p. 358.

such processes of exclusion.<sup>16</sup>

Her review traverses the history of philosophy examining the processes of exclusion of women in Greek tragedy, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche amongst others. However, the fact that women are overlooked is not presented as a conspiracy by male philosophers; Lloyd maintains it is usually incidental to their main purpose and occasionally occurs despite the conscious intent of the writer. She describes how, from the beginnings of philosophical thought, femaleness has been allied with the dark, mysterious forces of nature which are surpassed by reason:

Rational knowledge has been construed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind.<sup>17</sup>

For example Nietzsche, with characteristic overstatement, suggested that woman's closeness to nature accords her a restorative role and limits her participation in cultural life:

In her nature lies the healing power which replaces that which has been used up, the beneficial rest in which everything immoderate confines itself, the eternal Same, by which excessive and the surplus regulate themselves. In her the future generation dreams. Woman is more closely related to Nature than man and in all her essentials she remains ever herself. Culture is with her always something external, a something which does not touch the kernel that is eternally faithful to Nature.<sup>18</sup>

Through his association of women with sleep Nietzsche pushes to its limits the long-standing connection between women and passivity, contrasted with 'male' activity. He developed a dichotomous distinction suggested in the Pythagorean table of opposites, formulated in the sixth century B.C., where the feminine was explicitly linked with vagueness and absence of form.<sup>19</sup> As Lloyd writes:

---

<sup>16</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Methuen: London, 1984), p. x.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Greek woman', *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Maximilian A. Mügge, 18 vols (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911), II, 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Gatens clarifies this point as follows: 'Dichotomous categories of thought can be traced to the beginnings of philosophy in ancient Greece. The earliest records we have, from the Ionians,

The Pythagoreans saw the world as a mixture of principles associated with determinate form, seen as good, and others associated with formlessness - the unlimited, irregular or disorderly - which were seen as bad or inferior. There were ten such contrasts in the table: limit/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, rest/motion, straight/curved, light/dark, good/bad, square/oblong. Thus 'male' and 'female', like the other contrasted terms, did not function here as straightforwardly descriptive classifications. 'Male', like the other terms on its side of the table, was construed as superior to its opposite; and the basis for this superiority was its association with the primary Pythagorean contrast between form and formlessness.<sup>20</sup>

Hélène Cixous is author of over thirty texts and numerous articles and short pieces. Her works, like Zambrano's, are of great diversity, ranging from fiction to drama to poetic and theoretical essays. It is, however, her theoretico-poetic texts, especially her well-known essays 'Le Rire de la Méduse' ('The Laugh of the Medusa') and *La Jeune Née* (*The Newly Born Woman*), in conjunction with interview material, which provide, from what Showalter calls a gynocritical point of view, the most explicit link, with Zambrano's approach.<sup>21</sup> In her essay 'Sorties' (1975), Cixous, like Lloyd, recognizes the danger of 'A/Not A' distinctions, exemplified by the Pythagorean table, because of their peculiar affinity with gender distinctions. Taking her lead from Jacques Derrida, she argues the existence of a set of binary and hierarchized gender-defining oppositions in culture and society. She contends that thought has always worked by opposition:

By dual, *hierarchized* oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Wherever an ordering intervenes, a law organizes the thinkable by (dual, irreconcilable; or mitigable, dialectical) oppositions.<sup>22</sup>

---

show a table of dichotomous distinctions: good/bad, light/dark, unity/plurality, limited/unlimited and male/female. An important point to note about these distinctions is the associations at work between the left-and right-hand sides of these dichotomies. Maleness is associated with good, light, unity and limitation, all of which have positive connotations. Conversely, femaleness is associated with the negative, right-hand side of these distinctions' *Feminism and Philosophy*, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, pp. 243-70 (p. 248).

<sup>22</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', trans. Ann Liddle, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 90-98 (91).

The couplings she lists include 'Activity/passivity, Culture/Nature, Head/heart, Intelligible/sensitive and Logos/Pathos' which all find their roots in the primary couple Man/Woman. Cixous decries this two-term system in which, she maintains, the male side consistently triumphs over the female to the point where woman is equated with passivity, defeat and death: 'either the woman is passive; or she doesn't exist'. She seeks, therefore, to undo this given order of priorities and the very system of conceptual opposition that makes this order possible. In her critique of what Toril Moi has called 'patriarchal binary thought' Cixous heralds a new, empowering, feminine language which would strive to dismantle these oppositions.

Central to María Zambrano's essay, 'Eloísa o la existencia de la mujer' is, in fact, the opposition man/woman. In her gloss of the French love story Zambrano focuses on the figure of Héloïse, and she compares her active role in the love affair with Abelard to the traditional role played by women in medieval literature. She alludes to the conventions of the Courtly love tradition in which the lover worships an image of the beloved, 'la mujer queda encerrada por el hombre dentro de una imagen sagrada', thereby denying, her existence, Zambrano asserts, as the woman becomes 'sólo un símbolo del querer masculino'. Zambrano prepares the ground for the central argument of her essay -Héloïse as a primary, active woman in European medieval history- by emphasizing the passive role attributed to women by men in the Middle Ages <sup>23</sup>:

La quietud ha sido la exigencia que el varón ha ejercido sobre la mujer en su activa vida. [. . . ] Eloísa realizó la hazaña de evadirse de esa imagen sagrada. Se escapó de la cárcel de la objetividad para vivir y ser sujeto de su pasión. Se atrevió a existir.<sup>25</sup>

In the development of her discussion, Zambrano refers to the abiding association in Western culture between women and the heart or soul and men and the intellect or Greek 'nous'. Like Cixous, she refuses to accept the binary

---

<sup>23</sup> In an earlier, more explicitly feminist passage, Zambrano attributed the passive role played by women in history to their reluctance to resist: 'Es porque la mujer no queja, no se rebela, ni se revela, queda oculta detrás de ellos, sentada como en el fondo de la casa', *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> 'Eloísa o la existencia de la mujer', *Sur*, (Buenos Aires), (February, 1945), 35-58, (p. 45).

opposition between femininity and masculinity, though the position she adopts is clearly an ambiguous one from a feminist perspective (and at worst may be seen as the partial duplication of past philosophers' descriptions of women). Zambrano argues for the participation of women in history through the bringing together of the female and male sides, hence their participation involves detachment from the heart, implying a move towards rationality in 'una especie de pacto', as well as action:

La vida de la mujer es la vida del alma. El hombre comenzó su historia hace tiempo; la historia en que trata de alcanzar la libertad lejos del alma o desprendiéndose de ella, en una especie de pacto. ¿Habrà alguna manera de que la mujer encuentre su modo de vida participante en la aventura varonil de la libertad, sin dejar de ser alma?<sup>25</sup>

She contends, nevertheless, that participation is invalidated if it is at the expense of a sense of female identity; woman must progress 'sin dejar de ser alma'. Her argument in this essay can in one sense be summed up as the effort to undo the opposition between man and woman, active and passive, and head and heart in order to create an oxymoronic unity or co-existence which is the substance of her notion of *razón poética*.

In this context, Moira Gatens comment: on the absence of a philosophical concept which bridges 'nature and culture, the mind and the body, the private and the public spheres' is an interesting one:

There is a marked lack of reciprocity in philosophical accounts of the complementarity between male and female human being. It is woman who, conceptually and literally, acts as the 'bridge' for man between nature and culture, the mind and the body, the private and the public spheres. Whilst she acts as bridge, she herself cannot cross from nature to enjoy both sides of the dichotomy since there is no one, and no concept to act as her bridge.<sup>26</sup>

It could be posited, as Zambrano, through her representation of Héloïse (in relation to a wider conceptual framework), presenting one such concept in her *razón poética*?<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> 'Eloïsa o la existencia de la mujer', *Sur*, 35-58, (pp. 39-40).

<sup>26</sup> Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> See Zambrano's comments: 'Yo creo que, al llegar a ciertas honduras y a ciertas alturas, la

The correlation between Zambrano's anti-rationalist stance in her thought and the ways in which woman writers have proposed to move beyond ideals of reason and philosophy is particularly marked in Hélène Cixous's poetic vision of writing. Again Cixous offers confirmation of the assertion made by Gatens. One of the most striking features of Zambrano's and Cixous's writing is the poetic fabric of their texts; the metaphorical network is, as in poetry, very dense, unlike most philosophical or theoretical essays. Furthermore, it is through their philosophico-poetic style that the two writers (as suggested above) strive to dismantle notions of opposition in their writing; Zambrano in her critique of rationalist philosophy and Cixous in her challenging of patriarchal modes of thought. Their texts, however, are riddled with contradiction for, despite the stylistic blurring of genres, both draw a conscious distinction between philosophy and poetry.

In '*Filosofía y poesía*', for example, though Zambrano argues the importance of integrating philosophy and poetry in one mode of expression, 'hoy poesía y pensamiento se nos aparecen como dos formas insuficientes; y se nos antojan dos mitades del hombre: el filósofo y el poeta' (*Filosofía y poesía*, p.13), the greater part of her discussion is dedicated to representing the differences she perceives between the two disciplines. For her, philosophy can be summarized as an activity which involves a sense of estrangement from immediate reality, described, with a nod to Greek philosophy, as 'admiración'. She predicates that this detachment from direct reality gives rise to a quest for otherness:

Y así vemos ya más claramente la condición de la filosofía: admiración, sí, pasmo ante lo inmediato, para arrancarse violentamente de ello y lanzarse a otra cosa, a una cosa que hay que buscar y perseguir, que no se nos da, que no se regala su presencia. Y aquí empieza ya el afanoso camino, el esfuerzo metódico por esta captura de algo que no tenemos, y necesitamos tener, con tanto rigor, que nos hace arrancarnos de aquello que tenemos ya sin haberlo perseguido.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 16)

She maintains that otherness, or alterity, described here simply as 'otra cosa', is not a given reality, it is one which requires of the philosopher methodical and

---

voz ya no es ni de hombre ni de mujer', *Filosofía y poesía*, p. 9

rigorous searching. In contrast, Zambrano depicts poetry as a something found unseekingly, like the analogy of the clearing in the wood, 'no hay que buscarlo', repeating the point at the start of the next sentence, 'no hay que buscar' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 11); it is an 'encuentro, don, hallazgo por gracia' (*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 13). In a descriptive passage that partly echoes feminist theory in its assertion of the authority of experience, she then emphasizes the recognition of sensory or imaginary realities, in poetic writing:

El otro camino es el del poeta. El poeta no renunciaba ni apenas buscaba, porque tenía. Tenía por lo pronto lo que ante sí, ante sus ojos, oídos y tacto, aparecía; tenía lo que miraba y escuchaba, lo que tocaba, pero también lo que aparecía en sus sueños, y sus propios fantasmas interiores mezclados en tal forma con los otros, con los que vagaban fuera, que juntos formaban un mundo abierto donde todo era posible.

(*Filosofía y poesía*, p. 17-18)

In her theoretical works Cixous, likewise, distinguishes philosophical discourse, with its concomitant terminology, from 'the poetic word'.<sup>28</sup> Besides, she wilfully deprives herself of the conventions of philosophical writing (without discounting them altogether), 'I disenfranchise myself from the philosophical obligations and corrections, which does not mean that I disregard them',<sup>29</sup> and identifies herself with the poet:

I give myself the poet's right, otherwise I would not dare to speak. The right of poets is to say something and then to say, believe if you want to, but believe it weeping; or else to erase it, as Genet does, by saying that all truths are false, that only false truths are true, etc.<sup>30</sup>

All the same, the distinctions she draws are clouded by her decision 'to think in a poetic overflowing'; to deconstruct the concept of thought itself, through a multidisciplinary approach which Françoise Defromont terms 'metaphorical

---

<sup>28</sup> 'If I were a philosopher, I could never allow myself to speak in terms of presence, essence, etc., or of the meaning of something. I would be capable of carrying on a philosophical discourse, but I do not. I let myself be carried off by the poetic word', Verena Anermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln, Na and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), in the appendix 'An exchange with Hélène Cixous', pp. 129-61 (pp. 151-152).

<sup>29</sup> Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, p. 150-51.

<sup>30</sup> Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*, p. 15.

thinking':<sup>31</sup>

Strictly speaking, thought has philosophy as its synonym. But philosophy proceeds in a manner which I find restrictive. I prefer thinking in a poetic overflowing.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way, Cixous consciously blurs generic boundaries in her definition of poetry. With strong reminiscences of Zambrano, she insists on the philosophical foundation of her concept of poetry and supports her interpretation by employing metaphor to link and describe both disciplines. She represents poetry as a mobile and fluid language, 'the river of poetry' which runs across philosophy, the latter rooted to the ground ('bed', 'fertile field'):

I might summarize my definition of poetry as 'philosophic singing'. Philosophic reasoning, and, at the same time, the overflowing of the boundaries of philosophic discourse: making the river of poetry flow into the bed of philosophy. Some poetry, of course, doesn't have a message. There is poetry which is more musical than thoughtful. What I call poetry crosses the fertile field of philosophy in order to go beyond.<sup>33</sup>

The overlapping of genres in Cixous's writing involves not only the philosophical and the poetic but also the political. Her definition of philosophy is bound up with a critique of masculinist thinking and, at the same time, her description of poetry is inscribed by ideas of writing 'in the feminine' (*l'écriture féminine*). In her theoretical formulation of the concept of *écriture féminine*, Cixous prescribes a practice of writing which evolves outside the parameters of male-centred philosophical writing and hence occupies an insurgent and marginal position in the history of culture:

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded -which doesn't mean that it does not exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system, it does and will

---

<sup>31</sup> Françoise Defromont, 'Metaphorical Thinking and Poetic Writing in Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous', in *The body and the text: Hélène Cixous, reading and teaching*, ed. Helen Wilcox & others, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1990) pp. 114-125 (p. 114).

<sup>32</sup> Cixous, 'Conversations', *Writing Differences: Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), pp. 141-154 (p. 142).

<sup>33</sup> Sellers, *Writing Differences*, p. 152.

take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subject.<sup>34</sup>

Her contention is that this writing, more a Utopian possibility than an artistic practice, can only exist if there is a liberation from the law and in particular the laws of gender. In her texts there is a call to writing, a pressing invitation to women 'to write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon':<sup>35</sup>

Write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine Imaginary is going to be deployed.<sup>36</sup>

For Cixous, the imaginary, which roughly corresponds to the pre-oedipal period in Freud, is the source of feminine specificity and it is to be found in poetic texts 'because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious'.<sup>37</sup> This formulation is supported by Cixous's later statement that she finds a sense of philosophical release for women in poetic writing:

It must be said that it is in poetic writing that something of the mystery and continuity of life can appear, through grammatical subversion, through a certain liberty taken inside language with regard to the law of gender.<sup>38</sup>

Zambrano's poetic deviation from philosophical discourse may be seen as a Utopian potentiality as well as a practice of writing which in part reflects Cixous's concerns, though this is far from suggesting that she is a proponent of *l'écriture féminine*. Zambrano is however providing a bridging concept, a challenge to tabulations, categorisations and fixities. Cixous has granted that,

---

<sup>34</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 253).

<sup>35</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 250).

<sup>36</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986), p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 250).

<sup>38</sup> 'Extreme Fidelity', in *Writing Differences: Readings from The Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, pp. 9-36 (p. 14); Virginia Woolf adopted a similar position; she maintained that poetic spirit, which runs so deeply into her own prose, will shape woman's attempt to shed light on the human condition; 'The great impersonality of women's lives will encourage the poetic spirit. [. . .] They will look beyond the personal and political relationships to the wider questions which the poet tries to solve -of our destiny and the meaning of life', *The Granite and Rainbow: Essays*, 2nd edn (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), p. 83.

only with a few exceptions (most notably the work of Clarice Lispector), there are no texts yet written 'in the feminine' and it is not the aim of this thesis to strive to include Zambrano amongst these exceptions. One male critic has blundered into this territory by describing her prose, in an uninformed way, as 'escritura femenina', displaying above all a trenchant misogyny:

La prosa de María Zambrano [. . .] es escritura femenina. El código genético de su florecimiento nunca podría ser masculino en su desplegarse, su frasearse, su ritmarse; en la salobre sabrosidad de ciertos adjetivos insólitos, en su luminoso hermetismo, la prosa de María Zambrano es como una hermosa mirada femenina: evita y esquivada a la vez.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, mindful of the dangers of grasping at the slippery term *l'écriture féminine*, I would like to address the question of how theory and practice interweave in Zambrano's approach and its possible relation to Cixous's writing.

While the aim of rationalist philosophy is to purge itself of the subjective in order to focus on the actual basis of reason, the emphasis in Zambrano's thought lies on the working of reason. As she set down in *Claros del bosque*, her idea of philosophy reaches beyond objective, rational understanding:

Si el método se refiere tan sólo al conocimiento objetivo, viene a ser un instrumento, lógico al fin y sin remedio. [. . .] Mas no a toda hora el pensamiento sigue la lógica formal ni ninguna otra por material que sea.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 15)

Zambrano challenged the abstraction which characterizes rationalist thought, 'la palabra Razón ha perdido tanto, se ha desgastado tanto al convertirse en abstracta como para ser la traducción fiel del *logos*' (pp. 106-107), and, in her attempt to close the gap between reason and reality, she sought to give flesh to her ideas through poetry, hence rejecting the rationalist embargo on metaphor.

In *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, she elucidated this position:

Por una metáfora se ha solido entender una forma imprecisa de pensamiento. Pero la metáfora ha desempeñado en la cultura una función más honda, y anterior, que está en la raíz de la metáfora usada en la poesía. Es la función de definir una realidad inabarcable por la razón, pero propicia a ser captada de otro modo.

---

<sup>39</sup> Jorge Semprún, 'María Zambrano: Premio de Cervantes', *Diario 16*, 25 April 1989, p. 33.

(*Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 50)

Furthermore, her concept of *razón poética*, described as 'un medio de visibilidad donde la imagen sea real' (p. 14), is repeatedly elaborated by intensely metaphorical structures. The recurrent use of simile, metaphor and analogy in her writing, possibly because of their likeness to reality, indicates the common ground between her style and method.

Of all Zambrano's works, *Claros del bosque* is arguably the text in which theory and practice are most closely integrated. In the two complementary passages, 'La Medusa' and the first part of 'El espejo de Atenea', for example, she creates a dense web of images and ideas in her representation of the eponymous figures.<sup>40</sup> The Medusa (always capitalised) refers, on an immediate level, to both the creature of Greek mythology and the sea creature (the jellyfish). These two images are then entangled, in conjunction with Athena, to form the (des)prescription of her philosophico-poetical vision.

In her reworking of the myth of Perseus and the beheading of the Medusa, Zambrano focused on the ambiguity the Gorgon Medusa presents. This ambiguity resides in the fact that the mythological creature is at once beautiful and terrifying, 'y la belleza de la Medusa, criatura impar, seguirá siendo el foco mismo del terror, su centro original a través de los tiempos' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 114). Zambrano traced her mythological lineage which firmly connects her to the sea:

De la estirpe del dios de las aguas insondables, Poseidón, la Medusa era la única bella entre sus hermanas, la única joven de ese pueblo de las 'Gerias'.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 145)

Having established the link between the Medusa's beauty and the sea, Zambrano referred to the fruit she was to bear, 'la belleza ambigua, prometedora del fruto final del Océano insondable'. In mythology the 'fruto' the Medusa carries is a son conceived of Poseidon, 'fecunda ella por el dios mismo, el rey del Océano, su ancestro' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 113), a rival to <sup>the</sup>line of Zeus and hence a threat to Athena. Zambrano also represented this fruit in abstract terms as the 'logos

---

<sup>40</sup> Zambrano, like Hélène Cixous, displays a predilection for figures of classical antiquity. In *Claros del bosque*, for instance, she refers to Artemis, Electra, Athene as well as the Medusa.

recóndito' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 146) of the sea which she contrasted with the reflection from Athena's shield (escudo/espejo). She focused on the shield Athena bestows on Perseus which enables him to see the Medusa's reflection rather than look directly at the terrifying figure. She distinguished this mirror image which captures the appearance of reality from the *logos* of the sea (both metaphors for philosophy). In her description of the latter she suggested that it represents a cognitive process which unites the visual with the aural; it is presented as a process which involves looking, waiting, and then listening:<sup>41</sup>

Una figura vista en el espejo carece de ese fondo último que la mirada va a buscar más allá de la apariencia. Pues que la vista se une al oído. Cuando se mira directamente, se espera y se da lugar al escuchar. Nadie escucha a la figura reflejada por un espejo. Mientras que a las aguas se va dispuesto a escuchar. Y nada hay como el elemento acuoso para desatar esta atención, ese ansia de escuchar y esta esperanza informada de que las aguas -y más todavía las insondables y recónditas, las que no se vierten en el arroyo o en la fuente que tiene siempre canción- lleguen a sugerir algo y, en caso extremo, en lo impensable ya, den su palabra. Su palabra si es que la tienen. Y que allá en el fondo del alma se espera que todo lo creado o que todo lo que es natural tenga una palabra que dar, su *logos* recóndito o celosamente guardado.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 145-46)

In this context the mirror reflection may be seen as the conventional 'metáfora de la visión intelectual' Zambrano alluded to *Hacia un saber sobre el*

---

<sup>41</sup> In his recollection of the long conversations he had with Zambrano in Geneva Savater emphasized the importance of voice and the listening ear in the development of her philosophical prose. He wrote: 'Pero ¿qué es lo que sabe María Zambrano? Cosas que ha oído y brotan de nuevo en su voz, reflexionadas, recreadas. 'Ya sabes que soy del oído', me dice, tajante. Ella filósofa de oído, frente a filosofía visual, pasajística, teórica, de nuestra tradición sorda. Ella no compone teorías, sino que pone voz al devenir de lo que escucha. Por su palabra no puede separarse de la voz misma que la enuncia, so pena de perder la lección de refinamiento auditivo que contiene su aportación más propia', 'En presencia de la voz de María Zambrano', in *María Zambrano: Premio Miguel de Cervantes*, ed. Javier Ruiz (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1989), pp. 17-18 (p. 17). It is interesting to note that Cixous has presented a similar question as gender specific. She maintains that women have a 'privileged relationship with the voice' and that when women speak 'there is not that scission, that division made by the common man between the logic of oral speech and the logic of the text, bound as he is by his antiquated relation -servile, calculating- to mystery', 'Hélène Cixous', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 251).

*alma*, in other words a metaphor for systematic or rationalist philosophy.<sup>42</sup> This in turn is assisted by mythological anecdote as Athena, the donor of the shield, is often allegorized as the personification of wisdom. As a corollary the 'logos recóndito' of this passage represents the other metaphor, the 'visión por el corazón', Zambrano adumbrated in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, which she described as 'más extraña, más dada al equívoco, más misterioso y audaz' (p. 51). This argument is supported by the adjectives employed to depict the *logos* in 'El espejo de Atenea' ('insondable', 'recóndito', 'impensable'), and its location 'en el fondo del alma'.

The *logos* of 'las [aguas] insondables y recónditas' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 146) is explicitly related to the 'belleza insondable' of the Medusa but then, with a characteristic sense of counteraction, the mythological creature is linked with Athena's shield. For Zambrano, the Medusa becomes a sign or shield, superimposed on Athena's shield hence combining the two forms of vision mentioned above:

La belleza no pide ser sondeada. Y si se hace sentir lo insondable es porque viene de otro mundo, del que parece ser signo y escudo. Un escudo era ya la Medusa del reino insondable del océano. Y Atenea bien lo supo al incorporarla a su escudo.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 147)

In the penultimate paragraph of 'El espejo de Atenea', the metaphor of the dihedral shield is disentangled; Zambrano indicates it symbolizes 'un medio adecuado para la reflexión en uno de sus aspectos', signalling other 'less visible' forms of knowledge, 'que sólo son posibles en cierto medio de visibilidad' (p. 147). This serves as a preface for arguably one of the clearest explanations of the idea of *razón poética* in her work, albeit succeeded by the disclaimer, 'asunto que aquí ahora sólo queda indicado'. Here, she takes up an interrogative attitude to the assumption that rationalist philosophy provides the paradigm for all knowledge and advocates a positive reappraisal of non-systematic approaches to philosophy:

---

<sup>42</sup> See 'la metáfora de la visión intelectual ha sido -nadie podrá negarlo- la definición de una forma -hasta ahora la más decisiva y fundamental- de conocimiento', *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, p. 51.

Mas el ser humano habría de recuperar otros medios de la visibilidad que su mente y sus sentidos mismos reclaman por haberlos poseído alguna vez poéticamente, o litúrgicamente, o metafísicamente.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 147)

Zambrano's use of the mythical figure of the Medusa to represent, through a complicated mesh of images, her philosophico-poetic vision in some ways foreshadows Cixous's 'The laugh of the Medusa'. For in this essay Cixous adopted the Medusa as a symbol for women writers. Like Zambrano, she privileges direct vision over the mirror image glimpsed by Perseus: 'You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing'.<sup>43</sup> In the writings of both women mythical allusions are accompanied by oceanic water imagery (the element, above all others, traditionally associated with the feminine).<sup>44</sup> Moreover, if for Zambrano the Medusa represented a strange creature from another dominion where beings awaited accommodation through the creation of a new imaginary order,<sup>45</sup> then, for Cixous, the Medusa symbolises the woman writer's 'return from afar, from always: from *without*, from the heath where the witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond *culture*'.<sup>46</sup> Both writers here clearly make reference to a utopian potentiality.

In her depiction of the Medusa as a marine coelenterate, Zambrano drew a comparison between the formlessness of the jellyfish and the human brain, 'el animal nombrado Medusa ofrece así como un vaciado del cráneo' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 113). She then developed this simile further by suggesting that the

---

<sup>43</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 255).

<sup>44</sup> See Zambrano: 'Me habían llevado a creer que necesitaban oírme, que les fuera trayasando ese saber que, como agua, que se escapa imperceptible de toda mi persona, según decían; no es una mujer, es una fuente' 'Diótima de Mantinea', *Litoral*, 121-123 (1983), 87-119 (p. 107); Cixous 'We are ourselves sea, sand, coral, sea-weed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves', 'Hélène Cixous', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 260).

<sup>45</sup> See 'la promesa de esta extraña criatura anunciaba quizás otro reino en el que había de subsistir del mar, o quizá no, si se entiende que el mar sea el abismo donde la vida guarda gérmenes, esbozos, esquemas de criaturas inéditas todavía, y donde se alojan al par, aque llas de imposible nacimiento al menos en este orden del tiempo. Seres o proposiciones de seres necesitados de un orden imaginable que les aguarda', *Claros del bosque*, p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 247).



jellyfish represents 'un sistema nervioso y cerebro, albergue de otro modo de pensamiento' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 114). The tropic meaning is now significantly more complicated; the Medusa is described in metaphorical terms as a mass of nervous tissue, the sanctuary of an 'other' mode of thought. What then is this different mode of perception? The biological Medusa is identified with a system of thought deficient of sense perception; it is equated with non-scientific vision or 'pure thought':

Como indicios y sentidos no hay en esta viva Medusa, la simple mirada no científica, puede presentarse algo así como la sede o designio de un pensamiento sin la apertura de los sentidos; de un pensar puro sin más receptividad que la que la atañe al lugar donde como puro ser del pensamiento, transita, al modo de un insensible estrategia.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 114)

The preclusion of the scientific here recalls the dissociation Zambrano made between science and her concept<sup>of</sup> *razón poética* in *De la Aurora* where she wrote 'no sería, pues, ciencia ni tiene posibilidad de serlo este conocimiento' (p. 30). And her dismissal of sensory experience is in line with her comments on rationalist philosophy in 'El espejo de Atenea' as 'un medio adecuado a lo que ya es o a lo que a ello se encamina con certeza; a las 'cosas' en suma, tal como aparecen y creemos que son' (p. 147). Her rejection of the notion that science provides the pattern for all knowledge is interspersed with references to hope and dream which emphasize the utopian nature of her thinking:

La imagen de la Medusa marina despierta en el fondo insondable de las aguas del sueño el anhelo y el temor entremezclado de un pensamiento no asistido de los sentidos ni condicionado por ellos. De un pensamiento absoluto que no sería ya tampoco un pensamiento asistido del pensar -del esfuerzo y de la tensión del pensar-, ni por el tiempo. Un saber sería más bien; un saber sobre el tiempo, sobre las aguas del tiempo, y no solamente sobre el abismo del indefinido e indefinible nacimiento. Un saber absoluto que al darse aquí, tendría sólo la necesidad de recibir noticia acerca del lugar donde su receptáculo se encuentra; señales de ese su transitar por los mares del tiempo, para mantenerse en las zonas que le permitan no ser sumergido, ni arrojado fuera. Un sueño que quizás haya sido filosóficamente formulado. Lo que anda lejos de ser dicho como una condenación absoluta de este filosofar. No puede ser acusado un filosofar

por extraer una esperanza -aunque no pueda verificarse aquí- del abismo del terror originario. Y todavía más, en los escasos claros de la historia, el pensar filosófico y el poético han creído que tenían que aventurarse a dar forma -determinación- a lo que se agita en lo indeterminado volver la mirada hacia el albor del pensar griego, al *apeirion*, lo indeterminado de donde *la justicia del ser* destaca todas las cosas que son, que son por ahora, se entiende.

(*Claros del bosque*, p. 115)

Zambrano's discussion of dreams in her later work, *El sueño creador*, throws light on a paradoxical statement made in the passage above. In this dense paragraph she indicated that the (absolute) mode of thought she referred to is not 'un pensamiento asistido del pensar [. . .] ni por el tiempo'. In *El sueño creador* she wrote (the italics are hers):

En sueños nunca *pensamos* propiamente, sino que puede suceder que encontremos la solución de un problema que nos ha torturado despiertos. Mas esto no es pensar, sino encontrar, asistimos a la revelación o develación, mas *asistir* siempre.

*En sueños no existe el tiempo; mientras soñamos no tenemos tiempo. Al despertar nos devuelven el tiempo.*

(p. 16-17)

Her insistence on the atemporality of dream here, in conjunction with the more interesting observations on the notion of knowledge in dreams, help to explain the paradox in 'La Medusa'. For she suggested that though dreams do not, strictly speaking, involve *thinking* they may provide the solution to a problem unresolved in the conscious mind. She differentiated this cognitive process from thinking, 'pensar', by asserting that it is found, revealed or unveiled (all words she typically associates with poetry). Hence dream comes to represent a form of knowledge, it is 'un sueño que quizás haya sido filosóficamente formulado'; in other words a *razón poética*.

In metaphorical terms, a sense of hope in 'La Medusa' emerges from the depths of the sea, 'del abismo del terror original', <sup>and</sup> is described as an essential constituent of the dream mentioned above. Returning once more to the central metaphor of the clearing, Zambrano referred to the infrequent occasions in the history of philosophy when philosophical thought and poetry have emerged

together. In language which plays on the central Pythagorean distinction between determinate form and formlessness, she described how a philosophico-poetic approach ventured to 'dar forma -determinación- a lo que se agita en lo indeterminado' (*Claros del bosque*, p. 115). Then, Zambrano associated hope with one such high point, the Pre-Socratic union of poetry and philosophy, described metaphorically as the dawn of Greek thought; an idea clearly expressed in a political context in *Delirio y destino* where, once again, she employed metaphorical language to support her philosophical point. For she used the simile of an imported plant which withers in foreign lands to convey the idea of philosophy which is not informed by a sense of hope:

Y la esperanza en activo requiere y busca un conocimiento; un conocimiento hondo: Poesía, Filosofía. Una meditación previa más que ciencia. La Filosofía como tal necesita de ella también, si no marchita como planta importada.

(*Delirio y destino*, p. 82)

I suggest that María Zambrano's use of the image of the sea Medusa is unambiguous; like the mythical creature it exemplifies her pluralist approach to thought where dream, hope, poetry and philosophy combine in a single vision. In her depiction of the Medusa on both levels she consciously deployed metaphor in order to distinguish her 'method' ('un método de un vivir poético') from a rational or scientific one. The interlocking tropes in the two key passages enforce this idea equally through the exposition of theory and the practice of philosophico-poetic writing. In this way María Zambrano's concept of *razón poética*, where none of the usual categories between theory and practice or theory and literature are maintained, is very much in step with Hélène Cixous's definition of a feminist practice of writing in 'The Laugh of the Medusa'. Cixous wrote:

To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death -to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in a sequence of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but in/finitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of

different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from living from the boundaries of the other.<sup>47</sup>

Through approaches which (despite political difference) often overlap, Zambrano and Cixous strive to split open the closure of the dichotomous distinctions which are particularly prominent in philosophical discourse. In this way Zambrano's emphasis on the complementarity between philosophy and poetry (and related oppositions) in her concept of *razón poética* could be seen as acting as Gatens's bridge linking both sides of an opposition.

---

<sup>47</sup> 'Hélène Cixous', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, pp. 245-264 (p. 254).

## CONCLUSION

Zambrano's concept of *razón poética* may be seen as the cornerstone to her unsystematic thought, it illustrates the outstanding features which define and characterize her work as a whole, and points to diverse philosophical and literary influences at play in her writing.

*Razón poética* can be summed up as representing a form <sup>of</sup> knowledge through union, the intellect is not working alone, but together with 'the poetic', and guided and directed by the latter. Through union it is distinguished from purely rational knowledge, knowledge through conceptual, logical and discursive exercise of Reason. Instead it illustrates the complex and subtle workings of reason and at the same time it becomes a critique of reason.

Zambrano's questioning of the infallibility of principles of rational philosophy opens a number of avenues of thought. As testimony to her philosophical training she often finds her roots in Greek philosophy, Parmenides of Elea, Plato and Seneca <sup>being</sup> the primary influences in the genesis of her ideas. Then, like the work of her immediate predecessors in the field of philosophical writing, especially Nietzsche, Heidegger, Max Scheler, Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset, her approach straddles the disciplines of literature and philosophy in order to challenge the dominance of rationalism. Moreover, by connecting reason with the poetic, her work may be seen as performing the function which Northrop Frye attributes to the arts in general:

The arts have been traditionally regarded as forms of 'accommodation',

their function being to establish a link between reason and whatever is put 'below' it on the assumed diagram, such as the emotions or the senses.<sup>1</sup>

By implication, Frye's comments here reinforce Zambrano's rejection of scientific method in her thought.

Zambrano's search for an adequate form of expression for her anti-rationalist stance directs her to the language of mysticism. Mystical discourse, in particular in San Juan and Molinos, swarms with paradoxes and oxymorons, hence it would seem to provide the ideal vehicle for the expression of the paradoxical figure of *razón poética*. She also employs a central metaphor of mysticism, 'la metáfora del corazón' to symbolise and illustrate her move towards thinking of an intuitionist nature. The influence of mystical writing, however, is conceptual as well as stylistic for Zambrano recreates a sense of theistic union in her formulation of the transformation of reason.

In the context of modern cultural theory the conceptual development in Zambrano's work reflects the concerns of several feminist writers, notably Cixous, Lloyd and Gatens. These three theorists share with Zambrano the assumption of a common problematic constructed around the dichotomies which have dominated modern philosophy. It could be suggested that *razón poética* interacts with traditional oppositions such as reason/passion, mind/body, nature/culture, and male/female, and that, to a degree, it provides a solution to the dilemma they pose in the form of a bridging concept. It also closes the gap between theoretical writing and poetic writing in a way which touches on the difficult questions raised by Cixous through the presentation of her utopian project, 'l'écriture féminine'. For, as Octavio Paz observes, employing an effective metaphor, Zambrano's work flows over barriers of generic distinctions (and related distinctions):

Su obra se desliza con plena naturalidad y consciencia del pensamiento

---

<sup>1</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 337.

a la poesía: es un vaso comunicante entre ambos.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, as Paz's description suggests, the strength and interest of her work resides in its heterogeneity; the intellectual vigour of her writing coupled with its densely metaphorical texture has served as a springboard for subsequent generations of writers (in a similar way to Ortega y Gasset before her), especially in Spain and Latin America. For writers such as José Ángel Valente, Carlos Fuentes, José Lezama Lima, Fernando Savater, Antonio Colinas and others her texts are seminal and in particular her concept *razón poética*. As Fuentes states, Zambrano showed him and his generation:

Que la poesía no era una cosa seca, profesional, abstracta, sino que estaba íntimamente ligada al hecho poético, es decir: que el hecho poético era la razón de ser de la poesía, que en María Zambrano había una razón poética.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear, I suggest, that *razón poética* is an idea which not only provides internal coherence to Zambrano's writings but also opens out in a number of different and challenging directions in modern literature and philosophy.

---

<sup>2</sup> Paz, 'Pensamiento y poesía', *ABC literario*, 26 November 1988, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Fuentes, 'Faro de una generación', *ABC literario*, 26 November 1988, p. 9.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### § I. Primary sources

#### a. Books

*Claros del bosque.* (1977). Reprint. Barcelona. Seix Barral. 1986.

*De la Aurora.* Madrid. Turner. 1986.

*Delirio y destino: Los veinte años de una española.* Madrid. Mondadori. 1989.

*El hombre y lo divino.* (1955). Reissue. Madrid. Siruela. 1991.

*El pensamiento vivo de Séneca: Presentación y antología.* (1944). Reissue. Madrid. Catédra. 1987.

*El sueño creador.* (1965). Reissue. Madrid. Turner. 1986.

*España, sueño y verdad.* (1965). Reprint. Barcelona. Edhasa. 1982.

*Filosofía y poesía.* (1939). Reissue. Mexico. Fondo de Cultura Económica. 1987.

*Hacia un saber el alma.* (1950). Reissue. Madrid. Alianza. 1987.

*La agonía de Europa.* (1945). Reissue. Madrid. Mondadori. 1988.

*La confesión: género literario.* (1943). Reissue. Madrid. Mondadori. 1988.

*La España de Galdós.* Madrid. Taurus. 1960.

*La razón en la sombra: Antología del pensamiento de María Zambrano.*  
Edited Jesús Moreno Sanz. Madrid. Siruela. 1993.

*La tumba de Antígona.* (1967). Reissue. Mondadori. 1988.

*Los bienaventurados.* Madrid. Siruela. 1990.

*Los sueños y el tiempo.* Madrid. Siruela. 1992.

*Notas de un método.* Madrid. Mondadori. 1989.

*Nuevo liberalismo.* Madrid. Morata. 1930.

*Obras reunidas: Primera entrega.* Madrid. Aguilar. 1971.

*Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española.* Mexico. La Casa de España. 1939.

*Persona y democracia.* (1958). Reissue. *Pensamiento crítico*, 34. Barcelona.  
Anthropos. 1988.

*Senderos.* Memoria Rota, 8. Barcelona. Anthropos. 1986.

'Los intelectuales en el drama de España', (1937), in *Senderos.* Memoria  
Rota, 8. Barcelona. Anthropos. 1986, pp. 27-51.

#### **b. Articles**

'«La guerra» de Antonio Machado', (1937), in *Senderos*, pp. 60-70.

'Diótima de Mantinea', *Litoral*, 121-123 (1983), 87-119.

'Eloísa o la existencia de la mujer', *Sur*, 124 (February, 1945), pp. 35-58.

- 'Hacia un saber sobre el alma', (1934), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp. 19-30.
- 'Hora de España XXIII, por María Zambrano', *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70/71 (March-April 1987) 129-36.
- 'La «Guía», forma de pensamiento', (1943), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp. 59-81.
- 'La destrucción de la Filosofía en Nietzsche', (1945), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp. 130-40.
- 'La metáfora del corazón: fragmento', (1944), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp. 49-58.
- 'La religión poética de Unamuno', in *España, sueño y verdad*, pp. 129-60.
- 'Miguel de Molinos, reaparecido', *Ínsula*, 338 (1975), 3-4.
- 'Ortega y Gasset universitario', *El Sol*, 8 March 1936, p. 7.
- 'Ortega y Gasset', (1949), in *España, sueño y verdad*, pp. 93-128.
- 'Poema y sistema', (1944), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp.43-48.
- 'Por qué se escribe', (1934), in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, pp. 31-38.
- 'Rosa', *Un ángel más* 3-4 (1988), 12.
- 'San Juan de la Cruz: De la noche oscura a la más clara mística', (1939), in *Senderos*, pp. 184-98.
- 'Sobre la iniciación: conversación con Antonio Colinas', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo) 38 (1986) p. 2-9.

§ II. Secondary sources

- ABELLÁN, José Luis. *El exilio español de 1939*. 6 vols. Madrid. Taurus. 1976. Volume III.
- ABELLÁN, José Luis. *Filosofía española en América (1939-1966)*. Madrid. Guadarrama. 1967.
- ABELLÁN, José Luis. *Panorama de la filosofía española actual: Una situación escandalosa*. Madrid. Espasa-Calpe. 1978.
- Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre la Vida y Obra de María Zambrano (Vélez-Málaga, 23-26 de abril de 1990)*, edited J.F. Ortega Muñoz. Philosophica, 4. Málaga. Universidad de Málaga. 1991.
- AMORÓS, Amparo. 'La metáfora del corazón en la obra de María Zambrano', *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, edited Fernando Savater & others. Lérida. Grupo Cultural Zero Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada. 1983, pp. 39-73.
- ANONYMOUS. *Ofrenda a María Zambrano*, Pueblo, (Madrid), 13 June 1981.
- ANONYMOUS. 'Editorial', *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70/71 (March-April, 1987) 37-60.
- ANONYMOUS. 'Opinión', *ABC*, 7 February 1991, p. 19.
- ARANGUREN, José Luis. 'Filosofía y poesía', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 111-21.
- ARANGUREN, José Luis. 'Los sueños de María Zambrano', *Revista de Occidente*, 35 (1966), 207-12.
- BARTHES, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero*. London. Cape. 1967.
- CASTILLO, Julia. 'La tumba de Antígona: tragedia y misericordia', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 105-10.

- CHACEL, Rosa. 'Carta inédita de María Zambrano a Rosa Chacel', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 17.
- CHACEL, Rosa. 'Pentagrama', in her *Los títulos*. Barcelona. Edhasa. 1981, pp. 73-77.
- CHACEL, Rosa. 'Respuesta a Ortega: la novela no escrita,' *Sur* (July-August 1956), 97-119.
- CHACEL, Rosa. 'Rosa mística', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (1984), 5-9.
- CHACEL, Rosa. 'Una música oscura, temblorosa', in her *A la orilla de un pozo*. Valencia. Pre-textos. 1985, p. 21.
- CIOCCHINI, Héctor. 'La santa realidad sin nombre: En torno a *Claros del bosque* de María Zambrano', *Ínsula*, 388 (March 1979), 3.
- CIORAN, E.M. *The Temptation to Exist*. London. Quartet Books. 1987.
- CIORAN, E.M. 'María Zambrano: Una presencia decisiva', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 8 (1981), 23.
- CIXOUS, Hélène. *The Newly Born Woman*. Translated Betsy Wing. Minneapolis. University of Minneapolis Press. 1986.
- CIXOUS, Hélène. 'Conversations', in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, edited Susan Sellers. Milton Keynes. Open University Press. 1988, pp. 141-54.
- CIXOUS, Hélène. 'Extreme Fidelity', in *Writing Differences: Readings from The Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, edited Susan Sellers. Milton Keynes. Open University Press. 1988, pp. 9-36.
- CIXOUS, Hélène. 'Hélène Cixous', translated Keith & Paula Cohen, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, edited Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron. Hemel Hempstead. Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1981, pp. 245-64.

- CIXOUS, Hélène. 'Sorties', translated Ann Liddle, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, edited Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Hemel Hempstead. Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1981, pp. 90-98.
- COLINAS, Antonio. 'La esencia de un mensaje', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 102-104.
- CONLEY, Verena Andermatt. 'An Exchange with Hélène Cixous', in *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*. Lincoln, Na and London. University of Nebraska Press. 1984, pp. 129-61.
- CURRY, Walter Clyde. *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*. London. George Allen & Unwin. 1960.
- DEROMANT, Françoise. 'Metaphorical Thinking and Poetic Writing in Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous', in *The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching*, edited Helen Wilcox & others. New York. St. Martins Press. 1990, pp. 114-25.
- ELIADE, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Translated Willard R. Trask. New York. Pantheon Books. 1954.
- FERRATER MORA, José. *Diccionario de Filosofía*. 4 vols. Madrid. Alianza. 1979. Volume IV.
- FISCHER, Ernst. *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*. Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1963.
- FRAILE, Guillermo. *Historia de la filosofía española desde la Ilustración*. Edited T. Urdániz. Madrid. Editorial Católica. 1972.
- FRYE, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1990.
- FUENTES, Carlos. *Geografía de la novela*. Madrid. Alfaguara. 1993.
- FUENTES, Carlos. 'Faro de una generación', *ABC literario*, 26 November

1988, p. 9.

GATENS, Moira. *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality*. Cambridge. Polity Press. 1991.

GIL DE BIEDMA, Jaime. 'Piazza del Popolo', in his *Las personas del verbo*, Barcelona. Seix Barral. 1982. 6th edn. Barcelona. Seix Barral. 1992, pp. 70-71.

GREEN, Otis H. *Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian Mind in Literature from El Cid to Calderón*. 4 vols. Madison. Wisconsin University Press. 1963-66. Volume II.

GUILLÉN, Jorge. *Lenguaje y poesía: algunos casos españoles*. Madrid. Alianza. 1969.

GUY, Alain. *Los filósofos españoles de ayer y de hoy: Épocas y autores*. Translated Luis Echávarri. Buenos Aires. Losada. 1966.

HAPPOLD, F. C. *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*. London. Penguin. 1990.

HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Hölderlin y la esencia de la poesía*. Edited & translated Juan David García Bacca. *Pensamiento crítico*, 46. Barcelona. Anthropos. 1944, reprint 1989.

HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated Albert Hofstadter. New York. Harper Colophon Books. Harper Row. 1971.

*Homenaje a María Zambrano*, edited Blas Matamoro & others, *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November, 1984).

*Homenaje a María Zambrano*, *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 8 (1981).

HOWE, Elizabeth Teresa. *Mystical Imagery: Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz*. New York. Peter Lang. 1988.

IRIGARAY, Luce. *Spéculum de l'autre femme*. Paris. Minuit. 1974.

- JOHNSON, Barbara. *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. Baltimore & London. Johns Hopkins University Press. 1980.
- JONES, Ann Rosalind. 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'Écriture féminine*', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, edited Elaine Showalter. London. Virago. 1986, pp. 361-77.
- JUAN DE LA CRUZ, San . *Vida y obras de San Juan de la Cruz*. Edited Jesús de Crisógono & others. 6th edn. Madrid. Biblioteca de autores cristianos. 1972.
- KOLODNY, Annette. 'Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, edited Elaine Showalter. London. Virago. 1986, pp. 144-67.
- KRISTEVA, Julia. 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited Toril Moi. Oxford. Blackwell. 1986, pp. 34-62.
- LAREDO, Bernardino. 'Subida del Monte Sión', in *Místicos franciscanos*. Madrid. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos. B.A.C. 1965, ii. 25-442.
- LEZAMA LIMA, José. 'Carta a María Zambrano', *La Gaceta del F.C.E.* (Mexico), 186 (1986), 12.
- LEZAMA LIMA, José. 'La forma de una ausencia', *Los Cuadernos del Norte* (Oviedo), 8 (1981), 4-5.
- LLOYD, Genevieve. *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*. Methuen. London. 1984.
- MAILLARD, Chantal. *La creación por la metáfora: Introducción a la razón-poética*. Pensamiento crítico, 67. Barcelona. Anthropos. 1992.
- María Zambrano: Papeles para una poética del ser*, Litoral (Torremolinos-

Málaga), 124-126 (1983).

*María Zambrano: Pensadora de la Aurora*, Edited Ángel Nogueira Dobarro & others, *Anthropos: Revista de documentación científica de la cultura*, 70/71 (March-April 1987).

MARITAIN, Jacques. *The Range of Reason*. London. Geoffrey Bles. 1953.

MARÍAS, Julián. *Biografía de la Filosofía*. 3rd edn. Madrid. Revista de Occidente. 1958.

MATAMORO, Blas. 'El arrabal de los santos', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (1984), 66-71.

MOI, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Edited Terence Hawkes. New Accents. London. Routledge. 1990.

MOLINOS, Miguel de. *Guía espiritual*. Edited José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras. Madrid. Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, Fundación Universitaria Española. 1976.

MOLINOS, Miguel de. *Guía espiritual: Defensa de la contemplación*. Edited José Ángel Valente. Barcelona. Barral. 1974.

MORENO SANZ, Jesús. 'Introducción', *La razón en la sombra: Antología del pensamiento de María Zambrano*, Madrid. Siruela. 1993, pp. xi-xxxvii.

MORENO SANZ, Jesús. 'La visión segunda: El método en María Zambrano y la tradición filosófica y gnóstica en Occidente', in *María Zambrano: Premio de literatura en lengua castellana 'Miguel de Cervantes' 1988*, Barcelona. Anthropos. 1989, pp. 89-125.

MORENO SANZ, Jesús. 'Las fórmulas del corazón', in *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*, pp. 16-38.

MORENO SANZ, Jesús. 'María Zambrano: Del punto oscuro al centro creador', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 9-10.

- MORENO SANZ, Jesús. 'Sub quadam aeternitatis specie', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November 1984), 32-54.
- MORENO, Jesús & others. 'María Zambrano: Del punto oscuro *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), pp. 2-28.
- MURDOCH, Iris. 'Philosophy and Literature', in *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy*. Edited Bryan Magee. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1982, pp. 229-50.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*. Translated Shaun Whiteside. London. Penguin. 1993.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. 'The Greek Woman', *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited O. Ley, translated M. A. Mügge. 18 vols. London. T. N. Foulis. 1911. Volume II.
- NORRIS, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London. Routledge. 1988.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando (ed.). *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*. Málaga. Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Vélez-Málaga & Universidad de Málaga. 1982.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando. 'La confesión, género literario y método en filosofía', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 111-53.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando. 'La crisis de Europa en el pensamiento de María Zambrano', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 245-83.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando. 'La superación del racionalismo en la filosofía de María Zambrano', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 53-99.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando. 'Los intelectuales en el drama de

- España según María Zambrano', *Litoral* (Torremolinos-Málaga), 124-126 (1983), 130-58.
- ORTEGA MUÑOZ, Juan Fernando. 'María Zambrano, al filo de la aurora', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 28.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, José. 'Meditaciones del Quijote' in *Obras completas*, 12 vols. Madrid. Alianza & Revista de Occidente. 1983. I, pp. 309-400.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, José. 'Ni vitalismo ni racionalismo', in *Obras completas*. 12 vols. Madrid. Alianza & Revista de Occidente. 1983, III, pp. 270-80.
- PAZ, Octavio. *Signos en rotación*. Buenos Aires. Sur. 1965.
- PAZ, Octavio. 'Poesía y pensamiento', *ABC literario*, 26 November 1988, p. 7.
- PÉREZ, Janet. *Contemporary Women Writers of Spain*. TWAS, 798. Boston. Twayne. 1988.
- RUBIO, Fanny. 'La palabra que va de vuelo', *Litoral*, 124-126 (1982), 162-64.
- SALINAS, Pedro. *Jorge Manrique o tradición y originalidad*. Buenos Aires. Sudamericana. 1962.
- SAVATER, Fernando (ed.). *Papeles de Almagro: El pensamiento de María Zambrano*. Edited Fernando Savater and others. Lérida. Grupo Cultural Zero Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada. 1983.
- SAVATER, Fernando, '«Los Guernicas» que no vuelven', *El País*, 28 January 1981, p. 9.
- SAVATER, Fernando. 'En presencia de la voz de María Zambrano', in *María Zambrano: Premio Miguel de Cervantes*, edited Javier Ruiz. Madrid. Ministerio de Cultura. 1989, pp. 17-18.
- SAVATER, Fernando. 'Gran pesar entre los intelectuales ante la muerte de

- Zambrano', *El Independiente*, 7 February 1991, p. 44.
- SAVATER, Fernando. 'Los intelectuales: Razón, pasión y traición', *Quimera*, 100 (1990), 28-31.
- SEMPRÚN, Jorge. 'María Zambrano: Premio de Cervantes', *Diario 16*, 25 April 1989, p. 33.
- SHOWALTER, Elaine. 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, edited Elaine Showalter. London. Virago. 1986, pp. 243-70.
- SILES, Jaime. *ABC literario*, 9 October 1992, p. 14.
- SOBEJANO, Gonzalo. *Nietzsche en España*. Estudios y ensayos, 102. Madrid. Gredos. 1967.
- SONTAG, Susan. 'Introduction' to E. M. Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*. London. Quartet Books. 1987, pp. 7-29.
- TERESA DE JESÚS, Santa. *Obras completas*. Edited E. de la Madre de Dios & others. 2nd edn. B.A.C, 212. Madrid. Biblioteca de autores cristianos. 1967.
- THOMPSON, Colin. *The Poet and the Mystic: A Study of the «Cántico Espiritual» of San Juan de la Cruz*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1977.
- UGALDE, José Antonio, 'Modos de subjetivación en María Zambrano: no ser apenas', *Ínsula*, 509 (May 1989), 11-12.
- ULLÁN, José Miguel. 'Sueño y verdad del corazón', in *María Zambrano: Premio Miguel de Cervantes*, edited Javier Ruiz. Madrid. Ministerio de Cultura. 1989, pp. 19-20.
- UNAMUNO, Miguel de. 'El sentimiento trágico de la vida' in *Obras completas*. Edited Manuel García Blanco, 16 vols. Madrid. Afrodisio Aguado 1958. Volume XVI.

- UNDERHILL, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. London. Metheun. 1911.
- VALENTE, José Ángel. 'Conocimiento y comunicación', in *Palabras de la tribu*. Madrid. Siglo XXI de España. 1971.
- VALENTE, José Ángel. 'Del conocimiento pasivo o saber de quietud', in *María Zambrano o la metafísica recuperada*, pp. 101-10.
- VALENTE, José Ángel. 'El sueño creador', in *Palabras de la tribu*. Madrid. Siglo XXI de España. 1971.
- VALENTE, José Ángel. 'Juan de la Cruz, el humilde sin sentido', in *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red precedido de La piedra y el centro*. Marginales, 194. Barcelona. Tusquets. 1991, pp. 71-75.
- VALENTE, José Ángel. 'Palabra', in his *Punto cero: Poesía 1953-1979*, Barcelona. Seix Barral. 1980, p. 464.
- VITIER, Cintier. 'Lecciones de María Zambrano', *Litoral*, 124-126 (1982), 195-96.
- WOOLF, Virginia. *The Granite and Rainbow*. 2nd edn. London. Hogarth Press. 1960.
- ZARDOYA, Concha. 'María Zambrano en Hora de España', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 413 (November 1984), pp. 81-94.

