

JOSÉ LUIS FERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO. *El ídolo y el vacío: Octavio Paz y las transformaciones de lo divino*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2016. 286 pp.

Octavio Paz was an atheist, yet he was deeply preoccupied with the question of the sacred. Indeed, he often argued that poetry was the highest human endeavor precisely because it provided an access to the realm of the sacred that was more profound and meaningful than the access provided by religion. In short, poetry for Paz offered a religious experience for a non-religious age. Given the centrality of this preoccupation to Paz's career, a book devoted entirely to the topic of what José Luis Fernández Castillo calls "las transformaciones de lo divino" in Paz constitutes a welcome addition to the critical bibliography on the Mexican poet's work.

One thing Fernández Castillo cannot be taxed with is failing to provide enough context for his study of Paz. He devotes half of the book to sketching the background to his reading of Paz's poetry. His point of departure is the idea that Western modernity is characterized by a "crisis de la divinidad," by which he means the collapse of the belief in God as the stable foundation of all human knowledge. He begins by exploring the theme of the death of God, and the implications of this event for the notions of truth and metaphysics, in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. In both, the destruction of what Fernández Castillo calls "el Dios ontoteológico" – that is God as the fixed and final cause of all things – opens the way to a genuinely free human creativity, especially as it expresses itself through poetic language. The author then moves on to a philosophical excursus on the relationship between language and religion. He posits two principles, both of which play a crucial role in the romantic and symbolist poetic traditions of which Paz is the inheritor. The first is the principle of "génesis," in which emphasis is placed on the creative power of language. The second principle – that of "alteridad" – draws attention to the impossibility of representing the realm of the divine. In the third and final introductory chapter, Fernández Castillo tracks responses to the crisis of divinity in the Western poetic tradition, focusing on romantic and post-romantic poets such as Novalis, Friedrich Hölderlin, Stéphane Mallarmé, Rainer Maria Rilke, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and Wallace Stevens. The responses are complex and varied, ranging from the celebration of the creative imagination or an emphasis on linguistic self-referentiality to the search for divinity in the human heart or in the concrete, sensuous world.

In the detailed discussion of Paz's poetry that occupies the second half of the book, the author pays attention to both continuity and change over the course of the Mexican poet's career. In the early work, God's absence results in an anguished sense of emptiness and contingency, but it also sets

the stage for a joyous immersion in the here and now. Later, in poems such as “Himno entre ruinas” (1949), the writer stands spellbound by the sheer presence of the world, and the idea of divinity is defined as “un estado de armonía instantánea de la realidad” (173). In Paz’s best-known poem, “Piedra de sol” (1957), paradise is located not in an otherworldly realm, but rather in poetic creativity itself, a force characterized by what the poet calls “vivacidad” (192). We are dealing not with a rejection of the idea of divinity, but with its redefinition as something that imbues life itself, especially the experience of erotic love, with a sacred energy. In his poems from the 1960s, most notably the highly experimental “Blanco” (1967), the crisis of divinity leads Paz, like Mallarmé, into an exploration of the limits of language. In this section of his book, Fernández Castillo also offers a well-informed account of the influence of Buddhist ideas about silence and the void on Paz’s poetry. In the last of Paz’s poems discussed in this volume, the autobiographical “Pasado en claro” (1974), Fernández Castillo observes a critique of the idea of God as absolute transcendence, and the exploration of an alternative view of divinity as manifested in “el desvanecerse de los nombres con relación a lo nombrado” (260). In short, as he matured as a poet, Paz became increasingly self-conscious about the limitations of language, but he retained throughout his life a sense of the power of poetry to capture the impalpable sense of the sacred that runs through the world.

Fernández Castillo is a deeply learned critic who writes clearly and forcefully about difficult topics. The reader might wonder whether it is necessary to provide so much background before commencing the discussion of Paz’s work. However, the author regularly harks back to the poets discussed earlier in the book to cast light on elements of Paz’s poetry; as a result our understanding of Paz, and of the tradition to which he belongs, is deepened and amplified. Fernández Castillo’s readings of Paz’s poems are generally enlightening, although one cannot help notice that the author often treats the poems as making statements about the world, about poetry, or about God. Perhaps some reflection on how this comports with the constant questioning in Paz – and in the book under review – of the referential dimension of language would have been helpful. Another aspect of this study that might have been developed further is the question of the political implications of Paz’s poetry. In the final paragraph of his book, Fernández Castillo suggests that Paz’s poems enact a form of resistance to “[el] abstraccionismo de los sistemas ideológico-teológicos y la amenaza de una ortodoxia aplanadora y totalitaria” (271). But since the author has previously mentioned this topic only in passing, the observation feels like an afterthought. How significant a feature is this of Paz’s poetry? Is the anti-totalitarian stance typical of the poetic tradition

Paz belongs to? How does it relate to the crisis of divinity? It is a pity that the author has chosen not to explore these questions.

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MARÍA SOLEDAD FERNÁNDEZ UTRERA. *Buñuel en Toledo: arte público, acción cultural y vanguardia*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2016. 166 pp.

*Buñuel en Toledo* adds to a growing body of work on the cultural history of walking, epitomised by Rachel Solnit's excellent *A History of Walking* (2001). This trend owes a theoretical debt to Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau that is fully acknowledged here. Agustín Sánchez Vidal co-wrote *La mesa del rey Salomón* (Saura, 2001), based on these trips to Toledo in the 1920s and 30s, and Fernández Utrera uses this film as a point of departure to consider: whether these trips might be viewed as public art; what they reveal about Buñuel's ideology; and what relevance they have to his films. Other sources are carefully referenced: a paper by Miguel Molina Alarcón that includes the Toledo visits in discussion of Spanish performance and the catalogue of an exhibition on the *Orden de Toledo* (2005). This is a timely book, given the lack of attention paid to this aspect of Buñuel's life, and the growing importance of research on public art and geographic space as a physical, social and discursive text to be read and written.

From the scant source material available, Fernández Utrera places these visits between 1923-25, continuing more sporadically up to the beginning of the Civil War. Buñuel says he founded the parodic "Orden de Toledo" in 1923, with himself as Gran Maestro/Condestable, and friends as *Caballeros de la Orden* or more lowly *Escuderos*. This carnivalesque hierarchy was based on how much alcohol could be consumed and who could stay up all night. Despite the lack of source material, Fernández Utrera provides extremely useful information bringing these walks to life and establishing the importance of the location: as a conservative military training ground; as an icon of the liberal cultural and intellectual tradition associated with Cervantes, El Greco, Bécquer, and the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*; and as a location with a lively working class culture and tradition. Chapter One traces the town's historical association with the liberal intellectual and cultural tradition and examines a Dalí painting, *Sueños noctámbulos* (1922), for evidence of attitudes to the individual and collective psyche. Chapter Two focuses on a confrontation, presumed to have occurred in 1932, with cadets from the military academy over a