

THESIS

**RHYTHM AND SILENCE: RUBÉN DARÍO'S SHAMANIST POETICS**

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RMA Comparative Literary Studies

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*To Anaís Pérez Rodríguez,*

*my muse; my Eurydice.*

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on an unexplored facet of the so-called “renewal of poetry” of the Hispanic *fin de siècle* by establishing Rubén Darío’s “shamanist poetics”. In the face of the aesthetic and philosophical decline of the Spanish language, the Nicaraguan bard renewed poetry. His endeavor consisted of a radical return to the mythical sources of his art, a rethinking and a re-experiencing of its most elemental virtues. In Darío’s poetic context, the “stress-accent” became an almost empty abstraction, signifying nothing in itself (Jitrik). As concept, it merely alluded to a phonetic feature of words. However, as this thesis argues, the “poetic-shamanist” (rhythmic) revolution of the stress-accent as it becomes the “soul” of language, “revived” the latter.

In order to demonstrate Darío’s shamanist poetics, I will introduce his figure as poet as well as the contexts that led him to become a revolutionary of language (chapter one). Second, I will expose the belief systems that led Darío to come into contact with the shamanist tradition. Then, I will introduce shamanism itself as well as the poet’s appropriation of it (chapter two). Finally, this thesis aims to show evidence of Darío’s own shamanist poetics by close-reading some of his poems. This analysis elucidates how Darío, as a shaman-poet, displays his own “technique of ecstasy” (chapter three). As analytical tool, I apply Martin Heidegger’s thinking, who assists me to clarify how such technique works. By means of the ecstatic experience, the shaman-poet performs his task as “healer” of the soul, that is, as language healer or language renovator.

In the introductory section, I establish Darío’s “shamanist poetics” on the grounds of George Steiner’s idea of “language revolution”. Then, I underscore the relevance of this thesis by alluding to the shaman as a figure able to cover the vacuum of knowledge in the

Darian Hispanic scholarship on the metaphysical and existential dimensions of Darío's poetry. Third, I justify the use of Heidegger as analytical tool.

## Introduction

In his contribution to “¿Está en crisis la poesía?” (Is Poetry in Crisis?), Jorge Fernández Granados formulated an interesting thought on language and poetry: “[f]or a language, poetry is its great laboratory. Atomic fusions, hybrid species, new materials with unknown properties or monstrous clones can emerge from it”, “[I]t is a zone, within language, of reinvention and therefore of instability” (n.p.). The idea of poetry as the laboratory of language, as a powerful center where, in addition to life, death can be engendered—even that of language itself—, persuaded me to delve into the lab’s “experimentation methods”.

At this point, I recurred to Rubén Darío, who is widely remembered for having led, during the *fin de siècle* (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), the most profound and enduring “reinvention” of Spanish. Together with the poets of *modernismo* (modernism), Darío injected beauty and life into language by transforming the poetic form and sensitivity. Although Darío’s renewal endeavor has extensively been studied by scholarship, and the aspects of his figure and poetics that had remained obscure were already covered—namely his engagement with spiritism, the occult, and esoteric doctrines— by Erika Lorentz (1960), Raymond Skyrme (1975), and Caty Login Jrade (1983), there is still an unknown aspect that more recently Alberto Acereda (2004) just started to investigate: the “metaphysical and existential dimensions” of his work (n.p). By exploring this incipient topic in Darío, Acereda is counteracting the generalized idea among Hispanic scholars that “there was little or nothing left to say about Darío”, a belief that has left Darío “neglected and not studied” (312-313). In view of this, this thesis aims to exploit Acereda’s mine by establishing Darío’s “shamanist poetics”. In this way, I aim to contribute to develop the poet’s philosophical facet. Although the presence of the shamanist tradition in the Darian *oeuvre* is an aspect to

date unexplored, I argue that Darío not only appropriated it, but also turned it into the fundamental “method” of aesthetic and philosophical experimentation for the reinvention of the Spanish language, a reinvention which I will now explain by the term “language revolution”.

## Language Revolution

Thanks to George Steiner’s notion of “language revolution”, from *Extraterritorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (1971), I came to understand that shamanism was Darío’s principal method of language renewal. Steiner’s idea allowed me not only to recognize this, but also to situate Darío’s literary movement (*modernismo*) as part of the language transformations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Steiner, starting in the 1890s, a “language revolution” took place in all areas of knowledge throughout the Western world, extending itself until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (9). This was a continuous transformation of language after new attempts —philosophical, psychological, poetic— sought to reestablish a “semantic center” in view of the “crisis of moral and values” that preceded and followed the First World War (ibid). Then, I situate *modernismo* among the poetic and philosophical attempts which, in both Spain and Hispanic-America, counteracted the crisis of Spanish. But most importantly, the notion of language revolution led me to consider shamanism as Darío’s ultimate aesthetic and philosophical source of poetic experimentation. As Steiner points out, the language revolution was characterized by a return journey to the sources of language and meaning. It was a “radical return —a renovation which [was] at the same time a re-experiencing— of the image of the human person as uniquely related to the act of speech, to the Logos” (ibid.). In this light, I hold that Darío did not stay in the esoteric source (the Orphic-Pythagoreanism), where the

examinations carried out by Lorentz, Skyrme and Jade did, but reached its shamanic basis. These authors have demonstrated that music was Darío's poetic ideal by mainly focusing on his Pythagorean instruction, which would in principle be the first source of his language revolution. According to this vision, music and rhythm are the destinations, the goals, of his return journey. In this way, the poet would have musically re-experienced himself as a linguistic being. However, the esoteric ideal, seen from its shamanist root, is not music but "silence". Therefore, my thesis defends silence as the primordial source of Darío's language revolution while upholding the fundamental role of shamanism in his poetics. Following the shamanist interpretation, music is not the poetic goal but the means to reach the goal: silence. This research aims to reveal this shift of perspective as well as that of Darío's vision as poet.

### The Shaman and the Thinker-Poet

In 2016, the writer Sergio Ramírez —winner of the Cervantes prize and one of the most prominent scholars studying Rubén Darío's work— regretted the vacuum of knowledge of what he called the "deep Darío". In an interview held in Nicaragua as a commemoration of the centenary of the poet's death, Ramírez differentiated two different facets of Darío: on the one hand, the deep poet, and on the other hand, the musician based on rhythm and rhyme. As stated by Ramírez, the former has always been overshadowed by the latter. The deep Darío entails a barely known side, one "that is always reflecting on the mystery of life, the uncertainty of the human condition in the face of death, the cosmos". Then, Ramírez opined: "I believe that we need to know more about the deep Darío because he is who is linked to the poet's immortality" (1:02-3:07). These words frame the ongoing debate around Darío's figure and legacy, one that just started to discuss not only why the

so-called founder of the literary modernism in Spanish is scarcely known beyond the Hispanophone sphere, but also why his work and image are not properly appreciated even in the Hispanic context. Ramírez blames the excessive acclamation of the musical Darío for this, arguing that the poet's legacy lies dormant, on the contrary, in the philosophical characteristics of his poetry.

I have pointed out that this thesis aims to develop Darío's philosophical facet. This implies exploring the "deep Darío", his existential and metaphysical dimensions (Acereda). However, by exploring these dimensions in the light of his shamanist poetics, it turns out that the deep Darío and the musician are not conflicted, only that criticism has listened to the latter uncritically, often considering it inessential. As a result, it has in turn overlooked the musicality of the former. Darío's shamanist poetics will show that the poet attempted to make his "thought" musical as much as he tried to make his music "thoughtful". This feature of his work is highlighted by the figure of the shaman.

Mainly through the work of Mircea Eliade (1951) and Robert McGahey (1994), I underscore the figure of the shaman, noticing that one of his fundamental aspects is his being "seer". The shaman is the enlightened personage of the tribe, displaying his abilities to divine the god's desires and to grasp the secrets of nature through his knowledge, experience, and extraordinary intuition. He is, indeed, the archaic figure of the "thinker", who after Plato's rational metaphysics came to be known as "philosopher". In Darío's shamanist poetics, the shaman's seer character is transformed into "thinker" nature, provided that Darío is not a "metaphysician" as such, nor does he belong to a specific philosophical school. Yet, his special intuition leads him to discover metaphysical mysteries ("divinations") through alternative "methods". Here is where the other fundamental aspect of the shaman is brought to light. This is his being "musician", among

other possible characterizations. The shaman is also an “artist” in his own way. The reason is that he needs to convey the said mysteries to the tribe somehow. In this sense, he must “perform” his shamanic role and this implies some sort of “creation”. In Darío’s case, the musician is turned into poet. Nevertheless, the shaman needs to harmonize seer and musician in order to bring to light an even more fundamental aspect of his being: the “healer”. We will see that regarding Darío, he strives to conciliate both his thought and music in order to accomplish his task as healer, that is, as language renovator or language harmonizer.

### Martin Heidegger and the Shaman’s Ecstasy Techniques

In the third chapter, this thesis provides evidence of Darío’s shamanist poetics by analyzing some of his poems. In order to accomplish his healing task, the old shaman applies a number of ecstasy techniques. These allow him to travel to the spiritual worlds in search of an ill soul. As a shaman-poet, Darío applies his own techniques of ecstasy. He takes advantage of certain moods and feelings that, as human being, permits him to experience the world in either its fullness or emptiness. He thus considers these moments as the more propitious for poetic creation and inspiration. Those moods can be states of euphoria, boredom, wonder or existential despair. This thesis focuses on the latter two. Provided that the German thinker Martin Heidegger vindicated the said moods in such a way that, as in the case of “anxiety”, they became the ways in which the “truth of Being” could be experienced, I will apply his thought as analytical lens for Darío’s ecstasy technique. Specifically, the Heideggerian insight into “anxiety”, “nothingness” and “Being”. These interrelated issues will help me to elucidate Darío’s ecstatic experience in its three stages respectively: existential despair, silence, and wonder-rhythm.

In view of the limitations of metaphysics to reveal the “truth of Being” —the answer of why being is—, Heidegger explored the poetic-thinking of the Presocratics and Hölderlin. They shaped his idea that Being was itself without metaphysical ground. The original ground of Being, its truth, was to be “experienced” and not conceptualized in the early Greek “primordial unity of *physis*, *logos*, *arche* and *aition*” (ibid.). In his *Elucidations*, Heidegger himself alludes to this unity by quoting a draft of a preface of Hölderlin ’s *Hyperion*, which called it “the One infinite whole” (157). In addition to appearing in the Presocratic unity, for Heidegger, this One infinite, Being itself, could also be experienced in the nothing, which is an event that anxiety would incite. Then, when the human being, which he called *Dasein*, recognizes that there is Being in spite of experiencing nothingness in anxiety, he overcomes the latter and feels wonder. In his 1934 postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger expressed: “Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: *that* beings *are*” (234 original emphasis).<sup>1</sup> The German philosopher is convinced that the question which awed Leibniz in the early 18th century “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is the source of the wonder which keeps philosophy enraptured: that “being” is. So it is through wonder, Heidegger believed, that Being reveals its truth in the paradoxical form of the experience of the very mystery of its ground. For this reason, he considers that Being is *aletheia*, a Greek term which he interpreted as expressive of the concealment-unconcealment interplay of Being. We will see that in Darío’s shamanist poetics, the healing treatment of language, which is the “language revolution” as such, is no other than awakening wonder poetically after having experienced the mystery of language’s ground:

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<sup>1</sup> Yet, many of Heidegger’s ideas have been strongly contested, specially by Jacques Derrida. For instance, the Heideggerian idea that only the human being “dies” in strict sense thanks to his understanding of being.

silence, during existential despair. In chapter one, I begin by introducing the figure of Darío as a poet and the historical and poetical contexts before which he and *modernismo* directed the language revolution.

## Chapter One

### Rubén Darío as Poet, his Historical and Poetic Context

#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter exposes the figure of Rubén Darío as an important poet in the long history of Hispanic poetry. His appearance in the Hispanic *fin de siècle* initiated the revolutionary literary movement known as *modernismo*, whose particular aesthetic conception and worldview entailed a before and after in Hispanic letters. In the first sections (1.2-1.4), I will introduce Darío as a poet, describe the characteristics of *Modernismo*, and review his three most important books of poetry. At the same time, Darío's contributions cannot be understood without providing a general explanation of the so-called *fin de siècle*. This term alludes to the historical crises that took place worldwide during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These circumstances powerfully influenced Darío's engagement with syncretism, esotericism and, as this thesis argues, shamanism. The *fin de siècle* is briefly approached in the section 1.5. Then, I will address what I have called the "death of rhythm". This expression manifests the conditions of Spanish and of Darío's poetic context (section 1.6). The death of rhythm would have triggered the poet's idea of revolutionizing language through shamanism. Finally, I will provide the final remarks in a concluding section (1.7).

#### 1.2 Rubén Darío as Poet

Born in a humble Nicaraguan town, Metapa (nowadays called City of Darío) in 1867, Félix Rubén García Sarmiento, known as Rubén Darío, was the figure of the longest-lasting influence of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hispanic poetry. Besides a

poet, he was a storyteller, diplomat and journalist. In *The Siren and the Seashell*, Octavio Paz considers that Darío was the cornerstone of the contemporary Hispanic poetic spirit, emphasizing in 1964 that he was an ineludible “point of reference”: “[t]o be like him or not: either way, Darío is present in the spirit of contemporary poets. He is the founder” (20). This is so because “Darío’s presence marks the end of an era, and his work is a bridge between two centuries” (Kirkpatrick 182). He is widely praised in the Hispanophone world for having led the literary movement known as *modernismo*. During the Hispanic *fin de siècle*, he and the *modernistas* carried out a “language revolution” such as had not been seen since the Siglos de Oro (Golden Age of Spanish literature) (1500-1681).<sup>2</sup> This revolution supposed a new beginning in the history of Castilian letters. Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) specifies that Darío’s movement relied on a profound renewal of not only the poetic form and sensitivity, but also of the “magic” of certain words. Borges calls him “the liberator”: “Darío renewed everything: matter, vocabulary, metric, the peculiar magic of certain words, the sensitivity of the poet and his readers. His work has not ended and will not end. Those of us who at times fought him, today understand that we continue his work. We call him the liberator” (qtd. in Ramírez n.p.).

In his 1905 prologue to his poetry book *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* (Songs of Life and Hope), Darío portrayed himself as a misunderstood poet, advocated for the “aristocracy of thought”, emphasized that his work was not “for the masses”, and manifested his “intense love for the absolute nature of beauty” (49). This vision of himself as an aesthete, aristocrat and misunderstood poet will prevail until the end of his life in 1916. As a poet,

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<sup>2</sup> The Golden Age was a period of great literary splendor in Spain. In this time frame, figures such as Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco de Quevedo, Luis de Góngora, and Calderón de la Barca, flourished. The exact starting and ending dates of the Golden Age have always been contended, but it is almost universally acknowledged that it lasted almost two centuries, encompassing the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. I took as the ending date the death of Calderón de la Barca in 1681.

Paz considered him “not only the richest and most ample of the Modernist poets”, but also “one of our great modern poets”, specifying that “[a]t times he makes one think of Poe; at other times, of Whitman” (29). Paz explains that he reminds Poe “in that portion of his work in which he scorns the world of the Americas and is preoccupied solely by an otherworldly music”, whereas he resembles Whitman for “his vitalist affirmation, his pantheism, and his belief that he was, in his own right, the bard of Latin America as Whitman was of Anglo-America” (ibid.). And yet, Darío seems to be better compared to Victor Hugo:

eloquence, abundance, and that continuous surprise, that unending flow, of rhyme.

Like the French poet’s, his inspiration was that of the cyclopean sculptor; his stanzas are blocks of animated matter, veined with sudden delicacies: the striation of lightning on the stone. And the rhythm, the continuous swing that makes the language one enormous aquatic mass (ibid. 30-31).

In effect, Darío recognizes that he adopted the French language and poetry as his principal models in order to renew the Spanish language. In his 1896 article “The Colors of My Standard” (Los Colores del Estandarte), he wrote: “[a]s I penetrated into certain secrets of harmony, of nuance, of suggestion that one finds in the language of France, I believed, I might discover those same secrets in Spanish, or apply them” (551). Paz points out that, specifically, the French symbolism had a deep impact on Darío. Among the French symbolist poets, Paul Verlaine was the one who Darío loved the most. Nevertheless, “his best poems have little resemblance to those of his model” (30). Whereas Verlaine was “a provincial Parisian”, Darío was a “Central American globetrotter”, a cosmopolite, of “superabundant health and energy”. “[H]is sun was stronger, his wine more generous...His poetry is virile: skeleton, heart, sex.” (ibid.). Darío himself confirms this observation by

confessing his hedonism: “In truth, I live on poetry. My dreams have a Solomonic magnificence. I love beauty, power, grace, money, luxury, kisses, and music. I am naught but a man of art. I am good for nothing else.” (CDE 550). In line with the poet, Greg Simon and Steven White explain that Darío was obsessed with matter and the sensual: with textures, energies, shapes, movements, bodies, structures, the touches, the tastes. These authors invoke some of his literary symbols as expressive of his fascination: “swans, stars, shells, the caps of the ocean waves, bulls, women, buildings, sand, wine, and fear” (69). As for the latter, fear, Simon and White consider that Darío “feared, most of all, that he would be forgotten” (ibid.). According to them, this is the reason why he carved his verse “into metric stone”. This in order to make a musical verse easier to memorize and thus leave its imprint in the reader’s mind.

However, Darío’s concern for the spiritual and the metaphysical was no less important. He confessed: “I believe in God, and I am attracted to mystery. I am befuddled by daydreams and death; I have read many philosophers yet I know not a word of philosophy. I do espouse a certain epicureanism, of my own sort; let the soul and body enjoy as much as possible on earth, and do everything possible to continue that enjoyment in the next life” (CDE 550). Furthermore, Paz defends that Darío’s preoccupation for questions of the soul was such that it led him to appropriate a “variety of spiritual influences” and philosophies (30). In view of his complex and conflicting poetic drives, the Mexican laurate depicts him as a “hippogriff”, a “hybrid”, “a Romantic who was also a Parnassian and a Symbolist. Parnassian: nostalgia for sculpture; Symbolist: prescience of analogy.” (ibid.). Yet, his contradictory nature was due to his longing for an original unity, to his “[n]ostalgia for cosmic oneness” (ibid. 29). As a poet, Darío always strived for non-dichotomous ways of experiencing the world, a difficulty which, according to Alberto

Acereda in *Modernism, Ruben Darío, and the Poetics of Despair*, made him a fundamentally existential and despaired poet (127). Indeed, Paz holds that “[t]hroughout his life Darío oscillated ‘between the cathedral and the pagan ruins,’ but his true religion was this blending of pantheism and doubt, exaltation and sadness, jubilation and fear. Poet of the astonishment of being” (36).

### 1.3 The Revolutionary Movement of *Modernismo*

Everything changed in the Hispanic poetic contexts at the close of the century as the movement known as *modernismo* (modernism), mainly led by emergent Hispanic-American poets, “opened windows and doors so that the fresh air of the times could revive the language” (Paz 9). This is the movement that Darío led and developed during his life. Its history is framed between 1880 and 1910 and its vital importance for the development of Spanish and Spanish-American literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century has widely been recognized. *Modernismo* influenced writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, or Federico García Lorca. The movement, which includes poets such as Leopoldo Lugones (Argentina), Amado Nervo (Mexico), and Juan Ramón Jiménez (Spain), not only renewed Spanish, but also opened its doors to the avant-garde movements. One of its fundamental contributions to Latin-American literature is having introduced “modernity” into its letters. Darío and the *modernistas* let literature to “participate in a historical plenitude that until then had been denied to Latin Americans” (ibid. 19-20 and 24).

While it is true that Darío was the undisputed central figure of *modernismo*, it is also true that its aesthetic and philosophical foundations had already been considered by Hispanic-American poets prior to him. The poetic dissolution of the soul-body dichotomy, which is the idea that secretly animates the movement, led the Mexican poet Manuel

Gutiérrez Nájera to write what for many is the first *modernista* (modernist) manifesto: the 1876 text “El Arte y el Materialismo” (Art and Materialism). There, he counteracts the positivistic criticism of the new poetic currents. He holds that “the objective of art is the achievement of the beautiful” and that “the beautiful cannot be found in matter, if it is not in relation to the spirit” (n.p.). Gutiérrez Nájera then discusses the concept of beauty by addressing his detractors: “the beautiful is the representation of the infinite in the finite”, and later he says: “the beautiful is not conceptualized, it is experienced” (ibid. n.p.). As it can be noted, bonding matter and spirit by means of beauty was already a concern before Darío’s irruption as the great poet of Latin-America. What made Darío stand out was that he embodied in his work, like no other Hispanic poet, the aesthetic and philosophical concerns of his time. But particularly, he took a leading role because he coined the term *modernismo* and postulated its aims as revolutionary movement. In his 1890 article on Ricardo Palma, Darío first used the said term: “[Palma] understands and admires the new spirit that today animates a small but triumphant and superb group of writers and poets of Spanish America: modernism”, and then he wrote a statement concerning its goals: “the elevation of literary criticism; argumentation...freedom and flight, the supremacy of beauty over the established poetics in prose, and novelty in poetry; to give color and life and air and flexibility to the old verse that suffers annihilation, constrained by iron molds.” (n.p.). On the one hand, we can say that generally the *modernista* poetics established the following basic principles: formal perfection, musicality, love for the synesthesia, taste for the exotic, and sensitivity for the ornamental as a persuasive device. The latter convinces the readers that “the poem is indeed a work of art”, offering them “an abundance of ‘sensations’, achieved through the evocations of plastic images, rhythmic combinations and erudite references” (Julián Pérez 36). And on the other hand, the new poetics bet for metaphysical

exploration (the interest in spiritism, the occult, the esoteric, the Pythagorean) and for exploring the nature of love, eroticism and disenchantment. All these features show the aesthetic, themes and moods of *modernismo*. But most importantly, they represent its fundamental urge for unity and syncretism as they are combined by the poet. It is perhaps the sonnet “Yo Persigo una Forma” (I Seek a Form), from Darío’s *Prosas Profanas* (1896) (Prophane Hymns), the poem which best encompasses the spirit of the movement:

Yo Persigo una Forma

Yo persigo una forma que no encuentra mi estilo,  
botón de pensamiento que busca ser la rosa;  
se anuncia con un beso que en mis labios se posa  
el abrazo imposible de la Venus de Milo.

Adornan verdes palmas el blanco peristilo;  
los astros me han predicho la visión de la Diosa;  
y en mi alma reposa la luz como reposa  
el ave de la luna sobre un lago tranquilo.

Y no hallo sino la palabra que huye,  
la iniciación melódica que de la flauta fluye  
y la barca del sueño que en el espacio boga;

y bajo la ventana de mi Bella-Durmiente,  
el sollozo continuo del chorro de la fuente  
y el cuello del gran cisne blanco que me interroga.

I Seek a Form . . .

I seek a form that my style cannot discover,  
a bud of thought that wants to be a rose;  
it is heralded by a kiss that is placed on my lips  
in the impossible embrace of the Venus de Milo.

The white peristyle is decorated with green palms;  
the stars have predicted that I will see the goddess;  
and the light reposes within my soul like the bird  
of the moon reposing on a tranquil lake.

And I only find the word that runs away,  
the melodious introduction that flows from the flute,  
the ship of dreams that rows through all space,

and, under the window of my sleeping beauty,  
the endless sigh from the waters of the fountain,  
and the neck of the great white swan, that questions me.

This poem takes as its motif the very impossibility to attain the so-longed unity (the perfect form the poet is looking for). In this case, the impossible unity (Venus's kiss) is that of the body (the word's verbal constraints) and the soul of language (the poet's ideas). This impossible reconciliation prevents the poet to express the essence of poetry. Yet, despite his anxiety, we can experience a delighting rhythm, the typical *modernista* ornamentation and iconography (the "swan", symbol of beauty). In view of the literary achievements of *modernismo*, we could describe it as a:

verbal reform, a syntax, a prosody, a vocabulary. Its poets enriched the language with imports from French and English; they made excessive use of archaisms and neologisms; and they were the first to employ the language of conversation... Their cosmopolitanism could include both the achievements of the French naturalistic novel and American linguistic forms (Paz 26-27)

However, these reforms and imports were not unanimously viewed favorably, especially in Spain. Among the Spanish writers and intellectuals who opposed the Hispanic-American movement are found Miguel de Unamuno, Leopoldo Alas Clarín, and Luis Cernuda. Some of them considered as failed his supposed attempts to earn a place within the Western canon and at some point all of them scorned Darío's indigenous origins. Darío's critics judged his attempts to achieve a "modern and cosmopolitan tongue" (ibid. 28) trite, bad taste. Likewise, they considered his increasing influence—which had begun to absorb the young Spanish poets—a fad condemned to disappear sooner than later. It is important to mention the language politics involved in Darío's movement. Although it would be a

mistake to call Darío anti-Spanish, he did wish to emancipate Hispanic-American poets from their dependence on the Castilian poetic tradition and its consecrated figures. Emancipation, however, in the sense of allowing the Hispanic-American literature to contribute in a significant and original way to the enrichment of Spanish. He wanted to make evident that there was a specific Hispanic-American literature from which the Peninsular poets could also learn and draw inspiration.

But the most important contribution of *modernismo* is, undoubtedly, its rhythmic revolution. Darío and his followers resurrected a tradition as old as all languages: the “rhythmic versification”. In Spanish, this type of verse-creation relies on language’s own accentual richness. It works by playfully employing the “stress-accent” in order to generate the basic rhythmic patterns —the regular beats— of music in poetry. *Modernismo* turned this poetic modality into something more than a determined “style of rhetoric”, as it had long been conceived in the Hispanophone world. Rather, it transformed it into “an aesthetic and, above all, a world vision, a way of feeling, of knowing, and of expressing it” (ibid. 28).

#### 1.4 Darío’s Three Fundamental Works

In “La Historia de mis Libros” (The Story of my Books) (2017), Darío provides insight into his three fundamental books of poetry. There he wrote: “*Azul...* symbolizes the beginning of my spring, *Prosas Profanas* my full spring, and *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* encompasses the essences and saps of my autumn” (15). In effect, Darío declared that *Azul...* (1888) (Blue...) laid the ground of the “mental renaissance of Spanish” (CDE 549). This book of poems and short-tales became the main reference for *Modernismo* while delivering a style hitherto unexplored in the Hispanic poetic tradition. “The origin of the

novelty”, Darío specifies in “The Story of My Books” (1913), “was my recent encounter with the French authors of the Parnassus...I applied their way of employing adjectives, certain syntactical habits, a verbal aristocracy, to my Spanish” (441-442). The new style was characterized by its beauty and musicality in both verse and prose. Moreover, *Azul...* implicitly posed, as this thesis believes, Darío’s Orphic-shamanist ideal, which includes the sacred role of the poet and the Orphic myth. The latter gives representation to this role through its Eurydice-Hades motif. Darío would have prepared himself to poetically become a shamanic hero in order to find the lost soul of his beloved Spanish language. As elucidated by the poet José Emilio Pacheco:

It is often forgotten that Darío published *Azul...*(1888) at the age of twenty-one and wrote it at the age of twenty. In order to reach the perfection of *Azul.....*in *Poesías Completas* (Complete Poetic Works) edited by Alfonso Méndez Plancarte and Antonio Oliver Belmás (Madrid, 1963), five hundred pages of earlier poems had to be written in all metric forms, all styles and all the vocabularies used by Castilian poetry since its origins until 1885. No other poet in any language is known to have had such (self) training. For Darío, ‘appropriation’ was a weak term. If talking about cannibalism is disturbing, one can recur to sexual imagery: the Spanish language was Darío’s true lover and to truly possess her, he allowed himself to be possessed by her (L).

Years later, in 1896, Darío published *Prosas Profanas*. As the poet himself pointed out, this poetic piece can be said to be his “full” spring. As Paz remarks, *Prosas* represent the “high noon”, the “ne plus ultra of the movement” (33). In effect, in them, the rhythmic innovations reached their splendor. If we accept Darío’s Orphic quest for the soul of language, we could assert that this book shows his finding in the form of the rhythmic

resurrection of Spanish, as if the soul manifested itself rhythmically. The book is preceded by a manifesto called “Palabras Liminares” (Liminal Words), where Darío takes a position regarding his poetic practice and context. Paz explains that his preface “caused a scandal: it seemed to be written in another language, and everything it said sounded like paradox” (ibid. 34). In “Palabras”, he defends the “freedom of art and its gratuitousness” and “the negation of all schools, not excluding his own” (ibid.). But above all, Darío expresses his poetics in musical-spiritual terms, suggesting that language is essentially musical (763). On the other hand, the desire for novelty, along with the preeminence of reverie and mystery over the state of vigil, govern each poem. Overall, Paz concludes, the book is “a prodigious repertory of rhythms, forms, colors, and sensations” (35). However, at the same time, one cannot “help but notice the powerful eroticism, the virile melancholy, the terror at the pulsing of the world and one’s own heart, the awareness of human solitude when facing the solitude of things” (ibid.).

Finally, in *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* (Songs of Life and Hope) (1905), Darío is not much concerned with the “magical mission of the poet”, which would correspond to the search of beauty, music, and rhythm. Rather, he would give voice to “the nature of his Orphic journey, that quest for a dark but ‘pure’ center.” (Strauss 10). In this book, a more mature work, the poet adopts a more intimate and confessional tone. It is as if he finally opened his heart beyond the rhythmic shell of his being. And yet, his cult for the word and his love for rhythmic innovation are still in force. New themes appear and his expression is more sober and profound. As confirmed by Paz:

Cantos de vida y esperanza is a confession and a declaration. Defense of (and elegy for) his youth: ‘Was youth mine?’; exaltation and critique of his aesthetic: ‘The ivory tower tempted my desire’; revelation of the conflict that divides him and

affirmation of his destiny as a poet: ‘Hunger for space and thirst for the heavens.’

The duality that manifests itself in *Prosas profanas* in aesthetic terms—the form that pursues and does not find its style—is now shown in its human truth: it is a schism of the soul (38)

### 1.5 Darío and the *Fin de siècle*

Alberto Acereda situates Darío within the context of the *fin de siècle*. The author holds that only against the background of the profound crises of this time frame: economic, social, and spiritual, does his “authentic literary value” appear (41). The poet experienced the *fin de siècle* in both Spanish-America and Europe, where he disembarked for a second time in 1898 to spend most of the remaining time of his life.<sup>3</sup> The expression *fin de siècle* refers to the years from 1880 to 1900 and it is characterized by a “spirit” generally described as pessimistic, cynic, and melancholic, and by the widespread belief that “civilization leads to decadence” (Meštrović 18). Still, as Charles Morice manifests, “the century oscillated between fear at the twilight of the world and hope at the dawn of a world” (2). That is why during those years, in which the expansion of the bourgeoisie, the growing materialism, and the scientific positivism had been near to obliterate the role of art in the world, certain writers such as Oscar Wilde or Paul Verlaine, whom Darío met in Paris, raised their skeptical and visionary voices (Cerezo 41-42).

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<sup>3</sup> Cathy Login Jade explains that in Spanish America the crises of the *fin de siècle* resulted from “the positivistic criticism of the established religion and metaphysics”. But also, from “the European industrial powers that restructured the countries of Spanish America along the lines of the economic and social order of their own capitalist organization” (8). Both brought “prosperity and a growing faith in science”, which had a very deep effect in the Hispanic American countries. As for those relevant for Darío, Nicaragua goes first, for he was born there, then El Salvador, where he read Victor Hugo (1882), a key literary influence, for the first time, then Chile and Argentina, where he published *Azul...* and *Prosas Profanas* respectively.

Darío always “wanted to know what his reason for existing was and what destiny had for him after the death of his physical body” (Acereda 42). This concern was greatly influenced by the generalized abandonment of metaphysical speculation, “the problem of being and its essence” (ibid.). Hence Darío adopted the philosophy of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche as a response to the productivist and rationalized society, defending art’s transcendence and exploring alternative ways of thought and experience (ibid.). Darío was aware that the essential problems of existence, along with the care for the fundamental human dimensions, were being removed from the imaginary of the people. This can be noted in his 1895 article, “The Literary Life”, where he denounced that in such society art’s fate was “sad and disappointing” (522). According to Darío, not only artists abandoned their vocation, but more fundamentally, people lost their artistic sensitivity: “There [were] few, very few athletes of thought who in the midst of the rude battles of every day continued to worship the Muses and their arts. Most men disillusioned by this age of positivism and skepticism, have closed themselves up into a despaired muteness that ill befits their artistic nature” (ibid.). He held this position in his 1911 text, “El Pueblo de Polo” (The People of the Pole), pointing out that: “Modern progress [was] the enemy of reverie and mystery, since it [had] embraced the idea of utilitarianism.” (93). Yet, Darío believed in the survival of art and poetry, convinced that modern science and capitalism were not by themselves enough to answer man’s primordial questions and to fulfill his deepest longings: “But, still not having taken one single step regarding the origin of life and our disappearance in our inevitable death, reverie and mystery will remain in their eternal attraction” (ibid.).

It is the withdrawal of reverie and mystery from Hispanic poetry, together with the poet’s own sense of alienation and fragmentation in the modern world, which led Darío to

explore the past. Driven by his longing for a pristine and beautiful origin, he engaged as early as 1881 with alternative traditions and belief systems, especially those of ancient Greece. His longing is evident in his 1898 article “Vida literaria. Belkiss. Eugenio de Castro”, where he expressed that only by returning to the insights and experiences of the ancients, could the poets recover their “holy water” and transcend the dry seasons of modernity. Only in the “dawns of Homer”, in the “springs of life”, and “in the cradle of past civilizations”, the poets will find “pristine grace and original force” (qtd. in Tanase 113-114). This conviction drove him to appropriate, first the French symbolism, which catapulted him back in the past to esoteric doctrines (Orphism and Pythagoreanism) (Jrade 9 and 23), which in turn guided him to the “original force” of shamanism. All of them, with their emphasis on the occult (Orphism), on the relationship between music and magic (the French symbolism), on harmony, unity, and beauty (Pythagoreanism), and on the sacred and ecstasy (shamanism), will build for Darío the language revolution of Hispanic poetry.

## 1.6 The Death of Rhythm in Hispanic Poetry

The context in which Darío conducts his writing is more broadly defined as the age of nihilism. In this time, as Hofmannsthal’s *The Lord Chandos Letter* (1902) testifies, poetry does no more than any other form of language, which is to succumb to the impossibility of expressing anything authentically. In this age, language is in crisis. To the extent that “truth” becomes a dead metaphor, as Nietzsche’s famous diagnosis of God proclaimed, language is seen as a mere system of signs, signifying nothing. As a result, poetry was left in a fundamental impasse. This is so because, as a system of signs, “through the wound of meaning the whole being that is the poem bleeds and becomes prose: description and interpretation of the world” (Paz 33-34). Hence, Darío writes in an epoch in

which language turned itself into an impermeable wall between man and the world. It is a period in which the distance between the name —transformed into a mere sign— and the thing named had never been so unbridgeable.

That is why the “stress-accent”, which is the fundamental element in Darío’s poetry —since it is the producer of rhythm— came to signify almost nothing. In *Las Contradicciones del Modernismo* (The Contradictions of Modernism), Noé Jitrik performs an analysis of the stress-accent, which for him is the factory of Darío’s *modernismo*. Jitrik explains that the stress-accent is a “minimum sign”, “a sign almost without meaning or without concept” (36). As Jitrik explains, Darío’s stress-accent has in principle no autonomy: “it does not mean anything if it is not in a syllable” and, once there, its function is merely complementary: “it only adds something”, namely, the so-called “stress” (ibid.).<sup>4</sup>

It is the erosion of the stress-accent —of its meaning as the bedrock of rhythm—, the ultimate cause of what in his prologue to *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* Darío called the “mediocrity, intellectual mongrelizing, and aesthetic shallowness” that had prevailed in Spanish since the baroque (17<sup>th</sup> century) (49). Specifically, in “Palabras Liminares”, he points to the grammarians, but also to the Hispanic poetic tradition itself, especially that of Spain, as being responsible for such a situation (761). He was convinced that Hispanic poets had not listened carefully to their centuries-old poetic silence. The poet condemned their traditional neglect of music and pointed out that their “poetic expression had long been ankylosed as the mummification of rhythm became a historical norm” (CDE 859). Additionally, in his 1907 prologue “Dilucidaciones” (Elucidations) to *El Canto Errante* (The Wandering Song), the poet referred to certain “mental clichés” —or notions of

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<sup>4</sup> In chapter two we will define and examine in detail the stress-accent, the foundation of Darío’s poetry.

“Spanishness”— that likewise had contributed to led the musical potential of Spanish to “ankylosis and immobility” (951). In face of these clichés, Darío claimed that the language renewal had to be carried out by Hispanic-American poets, since “Spain [was] buttressed and gilded by tradition, walled in and bristling with Spanishness — ‘What no one will uproot from us’, says Valera, ‘no matter how hard they pull’” (CMS 550).

These two factors, the neglect of rhythm —as confirmed by the nullification of the stress-accent— and the imprisonment of the acoustic potential of language within the limits of certain notions of what it is to be authentically Spanish— led the language to a “situation of impoverishment close to death” (Martín 51). To illustrate this point, Spanish had endured an “army of grammarians” who, attached themselves to the positivist wave since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, defended a conservative and a highly politicized vision of the language (ibid.). As academicians, they worked tyrannically to “purify” Spanish and prevent the “linguistic invasion”, atrophying thus the “vital assimilations that renewed [its] blood and tissues” (ibid.). These assimilations are important because the speaker gets used to the sound of a given accent. That is, to the habitual and ordinary tone inflections and elocution rhythm as he speaks. In this way, the expressive power of an accent is leveled and its different nuances and sound effects are no longer perceived. That is why a foreign accent seems to us at first charming and musical in its own way. Yet, once our ears get used to it after a certain period of time, that very musicality normalizes itself and becomes ordinary. When this occurs, “the evocative magic of its musical essence” is lost (Navarro Tomás 15). In this sense, the introduction of foreign voices or the resurrection of those that have been forgotten within one’s own language contributes to the defamiliarization of the accent and to restore its charm.

As for the situation of Spanish in Hispanic-America, the writer Carlos Monsiváis indicates that it mirrored that of Spain. In Mexico, for instance, in addition to the “academic intimidation”, “what reigns as consecrated sound is the rhetoric of Catholicism and of the correct use of language of both theatrical melodrama and law.” ( n.p.). As Monsiváis suggests, this was a sort of linguistic dictatorship that was near to obliterate the “aesthetic wonder of the word” (ibid. n.p.). And yet, the Hispanic-American poets had been themselves co-responsible for the language crisis to some extent. Paz points out that the poetry which preceded Darío had been unable to counteract the critical conditions of Spanish because only few poets managed to embody a true romantic spirit (21). Romanticism, as passionate and insightful as it was, was simply overlooked by most Spanish and Spanish-American poets, leaving the generation of the *fin de siècle* without a base on which to amend a language that “had lost the secret of metamorphosis and surprise.” (ibid. 18 and 21). In view of this, Darío’s endeavor presented itself as the most radical one. While facing the death of Spanish, his revolution had to be directed at the mother tongue. This implied a reconstitution of the entire Hispanic poetic tradition if he was to restore language’s rhythm and deliver a new sound. Indeed, in his *Autobiografía* (Autobiography), Darío declared: “I have wished to rejuvenate and relax the language. I have employed forms, constructions, and twists from other languages, as well as exotic words and not purely Hispanic” (37).

## 1.7 Conclusion

We can conclude that Darío was a revolutionary of language. As leader of *modernismo*, he became the “liberator” of not only the poetic form, but also of a new sensitivity. As a poet, he held resemblances with other figures such as Poe, Whitman,

Verlaine and Victor Hugo. He distinguished himself from them, however, thanks to the complex and contradictory tendencies of his work. On the one hand, his pantheism and vitalist affirmation of life —his love for beauty and music, his eroticism and sensualism— and on the other hand, his lurking anguish and metaphysical introspection. As Paz pointed out, Darío always wanted to dissolve the tension of his being. He strived, but failed, to recreate in his poetry a synthetized world. His interest in music was very much due to his longing to play a harmonious concert with the contradictions of his soul. For Darío, only in this way could he free himself from the conundrum of existence and from his permanent feeling of fragmentariness.

The movement he led, *modernismo*, sought to raise the intellectual level of criticism and establish a poetics in which beauty, music, ornamentation, and formal perfection played an important role. Additionally, the movement endorsed language transferences of styles and vocabulary, and cultivated the miscegenation of poetry and prose. For their part, Darío's detractors brought to light the politics of language involved in his language revolution. Despite the resistance of certain Spanish intellectual figures, the Nicaraguan poet positioned Hispanic-America on the literary map, especially on that of Spain, where many important poets adhered to the aesthetic principles of *modernismo*, leading the Spanish literature through new paths. As for rhythm, it is evident that the rhythmic resurrection of the Spanish language is the most important legacy of the movement, not only as an aesthetic in its own right, but also as a way of experiencing, feeling, and understanding the world.

As for Darío's works, I confirm that the Parnassian *Azul*... laid the foundations of the *modernista* revolution. This work introduced and applied its basic principles. For its side, *Prosas Profanas* represented the summit of rhythmic innovation in the poet's work,

but also expressed, on an aesthetic level, his conflicted soul. Lastly, *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* stood out because it posed the said conflict in a more authentic and embodied way. In this book, the poet gave voice to his “Orphic descent”, which means that he poetically expressed his coming to face with nothingness, with the ultimate nature and purpose of poetry and of being a poet. These motifs brought new themes and a more sober and profound expression. Still, Darío’s interest in rhythm and music did not diminish.

Finally, as for Darío’s poetic and historical contexts, it is possible to assert that they triggered his interest in the revolution of language. In the face of the latter’s decline, the poet set himself the task of building anew the Hispanic poetic tradition, noticing that the spiritual crises during the *fin de siècle*, especially that of the prevailing nihilism, had accentuated the long-held forgetfulness of the stress-accent as source of rhythm and music, leading to “language ankylosis”, as he called it.

In the following chapters, we will see how, despite the language crisis, Darío became a creator in the form of a “shaman-poet”. I argue that he embraced a fundamentally shamanic endeavor: the poet’s Orphic function of resurrecting the past and bringing back the dead” (Franklin 57). We will see that, like the shaman Orpheus, Darío turned the Spanish language into his Eurydice, whose soul, like in the Orphic myth, must be retrieved from the underworld. To develop this idea, however, first becomes necessary to expose how Darío came to understand the shamanist tradition. In this way, it will become clearer how he conceived a shamanist poetics and how he posited it as the base of his *modernismo*—of his three fundamental works— and of the reinvention of the Spanish language.

## Chapter Two

### Darío's Shamanist Poetics: Music and Silence

#### 2.1 Introduction

Darío considered that in order to lead the mother tongue to a true renaissance he had to restore its “original being”. For him, this was a condition in which language, Heidegger would say, was still stand ‘in the clearing of Being’ and therefore was not “language” in the common sense of the word. Rather, it was something like an exquisite and powerful music. In effect, the Nicaraguan poet was convinced that language’s pristine condition was a preordained order of harmonious or musical coexistence between its aesthetic (phonetic) and metaphysical (semantic) dimensions. The struggle between these two has a long history in the Western civilization and reemerges whenever it comes to defining what is language. Indeed, such dispute originated in the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy. We will see that Darío addressed this quarrel in terms of “*verbal harmony*” (poetry) and “*ideal melody*” (philosophy). Yet, aware of his limitations as poet to perfectly harmonize the two, Darío exhorted Hispanic poets to return to the shamanist Orphic-Pythagorean experiences of rhythmic poetry in which language would still be close enough to “the clearing of music”, which he called *idea* and “*silencio profundo*” (profound silence). In this light, the stress-accent became of vital importance for Darío because, as a shaman-poet, he turned it into the incarnation of the *soul* in language, becoming the source of a “rhythm” able to emulate the harmony between *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. It is the beauty and wonder evoked by this emulation what ultimately kept the language in force. This is how the poet demonstrated that there was still mystery regarding the origin and destiny of its hitherto hopeless *soul*.

After establishing Darío's language revolution on the grounds of "music" and "silence" —which entails pointing out his bond with the European poetic traditions, namely the romantic (Hölderlin) and symbolist (Mallarmé) aesthetics — (sections 2.2 and 2.3), this chapter illustrates the esoteric origin of such grounds: the Orphic-Pythagoreanism. Then, the source of esoterism: shamanism, will be elucidated (sections 2.5-2.5.3). In the second part of the chapter, I will show how shamanism is tied to Darío's poetics, arguing that he embraced the musical-religious function of a "Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet" as a response to the "death of rhythm" (sections 2.6-2.6.4). Finally, I will describe the founding process of the stress-accent as the *soul* of the new shamanist poetics and of the Darío's shamanic role, concluding the chapter thereafter.

## 2.2 Music

An unprecedented vision of music in the Hispanic poetic tradition appeared in Rubén Darío's poetry. However, in order to understand its particularities, a brief exposition of the Mallarméan poetics is first necessary. What follows is an explanation of Stéphane Mallarmé's ideas that most influenced Darío: his interpretation of the history of Western poetry, his "Orphic explanation of the earth", and his insight into the relation between music, magic, and being.

While it is true that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in France, music was "the first of the arts to be severed from the mimetic principle" of the neoclassicists —who degraded its status in relation to poetry and painting—, by the 1790s the German romantics had already vindicated music's non-mimetic nature, becoming "the art most immediately expressive of spirit and emotion" (Abrams 50 and 92). Later, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a radicalization of this vindication can be found among the French symbolists, who bestowed

upon music a magical power and envisaged it as their poetic ideal. For instance, Mallarmé believed that language had lost its magical essence when ceased to be music, a conviction that led him to conclude in 1894 that “all poetry had gone wrong since the great Homeric deviation” (qtd. in Sartre 16). As explained by George Steiner in *On Difficulty*, for Mallarmé: “By becoming linear, narrative, realistic, publicly-focused, the art of Homer and his successors —this is to say of the near totality of Western literature— had lost or betrayed the primal mystery of magic” (43). As Mallarmé saw it, the sole duty of the poet was to awaken the mysterious power of language, and this implied releasing it from the supremacy of “the meaning”, which hindered its musical-magical being to come forth.

For Mallarmé, however, how was it that a language returned to its musical essence regained magical power? In 1884, he expressed his vision as follows: “Poetry is the expression, in human language restored to its essential rhythm, of the mysterious meaning of the aspects of existence: in this way it confers authenticity on our time on earth and constitutes the only spiritual task there is” (138). According to this poetics, which Mallarmé called “the Orphic explanation of the earth”, to recover language’s “essential rhythm” means to harmonize its two fundamental constituents: the sensations of phonetics (poetry) and the meanings, or ideas, of semantics (philosophy). If the poet achieves this, language would restore its primordial evocative power and, like music —which is “indefinite and innocent of reference to the external world”— would also suggest an “untarnished vision of the universe, a vision that recalls the first day of creation” (Login Jrade 8). In an innocent language, the meaning would no longer be “stained” —which is to say that it would cease to be an instrument at the service of communication and a mere “representation” of the world—, for it would fuse itself with the word’s own “music” (phonetics) and would become pure suggestion. In this way, the world would become a “kind of ultimate poem,

within whose harmonious contours man discovers his true dwelling-place” (Bruns 7). But furthermore, it is by the saying of a word freed from the subjection to communication, thus reconciled with itself and, by extension, with the world, that language would come to be truly creative. This is so because the poet, in turn, would retrieve his role as “magus”, deriving “his power from the fundamental unity of word and being” (ibid. 219). Insofar as poetry retrieves language’s musical nature, Mallarmé believed, “[t]o evoke an object is to create it” (Bays 15).

### 2.3 Silence

Likewise, a reconception of silence —one probably not seen in the Hispanic poetic tradition since the mystic poetry of San Juan de la Cruz (16<sup>th</sup> century)— lurks behind all of Darío’s work. In fact, for Darío, silence is the creative principle of “rhythm” and music, which are the most noticeable characteristics of his poetry. His vision of silence can be illustrated by Friedrich Hölderlin and his interpretation of the Greeks. Hölderlin remarked that for the cathartic, the “revelatory”, moment of Greek tragedy, it was necessary “*what in poetic meter is called cesura*, the pure word, the counterrhythmic rupture” (102, original emphasis). For the German poet, the sudden pause of rhythm “at the highest point” of tragedy revealed not “the change of representation but the representation itself.” (ibid.). Hölderlin saw that such a disruption of rhythm, its abrupt absence, made the audience become aware of the play itself —that is, of the nature of the representation as a merely sequenced performance— by showing them how they had been subjected by the enthralling drag of its rhythm up until that moment.

Like Hölderlin, Darío knew that it was precisely such a silencing of rhythm what made the readers appreciate that there was something like “rhythm” in his poetry, therefore

allowing them to think “metaphysically” about the nature of the poem, about how it had been conceived and how its aesthetic mechanisms worked. We shall also see (chapter 3) that Darío’s resurrection of the poetic cesura is aimed at leaving a lyric testimony of the very nature of silence, namely of its character as the revelatory moment of rhythm and music and of the fact that the latter is merely the absence of a previous foundation: silence.

In the following two sections, we will appreciate the esoteric Orphic-Pythagorean origin of both the Mallarméan vision of music and of the Holderlinian understanding of silence; origin which in turn is rooted in the Shamanist tradition and which Darío also reworked.

## 2.4 Orphic-Pythagoreanism

In *Rubén Darío and the Pythagorean Tradition*, Raymond Skyrme has pointed out that among all the philosophies, poetic traditions, and belief systems, present in Darío’s poetry, it is perhaps the esoteric interpretation of Orpheus and Pythagoras, which came to be named Orphic-Pythagoreanism, the most influential.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Darío can be praised for having introduced esotericism in the Hispanic poetic tradition like no other poet before or during his time. As a syncretic cosmovision, Skyrme explains, the Orphic-Pythagoreanism

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<sup>5</sup> Western philosophy has always been accompanied by an “esoteric tradition”, which encompasses numerous unorthodox philosophies and doctrines, generally in countermovement with the established metaphysics and with the Judeo-Christian religion properly. According to Cathy Login Jade, esoterism can be considered as a syncretic vision of the world, combining wisdoms of certain figures who are believed to have been granted with a greater knowledge or superior consciousness, and who are described as “initiates of occultism” (Krishna, Hermes, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, Jesus, etc.). The mysterious essence of existence, the unity of a single universal soul, reincarnation, the eternal recurrence, and the capacity of the initiates to perceive these mysteries, are common beliefs in the esoteric doctrines, of which the Hebrew Kabbala or the Christian version of Hermetic lore have remained deeply influential throughout history (7 and 9). It is the esoteric doctrine, then, with its syncretic thinking, which would influence Darío’s appropriation of Pythagoras and Orpheus. For this reason, the poet “freely combines elements not only from historical Pythagoreanism but also from Neo-Pythagoreanism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism” (ibid. 9).

defends “the creative power of the poets to express in art the perception of a mysterious musical order” (qtd. in Acereda, 2006).<sup>6</sup> This belief, which Darío, Hölderlin and Mallarmé freely assumed, originates in the philosophical-religious cult of both Orpheus and Pythagoras. The former is the mythical Thracian poet whose poetry, accompanied always by the lyre, had the power “to tame wild beasts, make rocks move, and divert rivers”, and the latter is the Presocratic thinker whose discoveries significantly influenced musical theory: “the relation of number and sound” and, in a greater scale, of music/mathematics and cosmic rhythm (Bonds 20 and 24). Darío’s vision is consistent with the Orphic-Pythagoreanism of the Neoplatonist Proclus (4th century AC), according to whom Orpheus was a demi-god and the supreme mediator between the gods and men, which is why he was seen as the source of all Greek theology: “All Greek theology is an offspring of the Orphic mysteries; first Pythagoras was taught the divine mysteries by Aglaophamus, and then Plato obtained perfect knowledge from them from the Pythagorean and Orphic texts” (qtd. in Bernabé 143-144). As for Pythagoras, there are some extreme cases among the Neoplatonists that echo Darío’s conception even more. They suggest that Pythagoras was as a sort of priest or shaman of Orpheus who would have made him the most powerful initiate of his “mysteries”.<sup>7</sup> In these instances, “Pythagoras appears to be like the second-in-

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond Skyrme has analyzed the complex confusion among the 19<sup>th</sup> century French writers regarding the concepts of the Orphic and the Pythagorean. He concludes that, in general: “Pythagoreanism signified a philosophical outlook of the world, whereas Orphism implied, in addition to this, the creative power of the poets to express in art the perception of a mysterious musical order” (qtd. in Acereda, 2004, 206). In Darío’s case, the confusion of both is no less complex, and although he generally refers himself as under the aegis of Pythagoras, he sees the latter and Orpheus as complementary or even intertwined.

<sup>7</sup> The ancient Greeks called “Orphism” to a religious movement based on the so-called “Orphic mysteries”, a series of writings, ritual practices, and religious beliefs such as the transcendental character of the soul and reincarnation. This religion (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) is believed to have been initiated by the mythical poet Orpheus, who would have been inspired by the myth of Dionysos and the Titans. In this way, the Orphics turned Dionysos into the focus of their cult. As for “Pythagoreanism”, in *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea*, Mark Evan points out that the ancient Greeks turned to the teachings of Pythagoras to discover the essence of music and its effects, which is why he is intimately bonded with Orpheus, the musician par excellence.

command of Orpheus, and some authors ascribe to him the mythical abilities of the Thracian...that he possessed the same dominion as Orpheus over savage animals, and that he allured and detained them by the power of his voice” (ibid.).

Among the esoteric mysteries that the Olympian and Chthonic gods —Apollo and Dionysos— would have revealed to Orpheus, and that he, in turn, would have somehow shared to Pythagoras, is that of the musical-transcendental origin of the universe. According to the interpretation of Edouard Schuré, who introduced Darío into occultism and esotericism, Pythagoras would have expressed the Orphic origin of the universe through his sacred mathematics.<sup>8</sup> The latter begins as follows: “Zero” is the One, the “essence of the Uncreated Being” or of the number (n.p.). In the beginning, Zero was pure infinite harmony, but once it multiplied itself by infinity was equal to One. Thus, it became determined, producing “all the numbers it contain[ed] in its great unity and that it governs in perfect harmony” (ibid.). It is due to this and other Orphic mysteries that Pythagoras would have come to believe that all nature is rhythmic and “musical in their essence”, and that it expressed itself as “a grand signing of life made up of the millions of sounds that fuse together into a great harmony that is beyond what we as humans can imagine” (Nelson 68). Furthermore, the ontology of the universe as a great musical rhythm brings with it other Orphic mysteries such as reincarnation, the eternal recurrence of things, or the

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However, Pythagoras is rather a shadowy figure, of whom little is known and whom much has nevertheless been ascribed. He existed, for sure, in the 6th century BC, although by Plato’s time, whom he greatly influenced, he had already become the mythical figure who will inspire the philosophical-cultic movement which follows (23). This new religion, which enveloped Pythagoras within an aura of mystery and rumor, is believed to have been inspired by the Orphics and to have reformed and developed many of their ideas.

<sup>8</sup> As Caty Login Jade has emphasized, mathematics, as Pythagoras understood it, was an expression of the divine power, thus the numbers had for him a religious dimension. Jade specifies: “his sacred mathematics or science of principles was both transcendent and more alive than the secular mathematics known to our modern scientists and philosophers. Number was not considered an abstract quantity but an intrinsic and living nature of the supreme One, of God, the Source of universal harmony” (12)

transmigration of souls (Acereda 211). The origin of all these beliefs can be found in the Paleolithic shamanist tradition (Linebaugh 122), many of which influenced Darío's poetry by the mediation of esoteric doctrine (Acereda 211). The question of the soul in connection to cosmic rhythm, for instance, occupies a especial place among the Orphic mysteries which, through Pythagoreanism, serve Darío as source of inspiration. Erika Nelson explains that "[a]s Pythagoras believed, the human soul which was considered to be 'sick', suffering and out-of-balance, consistently strives to imitate the orderliness of the universe and to put itself back into the *harmonia mundi*." (69). However, among the Pythagoreans, "rhythmic sound was believed to have the capacity to heal the sickness of the soul" (ibid) by harmonizing it with what Pythagoras called the "music of the spheres".

In this view, music became fundamental for Pythagoras, especially when he realized that music was an "audible manifestation of number" (Bonds 23). That is, that it revealed, as his own musical experiments demonstrated, the basic principles that compose everything which exists: Zero's sacred numbers.<sup>9</sup> The esoteric Pythagoras believed that the Orphic music expressed the greatest of enigmas, namely the perfect harmony of souls and numbers, which is why Orpheus became his musical-religious model. It is this ideal —the Orphic-Pythagorean origin of cosmos— what influenced Mallarmé's "Orphic explanation of the earth" —that is, his idea of returning language to its "essential rhythm"— and which

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<sup>9</sup> Pythagoras examined music and made important contributions to musical theory. Mark Evan specifies his discoveries by referring to a widely known legend which illustrates how he put the science of acoustics on a rational basis, specifically by correlating mathematics and sound, weight and pitch: "Passing by a forge one day, Pythagoras observed that the blacksmiths' hammers produced pitches of different intervals, some consonant with each other, some dissonant. On further investigation, he found that these pitches were proportional to the weight of the hammers, and that these weights and pitches could be correlated arithmetically. A ratio of 2:1 produced pitches at the interval of an octave; a ratio of 3:2 produced the interval of a perfect fifth; 4:3 produced a perfect fourth, and so on" (24).

revealed itself as “silence” to Darío. This is the silence which he, like Hölderlin, thought it to be the revelatory moment and authentic foundation of rhythm and music.

## 2.5 The Shamanic Roots of Orpheus and Pythagoras and the Figure of the Shaman

Aware of the “shamanic” origin of Orpheus and Pythagoras, I argue that Darío —though he never explicitly referred to it— bestowed upon the traditional figure of the Hispanic poet a hitherto unseen shamanic function: the spiritual task of bringing back the Spanish language’s soul from the poet’s inner “underworld”, of which the poetic and philosophical decline of the language, the “death of rhythm”, was only a manifestation.

As Walter Strauss explains in *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature*, the mythical Orpheus offered modern poets supports to renew the conception of the poet and of poetry in difficult times. The author specifies that the poet, “dispossessed by ages of cold reason”, found in the Orphic figure ways of thinking how to recover “the irreplaceability of poetry, the need for symbolic expression, [and] the perpetuity of the poetic voice” (10). This is so because the Orphic myth is bonded with the Eurydice-Underworld theme, by virtue of which the poets freely “formulate their convictions about the nature and place of the erotic, usually in the context of the descent motif —interpreted with varying stress as a plunge into the unconscious (Nerval), a confrontation with death and night (Nerval, Novalis, Rilke), and coming to face with Nothingness (Mallarmé, Blanchot)” (ibid.). This is how, as Robert McGahey points out in *The Orphic Moment: Shaman To Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé*, a “new being” was born, namely the “Orphic poet”, a figure “built on the old figure of the shaman” (xvi.). Similar to the ancient shaman, Strauss concludes, “[t]he Orphic poet is, once more, at the beginning of

a journey, confronted with the task of sacralizing time, space, and language before the Orphic spell can take place”. “His task is to face the Nothingness, to overcome (abolish) it in order to make poetry once more possible” (12). Next, we will see how, in order to face the “nothingness” of Spanish, to overcome it, and thus recover language’s *faith*, Darío appropriated the shamanist origin of the Orphic myth. As I argue, Darío turned himself into an Orphic shaman-poet, specifically into a Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet. Yet, before arriving at Darío’s particular vision, it becomes necessary to define the figure of the shaman and expose the shamanic origins of Orpheus and Pythagoras as well the characteristics of their shamanist art.

The archaic “shaman” is a figure which in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Mircea Eliade situates at the center of the history of religions. However, Eliade holds that the shaman has historically been misconstrued, pointing out that ethnologists have fallen “into the habit of using the terms ‘shaman,’ ‘medicine man,’ ‘sorcerer,’ and ‘magician’ interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all ‘primitive’ societies” (4). Although Eliade does not deny these terms as belonging to the shaman’s realm—he even adds his character as “priest, mystic, and poet”—for him the shaman is essentially “the great master of ecstasy”, by virtue of which he interacts with the divine and mediates the relations between the tribe and the gods (ibid. 3). According to Eliade, it is the “ecstatic experience” what is considered to be “the religious experience par excellence” in most primitive tribes throughout the world, beginning with those of Siberia and Central Asia, but extending itself to the Indo-Europeans, to Oceania and to the Americas (ibid. 3-4). But, as he himself acknowledges, given the complexity of such phenomenon among all the documented traditions, “the least

hazardous” would be to speak of “shamanism” as a *technique of ecstasy* instead of the shaman alone (ibid. 4 original emphasis).



**Figure 1.** Mongol shaman wearing a ritual gown and holding a drum with the image of a spirit helper, c. 1909. National Museum of Finland (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica).

Accordingly, Eliade identifies the characteristic which would distinguish the specifically shamanic ecstasy: “the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (4). In turn, the techniques of ecstasy inviting this journey are numerous. Eliade points out that among them there can be found the use of narcotics and musical instruments (ibid. xi.). However, in the specifically South American shamanism, which seems to be influencing Darío’s conception of ecstasy (chapter 3), the use of a “magical substance” is common (ibid. 52). According to Eliade, “[i]n general, for the shamans of tropical South America magical power is concretized in an invisible substance that the masters transfer to the novices, sometimes from mouth to mouth.” (ibid). This invisible magical substance would be the

“vaguer and rather abstract form” of the “shaman’s power”, which other shamanic objects such as arrows, thorns, or rock crystals would shape and concretize (ibid). As for the musical instruments, McGahey specifies that “[t]he shaman’s instruments include the lyre—fashioned of sheep gut and the carapace of the tortoise—the drum, and the rattle.”

(6). For their part, the functions of the ecstatic journeys are varied. For instance, Eliade emphasizes the shaman’s character as “healer”, pointing out the healing purposes of the voyages. During this type of ecstasy, the shaman “announces the diagnosis, goes in search of the patient’s fugitive soul, captures it, and makes it return to animate the body that it has left” (183). If the shaman is able to accomplish this, it is because “he commands the techniques of ecstasy” (ibid.). But especially, if he can reveal anything at all to the tribe, either a diagnosis or any other mystery, it is because, as Socrates affirmed, “his mind has within itself a divining power” (qtd. in McGahey 34). Although this power makes him an enlightened being able to decipher the world and the gods’ needs and motivations, it creates an unsurmountable contradiction in him. The “shamanist contradiction”, as Jack Lindsay calls it, arises from the conflict between his apparent condition as a metaphysically “free and independent person”, on the one hand, and his character as “mouthpiece of forces beyond himself”, on the other (qtd. in ibid. 8). We will in short see that this contradiction is no other than his own soul-body conflict, which can be defined in terms of the Apollonian-Dionysian struggle or as the philosophy-poetry dispute. In fact, as the prototypical shaman Orpheus will explicitly show, what constitutes the archaic figure of the shaman properly, is no other than the contradictory embodiment of what we would now call “thinker” and “poet”. The shaman forces himself to harmonize his character as seer or thinker with his poet being. This is so because liberating himself from the contradiction can only be attained

if the divination retained by his divination power is delivered through his “body” as poet, which nevertheless is subject to forces that his divination power cannot fully control.

### 2.5.1 Orpheus as the Prototypical Shaman

McGahey argues that Orpheus was a “shaman” before becoming the central figure of the cultic-philosophical movements he later inspired (Orphism and Pythagoreanism). For McGahey, Orpheus, “[a]s a poet-singer with the power to entrance, bears close resemblance to the oldest go-between of the spiritual and human realms, the tribal shaman” (6). Eric R. Dodds and Mircea Eliade support McGahey’s assertion, defining Orpheus as the mythical ideal shaman, and including Pythagoras and Empedocles within the group of Greek figures —of which only Orpheus is not properly historical— of “shamanist type” (ibid.).<sup>10</sup> Dodds and Eliade agree that Orpheus would have become the prototypical shaman because he was seen as the mediator between the brother-gods, Dionysos (passion) and Apollo (reason), whose contradiction the shaman Orpheus would have managed to harmonize through his music (ibid. 7). This is the music that, later, would have been interpreted as the harmonic expression of two opposing cults and worldviews in ancient Greece: the “Mycenean-West Asian religion and northern shamanism (viz., Dionysos and Apollo)” (ibid.). If Orpheus was seen as a shamanic intermediary suspended between both cults, it is because his music, as a technique of ecstasy, worked as a spiraling staircase, as a “song-way” (McGahey 6), which allowed him to ascend with Apollo and descend towards Dionysos. This is so because although the Thracian does play his music on the lyre —the instrument of his

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<sup>10</sup> According to McGahey, there are a few twentieth-century scholars who hold that Orpheus was in fact a historical figure, either an “Apolline priest” (Guthrie) or a “cosmogonic poet” (Harrison) (ibid. 20). He concludes, however, that most of them do not find evidence of the historicity of Orpheus, who is seen, rather, “as a hero of legend, perhaps shamanic” (ibid.)

father, Apollo, which is “a reflection of the well-ordered harmony of the Paeon”—, he uses it to “descend below, to the underworld, in search of his beloved wife Eurydice” (Irwin 10-11). The underworld, in turn, is “the lower, chthonic world of frenzied drums, flutes and passion (a passion that drives Orpheus ‘below’), as embodied in Dionysus” (ibid. 11).

### 2.5.2 Orphic Poetry as the Harmony Between Poetry and Philosophy

For McGahey, however, the music of the shaman Orpheus would also express the harmony of poetry and philosophy. He asserts that Orpheus’s representation as a lyrist on the one hand, and as musician on the other, symbolizes the harmony between poetry (Dionysos) and philosophy (Apollo) respectively. He explains: “[s]ince the poet, the lyrist, accompanied himself by the lyre, this archaic poetry was also music. As mythos gave way to logos in the fifth to fourth centuries, the original music...was sundered, transmuted into the children of myth: poetry and philosophy.” (xiv). Likewise, McGahey describes the nature of such a contradictory, and yet harmonious, music, by saying that its “divinatory power”, although it is within the mind —philosophy— of the Orphic shaman, he needs his body —poetry— to manifest it:

The original melody that is produced by this divination is played through his body, for the body is his instrument. This melody cannot be heard by the physical ear; it is beyond sense. In this respect, ‘Orphic music’ is like the music of the spheres. It is an inner music that is itself a ‘way,’ charting a soulpath for the poet-shaman (thus the psychopomp is self-led)...But the playing out of this divine melody through the titanic flesh creates a contradictory kind of music of such power that the singing Orphic poet shatters his body. The mind, the ‘head,’ breaks loose from the instrument, the skeletal frame strung with sinews. Orphic poetry is the music

issuing from the contrariness of the soul/body... That very contradiction, when lived and played through, creates an exquisite music (ibid. xv-xvi).

The greatness of this music, its religious function by virtue of which the shaman sacrifices himself for the sake of reestablishing the bonds of language (the poetry-philosophy relationship) and, thereby, the relationship between the community, the world, and the divine, would be the reason why Orphic music became the musical-religious goal among his cult followers and among the modern Orphic poets. Darío, for instance, who understood the Orphic music well, was able to recognize the way it manifested itself as source of inspiration and “divinations”: silence. Indeed, the Orphic source is a melody that “cannot be heard by the physical ear” and thus it can be interpreted as “silence”. Orphic music is the perfect ensemble between music (philosophy) and lyrics (poetry); a music which no mortal ear can hear. This would be the melody-destination of Darío’s spiritual journey (chapter 3). But if Darío is able to appreciate the source as an Orphic poet, it is because his mind has the “divining power”. In this sense, it can be said that he shares the “musician” character with the shaman Orpheus and therefore he can be seen as a “philosopher” (seer-thinker). But especially, if Darío can manifest his divinations bodily or poetically —rhythmically— in an ecstatic or exquisite way, it is only because his facet as “lyrist”, as poet, allows him. Orphic poetry is thus the “music” issued by Orphic music and played out in human language. Like the shaman, Darío deals with the contradictoriness of his being, and he does so by poetically harmonizing his Apollonian divining power and his Dionysian aspect as poet-medium. In this light, he is, like the shaman, a thinker-poet.

### 2.5.3 The Pythagorean Shaman

With his new poetic role, Darío would have turned himself into an Orphic shaman-poet of “Pythagorean type”, a figure which likewise posits Orpheus as his model. Darío was aware that in Pythagoras he could find the longing for an Orphic poetic-philosophical (Dionysian-Apollonian) unity. In Pythagoras, however, such an attunement is conceived in the terms pinpointed by Bertrand Russell when he notes that both “ecstasy” and “mathematics”, the former pertaining to the realm of “[p]ersonal religion” and the latter to “theology”, coexist in his vision (44). But furthermore, Darío knew that the Pythagorean shaman, just as Orpheus is bonded with the Hades-Eurydice motif, is linked with the spiritual journey to the underworld—where he supposedly saw Homer and Hesiod being punished for revealing the god’s secrets—, a legend that Hieronymus of Rhodes (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) diffused (Santamaría 31).



“Pythagoras Emerging from the Underworld” (1662) by Salvator Rosa

What bonds the Pythagorean shaman to Darío is the fact that, contrary to the master shaman Orpheus, he would use the drum instead of the lyre as instrument. If Darío uses the drum, we will see, is because the Spanish language has a stress-based metrical system which

resembles the sound of the drum.<sup>11</sup> Like Darío, the Pythagorean shaman would use the drum because it seems to be more akin to his own metaphysics of rhythm, which according to a legend, Pythagoras himself corroborated by analyzing the pitches produced by the blows of different hammers.<sup>12</sup> With the drum, the Pythagorean shaman would then generate “rhythm” in order to express the divination of his ecstatic journey; rhythm which would then instigate ecstasy to those who listen to it.

Like the Orphic music, the rhythm produced by the Pythagorean shamanic drum would be the result of harmonizing what in his “Rhythmic Investigations” Nietzsche called the “infinite rhythmic movements” of the body and the “beat”, whose organized patterns accommodates the former “according to a new law” (qtd. in Eikelboom 70-71). Lexi Eikelboom explains that, for Nietzsche, who of course influenced Darío, this new law would correspond to the Orphic attunement of Dionysos and Apollo, of poetry and philosophy, respectively, and would rule once “the relationship between the infinite number of rhythms (Dionysos) and the beat (the Apollonian order applied to Dionysian viscosity) is harmonious” (71). In this way, the drum, which is a Dionysian instrument, would work similarly to Orpheus’s ideal lyre, that is, as the spiraling staircase through which the shaman can move between the Chthonic and Olympian worlds. In a similar way, the Pythagorean shaman conceived the resulting music—which for him corresponds to Orphic music—as the “music of the spheres”, which according to the Neoplatonist Simplicius (6<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In order to create rhythm in poetry a distinguishing between metrical systems is needed, for these differ from language to language. Spanish and English are “stressed-based systems” or of “qualitative type”, which means that rhythm comes from the special quality of the stress-accent, which generate the beats in the verse. Yet, Greek poetry relies on a “quantitative system” in which rhythm originates, not in stress, but in “duration”, that is, in the length of the vowels, which can be short or long. While in Greek the patterns between short and long vowels create the rhythm, in Spanish does so the patterns between non-stressed (silences) and stressed syllables.

<sup>12</sup> See note 9.

century AC) could not be heard if not by purely “intellectual discernment of the harmonic ratios governing all cosmic order” (qtd. in *ibid.* 130). Likewise, it can be said that this silent discernment—which for the Pythagorean shaman revealed the perfect harmony— can be compared to Darío’s vision of silence.

## 2.6 Darío’s Shamanist Orphic-Pythagorean Poetics

### 2.6.1 Darío’s Metaphysics of Language

Greatly influenced by Mallarmé, in the 1907 prologue “Dilucidaciones” (Elucidations) to his poetry book *El Canto Errante*, Darío manifested a conviction hitherto neglected in the Hispanic poetic tradition: that word and being—which he calls “idea”—were originally a unity: “the word is born together with the *idea*, or coexists with the *idea*, since we cannot realize one without the other” (958 emphasis added). For *idea*, Darío firstly understands “thought”, “meaning”, “idea”, which for the poet are essentially human and temporal. In “Dilucidaciones”, however, the poet uses another connotation, which involves a syncretic vision, combining diverse traditions, philosophies and esoteric doctrines, of which the French Symbolism, Judeo-Christianity, Platonism and Pythagoreanism stand out. In this sense, *idea* is something sacred, atemporal, and generally means “the being shaper of things” (Tanase 149). Later, “Dilucidaciones” allude to the divine Word present in John’s Gospel as expressive of the original relationship between language and *idea*: “In the beginning is the word as the only representation. Not simply as a sign since there is nothing previous to represent. In the beginning is the word as the manifestation of infinite unity, but already containing it. *Et verbum erat Deus.*” (*ibid.* 958-959 original emphasis). For Darío, nevertheless, God’s Word also signals the magic-creative potential and the sacred labor of the poets: “The word is in itself nothing more than a sign...but it contains everything by

demiurgic virtue. Those who misuse it will be the culprits if they do not know how to handle those dangerous and delicate means.” (ibid.). Like Mallarmé before him, Darío posited music as an ideal, convinced that the poet had to first awaken language’s musical soul in order to reestablish its relationship with the *idea*. To recover the fullness of language’s evocative power, its “demiurgic virtue” —or its power to create something out of nothing— was the ideal revolution around which all of Darío’s efforts revolved.

### 2.6.2 Music: Rhythm, *Verbal Harmony* and *Ideal Melody*

In his 1896 text “Palabras Liminares” (Liminal Words), which preludes his poetry book *Prosas Profanas*, Darío had already addressed the issue of poetic practice. In fact, this is the text which more openly alludes to it. And yet, it expresses Darío’s vision of poetry with evident hermeticism, which means that the poet entangles some of his philosophical, religious, musical and literary influences. Darío manifests his poetics, his own “Orphic explanation of the earth”, as follows: “And the question of meter? And rhythm? Since each word has a *soul*, there is in each verse, in addition to *verbal harmony*, an *ideal melody*. Music is only from the *idea*, many times.” (764, emphases added).

“Palabras Liminares” follows a strictly musical principle: the relationship between rhythm, harmony, and melody. Rhythm is the very possibility of music; the “foundation for a temporal and physical experience” (Montague 147). Yet, melody is what our ears notice the most. Melody is the principal structure of notes, the “musical idea” or “single tune” around which harmony —which only accompanies it with ornamental musical substructures, with background, giving it thus “more body”— work in order to highlight it. As the musician Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1771) is said to have declared: “The true goal of music—its proper enterprise—is melody. All the parts of harmony have as their ultimate

purpose only beautiful melody. Therefore, the question of which is the more significant, melody or harmony, is futile. Beyond doubt, the means is subordinate to the end.”

It is on this basis that Darío aimed at linking language with the archaic Orphic music, suggesting that poetry, for its part, could make both the “harmony” (poetry/lyrics) and “melody” (philosophy/music) of language equally significant. This would imply fusing them both by means of a very special rhythm. If this were achieved perfectly, language would transform its essence into pure musical suggestion, into “music that is only from the *idea*” while merging itself with the *idea*.

Although Darío recognizes that perfection is unattainable, he is convinced that, although it is not possible to completely reestablish the co-belonging of the *idea* and language, the latter is still sacred despite its earthly, verbal reality. For the poet, language continues to be animated by a nameless force. That is why he thinks that each word has a *soul*, which would be the sacred form of language. To interpret “Palabras Liminares”, however, it is necessary to consider, not only the poet’s Orphic-Pythagorean shamanism, but also “the Darian idea of substantial union between soul and body, or between the internal and external form of language” (Zepeda-Hernandez 280). In this light, I argue that in Darío’s poetic practice, the internal form, the word’s *soul* —which can likewise be said to be the presence of the “sacred number” in it— is represented by the so-called “stress-accent”. This is a stress that “falls” upon a specific syllable of a word. The emphasis caused by the stress-accent makes this syllable louder than the rest and is present in almost all the words of Spanish.<sup>13</sup> The stress-accent would be the “fallen” form of the *soul* as it embodies

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<sup>13</sup> There is a group of “palabras átonas” (of toneless or unstressed words) in Spanish, which means that they lack the stress-accent. These words generally play an exclusively grammatical function such as that of prepositions. These words commonly have just one syllable, like “a”, “con”, “de”, “en”, “por”, “para”, etc. If they are unstressed is because it is not possible to modulate the sound further as they are uttered so as to allow

a syllable, which would come to represent the core of the word's body. The latter makes the *soul* audible, depriving it thus from its sacred essence. This is so because the *two* external forms constituting language's body are in conflict: phonetics *and* semantics. Their noisy-informational discord—in which the semantics dominates; just like the melody does with harmony—operates at the core of the syllabic articulation, hindering their unity, which is the *soul* properly, to come forth.<sup>14</sup>

We can then ask ourselves: how can poetry make the *soul* manifest and turn language into the music of the *idea* despite the reign of the melody, of semantics? The French symbolist poets pursued music in two ways: via the phonetic sensations of the verse (Verlaine's proposal) and through the harmony of the ideas evoked throughout a text (Mallarmé's practice) (Tanase 151). The Nicaraguan poet aimed at fusing them both. To do so, he aspired to unite what he called *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*, whose highest expressions would respectively correspond to poetry and philosophy, to the Dionysian infinite body rhythms and to Apollo's beat. Then, as Cathy Login Jrade points out in *Ruben Dario and the Romantic Search for Unity*, “[t]hrough the fusion of verbal harmony and ideal music, language becomes poetry and ‘recovers its original being, becomes music again’”, specifying that the “melody that remains”—this is, the music that is only from the *idea*—“is the ideas that are in their essence music” (21).

A question remains, though: how can the poet merge *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*? Influenced by the Orphic-Pythagorean shamanism, Darío asks about “meter” and

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a stress to land at some point. Darío takes these soulless words as silences, which are likewise necessary to create rhythm.

<sup>14</sup> Here, it is worth recalling *The Siren and the Seashell*, where Octavio Paz reminds us that “[d]espite the fact that Darío did not formulate his thought in exactly these terms, all his poetry and his attitude toward life reveal the tension of his spirit between the two extremes of the word: music and meaning” (94).

“rhythm” in the quoted “Palabras Liminares”. He recognized that “sound is a manifestation of the number” and that, therefore, in order to achieve music in poetry, he had to rely on the numerical settings, or “meters”, provided by traditional metrics. Metrics is the knowledge of poetic meters—for example, the iambic pentameter, the dactylic hexameter, etc.—, which once enabled Hispanic poets to create rhythmic patterns devised beforehand. Those meters are designed to distribute the “stress-accents” at specific intervals—this is to say, after a certain number of non-stressed syllables— throughout the verse. In this way, the poetic rhythm is based on the same principle as that of music, that is, on meter, which corresponds to the musical meter (Navarro Tomás 27). Consequently, the regular beats of the stress-accents produces the rhythm. It can be said that, in view of the “death of rhythm”, the poet alleviates the Spanish language by rhythmically—beautifully— manifesting its occluded and “sick” *souls*. Later, in the section “The Stress-Accent as the New Foundation” (2.6.5), we will confirm that this manifestation would seek to harmonize *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. While it is true that the harmony achieved is not the music of the *idea*, at least generates a rhythmic, yet mysterious and contradictory, expression able to lay anew the foundation of all aesthetic and metaphysical endeavor: wonder.

### 2.6.3 Silence: *silencio profundo* (profound silence)

Darío was always aware of the impossibility to create a perfect rhythm between poetry and philosophy, between *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*, and that “the Symbolist aesthetics would lead him, like the French writers before, to silence” (Login Jrade 22). What Darío knew, but intentionally ignored due to language’s own necessities at the time, was that “the very materiality of language”, specifically the syllable, “prevent[ed] poetry from attaining the spirituality of music” (ibid.). However, the impossibility to recreate the

music of the *idea* in language, or the silencing of rhythm, was never a poetic deadlock, provided that, similar to Hölderlin, Darío recognized something like the “essence of silence”. In his 1905 “Nocturno” (Nocturne) poems he called this essence, which is inseparable from wonder, “silencio profundo” (profound silence) (chapter 3). In fact, I argue that what the poet meant by “music that is only from the *idea*” in “Palabras Liminares” alluded to this peculiar silence.

The nature of silencio profundo will be analyzed in detail in chapter 3 in the light of Heidegger’s vision of the “Nothing”. For now, it will suffice to say that the conception of silencio profundo —while being informed by Hölderlin (Greek tragedy) and by the Orphic-Pythagorean shamanism— can be defined as the “humblest hierophany” (Eliade xvi). The humblest hierophany is the primordial manifestation of “the sacred”, involving “an ‘eternal new beginning,’ an eternal return to an atemporal moment, a desire to abolish history, to blot out the past, to recreate the world” (ibid. xvi-xvii). As an eternal new beginning, silencio profundo is something like the “music” by virtue of which the *idea* manifests itself; it is the perfect harmony of *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. In silencio profundo, the poet and the *idea* are one. During this primeval harmony, time would cease to flow and the “world” would be devoid of all human determination, permitting the “law” of cosmos to manifest itself as such. For Darío, this law is the sacred, which secretly reigns and animates everything which exists (Paz 34). Under the law of the sacred during silencio profundo, all beings in turn adopt sacred forms, namely that of their *souls* or numbers. For instance, language itself reveals its *soul* in the form of a stress-accent returned to its pristine vitality, that is, as if it had never embodied the syllable. In view of this, silencio profundo is not “a nothing”, “absolute absence of sound”, but quite the contrary: it fundamentally co-belongs to poetry and rhythm, “operating” as their “metaphysical ground” while animating all

poetic creation in a mysterious way. This would be its essence. Yet, to affirm its condition of metaphysical ground would be equivalent to assert that language, music and poetry, are themselves metaphysically groundless since they would be what they are only by virtue of silence, of an “absence”.

In this light, due to the impossibility to musically recreate *silencio profundo* by means of poetry, Darío’s true aspiration was only to rejuvenate and relax the language. To do so, he endeavored to achieve the beautiful. It is the beauty made evident in a language which has irremediably lost its *soul* what ultimately “revives” it. It is this contradiction, the mystery of poetry’s being, the absurd fact that there is beauty—in view of language’s groundless essence as represented by *silencio profundo*— what relaxed language’s own anxieties before nothingness and absolute silence. In other words, Darío’s achievable objective was to recreate, not language, but the wonder evoked by *silencio profundo* in poetry. An implicit recognition of this can be found in his criticism to *modernismo*, “De Catulle Mendès. Parnasianos y decadentes” (1888), where Darío expresses his awe before the mystery of his poetic achievements, which according to him had done nothing more than “make artificial roses that smell of spring, therein lies the mystery” (n.p.).

The poet’s awareness of *silencio profundo* can be traced back as early as 1888, the year he published the work that triggered his language revolution, *Azul*.... Still, Darío presented such revolution, as “The Story of My Books” testifies, as founded on rhythm and music (444). Nonetheless, in the text “De Catulle Mendès”, we can find another allusion to silence as the authentic trial of poetry. There Darío invites poets “to be able to write, not as parrots speak, but as the silent eagles do” (n.p.). If he defies his colleagues in such a way, it is because for him there was a way (a “technique of ecstasy”) to access *silencio profundo* and thus a way to turn it into the primordial source of melodic initiation, of poetic

inspiration and, ultimately, of all the authentic beauty that, for him, was to be found in poetry. We will see, however, that the poet confessed his true source only until 1905 in the “Nocturno” poems of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* despite that he knew that the entire “renaissance” of the Spanish language had been based on it.

#### 2.6.4 Darío’s Shamanic Orphic-Pythagoreanism

As Erika Lorentz has explained, in Darío’s syncretic imagination, Pythagoras and Orpheus serve as a complementary, at times intertwined, “dual, musical-religious function” (qtd. in Login Jrade 49). This relationship establishes Pythagoras—who is closely associated with the so-called “music of the spheres”—as the figure capable of expressing “the rhythm of all that exists” (ibid.). Likewise, this bond posits the divine music of Orpheus—which for Darío is *silencio profundo*—as the source of rhythm and of inspiration.

In this light, Darío bestowed upon the poet the religious-musical role of what I have defined as the Pythagorean Shaman thinker-poet, a subtype of Orphic shaman-poet whose figure was unprecedented in the Hispanic poetic tradition. Darío’s interest in raising the Hispanic poetic profession to the level of the sacred can be noted in his 1894 article “De un Libro de Páginas Íntimas” (From a Book of Intimate Pages), where he alludes to his shamanic function by claiming that the poet “is of the race of priests, and in that he rises toward the divine.” (521). As shaman, Darío is “Orphic” because he takes Orpheus as his ideal while having to accomplish the very task of the Thracian: to face “nothingness”, or rather, “silence”. This silence is the death of his beloved Spanish language, which lost its essence: its “soul” as proposed unity between its poetic and philosophical rhythms. Thus, as an Orphic poet, Darío sees language as Eurydice, his wife, for whom he ventures into the

underworld of his own metaphysical silence. His destination is “*silencio profundo*”, the “place” where her *soul* dwells.

As for his character as “Pythagorean”, it is worth mentioning that “Pythagoreanism was not just a poetic device, but a way of life for Darío, whose interest commenced at an early age and continued evolving until his death” (Jensen 7). Not only Darío was aware of Pythagoras’s esoteric condition as the great initiate into the Orphic mysteries—as the second in command of Orpheus—, but also as shaman and as philosopher of rhythm. All of this seduced his sensitivity, imagination, and poetic aspirations. In short, Pythagoras offered him both an aesthetic and a metaphysics of rhythm, with which he learned to conceive the stress-accent as a holy number and *soul*. What’s more, I argue that he also learned how to promote the “syllable” which receives the stress-accent—and which impedes reproducing the latter’s sacred essence in language— by turning it into his shamanic instrument: the drum. Then, by playing the stressed-syllables properly, the tribe can appreciate a particular divination—which simply put would be the “successful” expression of a specific poetic inspiration— on the basis of language’s rhythmic resurgence. This resurgence is associated with the Pythagorean *harmonia mundi* and, as the outcome of the shaman’s descent, would ease the illness of language’s *soul*. Another reason why Pythagoras became the figure to be appropriated in order to face the poetic-philosophical detuning of Spanish is his sacred mathematics. If Darío can be praised to have a special divining power, it is in part due to his Pythagorean mathematical knowledge, which helped him to master the drum. He applied his expertise to poetic meter, allowing him to play the drum unusually for it to manifest any kind of rhythms. Thanks to this Pythagorean indoctrination, Darío ended with the predictability and monotony of traditional metrics by resurrecting elements of the verse such as the *caesura* or the enjambment, and

by applying the forgotten “irregular versification ” (Paz 27 emphasis added), which is the employment of different poetic meters in the same poem. In this way, the shaman turned poetry into a ceaseless polyphony of rhythms and Orphic divinations.

Finally, Darío’s shaman is “thinker” because he has a metaphysical thinking, whose origin can be traced back to the Apollonian “divination power” of the old shaman. Yet, Darío’s metaphysical autonomy is irremediably thwarted as he foresees —just like the Orphic shaman envisions his sacrifice, the shattering of his body— his own death and possible sinking into nothingness. The possibility of nothingness overpowers the shaman thinker-poet and makes him experience his own “shamanic contradiction”. The contradiction arises because his “metaphysical divination power” —as a power which grounds the poet’s cosmos— is nonetheless tied to a finite body which considerably controls that power and ultimately terminates it. It can be said that the shamanic contradiction is the soul-body conflict within the shaman Darío, a struggle which corresponds to his being thinker and poet if the latter is conceived of as the being within himself who drives him below to face forces beyond his control. This contradiction is what triggers the shamanic endeavor of reconciliation by releasing the feeling of existential despair. In chapter 3, in the light of Heidegger’s vision of “anxiety”, we will examine how the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet aspires to such reconciliation while performing his function as “healer” during tragic despair. This feeling, Eliade would say, would come to represent a “magical substance” (52). Then, through the magical substance of existential despair, Darío would enter into his own form of ecstatic trance and would go in search of the purest form of the stress-accent, the *soul*, to his inner underworld. For him, mastering the techniques of ecstasy is no other than knowing how to reach *silencio profundo*, find the *soul*, and transcend his metaphysical void (nothingness). Transcending, however, not by

retrieving the *soul* as such —a feature which links the poet to Orpheus even more, who finally lost Eurydice before emerging from Hades—, but by expressing, through the stress-accent form, that is, via the shamanic drum, a divination of the original melody (*silencio profundo*). In this sense, the shaman penetrates *silencio profundo* only to contemplate the *soul* and to be inspired by it. It is at this point that Darío becomes a “poet”. The original melody, however, as the perfect harmony between *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*, is the fusion between the “beat” of the divining power and the Dionysian rhythms of the body. As such, it represents the unraveling of the shamanic thinker-poet contradiction. In “The Deaf Satyr”, a short tale from *Azul...*, Darío describes the power, the shaman’s “demiurgic virtue” if the poet were able to reproduce *silencio profundo* in language:

When Orpheus strummed his lyre, a smile would come to Apollo’s face, and  
Demeter would shiver with pleasure; the palm trees would release their pollen,  
seeds would burst, lions would softly shake their golden manes. Once, a carnation,  
transformed into a red butterfly, fluttered off its stalk, and a star, fascinated,  
descended and became a fleur-de-lis. (292).

In this passage, the character of the deaf satyr is unable to listen to Orpheus as he plays the music of a language reconciled with the *idea*. Like the deaf satyr, the poet knows that since language is irremediably in conflict, he can’t listen to this music and thus he is incapable of dissolving the shamanic contradiction entirely. Lorentz confirms that this music can only be “experienced” by the poet as an Orphic “unity of feeling” (qtd. in Login Jrade 49.).

Nevertheless, the poet also knows that he can at least relax the contradiction by evoking awe through poetry. This is so because he can experience the Orphic unity of feeling in *silencio profundo*, which enables a source of poetic inspiration with the potential to make the poet play the shamanic drum extraordinarily. That is, in such a way that the thinker’s

“melody”, —the divination itself, the “message” or the “ideas” he utters— is contradictorily played through the “harmony” of the poet’s verbal drum, language’s body.

#### 2.6.5 The Stress-Accent as the New Foundation of Hispanic Poetry: Rhythm and the Pythagorean Shaman Thinker-Poet

In this final section, we shall recognize the foundational role of the stress-accent as the basis of the rhythm that rejuvenated the Hispanic poetic tradition. It is the book of poems and short-tales *Azul...* where Darío laid the ground of the enchantment of Spanish by creating a religious trinity aimed at resurrecting language’s *soul*: the stress accent, the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet, and silencio profundo (Orphic music/music of the spheres/hierophany).

In “The Story of My Books”, Darío confessed that his short-tale “Queen Mab’s Veil” (from *Azul...*) was “a poem in prose”, declaring that more than in any other of his previous attempts he had endeavored to “achieve rhythm and verbal sonority, a transposition of music into words”, a feat “until then unknown in Castilian prose” (443). The transposition process, which reigns almost all of Darío’s work, is aimed at creating a single rhythm between *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. Noé Jitrik explains such a process by pointing out that Darío’s poetic *oeuvre* is a system based on, and ruled by, the stress-accent, which produces the rhythm so characteristic of his work (12). Interestingly, this rhythm would not only spark the music of the poem, but would also generate its meanings and ideas. Jitrik explains:

If, in turn, we consider that the stress-accent is the foundation of a rhythm which brims the syllable, the word, and even the verse, we could understand that it is the junction point, the element that gives cohesiveness to the whole. Hence, we can

conceive that the stress-accent articulates words and, consequently, generates the images (ibid.).

Since for Darío the word is fundamentally the receptacle of the stress-accent, of the *soul*, the latter largely determines, out of the needs and aims of the shamanic divination —whose specific rhythm has been retained by the shaman’s mind thanks to his divining power after his spiritual journey—, which words must be articulated, which must be discarded, and how. This is how the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet plays his drum. He moves himself away from the center as the source of music and meaning, allowing what has been revealed to him to take his “flesh”, his language, almost by itself.<sup>15</sup> In Darío’s poetry, the resulting music and meanings would be the product of rhythmic dictations which would ideally be issued by profundo silencio at the end of his ecstatic journey. Then, “playing” the stressed-syllables “correctly”, so that language tunes itself into those dictations, would be the final stage of the shamanic process and the shaman’s ultimate pursued value. Provided that rhythm determines meaning, the Darian poetic imagery “does not rest on strictly logical associations”, but “results from a reunion, if not entirely illogical, at least paralogical, raised by the rhythmic necessity” (ibid. 17). Following this line of thought, we could say that the stress-accent controls all the creative process, producing a rhythm which would achieve a “paralogical reunion” between *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. By paralogical, Jitrik means that the Darian expression is traversed by a “logic” that often leads to paradox. Specifically, to a paradox in which music and meanings conflate or their relation results ambiguous. In Darío’s paralogical way of thinking, a word can be seen as an expression of

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<sup>15</sup> Exemplary of a similar kind of creation is the 1965 song “Yesterday” —the most covered song in music’s history— which according to Paul McCartney came to him in a dream: “I just woke up and I had the melody in my head” (0:20).

either the poet's thoughts and feelings or of the pure musical qualities of language, or of *both*. In this way, by paralogically controlling the shaman's music and ideas —what he does and “says” at all—, “the stress-accent becomes the lever that moves the artifacts that set subjectivity in motion as the factory of novelty” (ibid. 12). This is the “novelty” that would give the shaman his sacred “subjectivity”. This novelty “enchants” language as he brings a divination back to its body. Then, after having contemplated its *soul* in silencio profundo, he overcomes nothingness through the poem's ability to evoke wonder and mystery. In this way, the shaman reinforces his privileged status before the tribe. But especially, he reestablishes the faith of the tribe in the transcendent by confirming that there is still mystery regarding language's destiny.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Rubén Darío's language revolution is “shamanic” in its origin. The poet assimilated this origin and developed a revolutionary poetics based on music and silence aimed at “healing” the Spanish language. In order to demonstrate my point, it became necessary to expose the poetic influences and belief systems that mediated the poet's interpretation of the shamanist tradition: the French Symbolism (Mallarmé's vision), the Greek tragedy (as seen by Hölderlin), and the esoteric Orphic-Pythagoreanism. Next, I overviewed shamanism, concluding that the figure of the shaman is bonded with the mythical Orpheus and with the thinker Pythagoras, and that both were already Darío's poetic ideals before he commenced the language revolution of *Azul*....

After linking Mallarmé's ideas, Hölderlin's vision of silence, the Orphic-Pythagoreanism and the shamanist tradition, to Darío's specific poetics (“Palabras Liminares”) and metaphysics of language (“Dilucidaciones”), we can assert that he came to

understand that, in order to authentically revive the Spanish language, he had to awaken language's musical being. He called this being, *soul*. But especially, based on “Palabras Liminares”, we can also affirm that he realized that retrieving the *soul* of language implied harmonizing, like the Orphic shaman, the perennial conflict of its poetic and philosophical discourses, which I have identified with *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*.

Likewise, in view of the shamanist tradition, we can claim that, just as the shaman Orpheus lost Eurydice forever, Darío lost the *soul* in the “fallen” form of the stress-accent. At the same time, however, he conceived the latter as the cornerstone of a rhythm with the potential, if not to ontologically transform language, at least to enchant it. By evoking wonder through poetic beauty, the shaman brings to light the mystery of language in spite of its fallenness.

Linked to this, we can in turn acknowledge that, although the retrieval of the *soul* is poetically unattainable insofar as rhythm is unable to achieve a perfect harmony between harmony and melody, Darío always knew that it could nonetheless be experienced in a peculiar silence. This silence is “*silencio profundo*”, which for him expressed the “essence” of poetry and worked as the primordial source of poetic inspiration. This because the stress-accent revealed its sacred form there. For this reason, I concluded that silence, and not music and rhythm, —which are only the outcome—, became for him the key to retrieve the charm of the Spanish language.

In this light, I arrived at what I have called Darío's Shamanist Orphic-Pythagoreanism, defending his new role as “Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet”, his spiritual task of language healer, and his use of a “technique of ecstasy”. I introduced the latter as the “magical substance” of existential despair. This feeling, triggered by the “shamanic contradiction”, would give Darío access to the source of *silencio profundo*, out

of which the enchanting combination of stress-accents of his shamanic drum emerge.

Finally, I explained the foundational role of the stress-accent as the base of rhythm while arguing that it also grounded the shamanic status of the poet.

In the next chapter, I will try to show the poetic evidence of what I have only proposed here. This implies close-reading some of Darío's poems in order to see how they display the shamanist poetics exposed. But above all, this analysis will allow us to appreciate, in the light of Martin Heidegger's thinking, how the shaman-poet performs his ecstasy technique, what it consists of and what its nature is. Simply put, I will try to demonstrate how Darío's spiritual healing task retrieved language's aesthetic and philosophical dimensions.

## Chapter Three

### Darío's Shamanist Poetics and Ecstasy Technique

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter shows evidence of Darío's shamanist poetics. First, I will demonstrate this by close-reading the sonnet "Ama tu Ritmo" (Love Your Rhythm), where Darío delivers a "divination" and plays his shamanic drum (sections 3.2-3.2.2). In this case, the divination thematizes the role of the Pythagorean shaman and the trials of his healing task. Secondly, in the light of Martin Heidegger's reflections on "Anxiety", "Nothing", and "Being", I will demonstrate the three stages of the shaman's ecstasy technique, respectively: the "shamanic contradiction"—which releases the magical substance of existential despair and triggers his spiritual voyage—, the hierophany—or the epiphanic moment of the essence of silence enabled by the shaman's specific condition as "thinker"—, and his abolishing of nothingness through rhythm and through the poem's "demiurgic virtue", enabled by his being "poet" (sections 3.3-3.3.4.2). My evidence will rely on the poems "Nocturno" (1905-1907) for the first two the stages, and on "Caracol" (The Seashell) (1905) and "Palimpsesto" (Palimpsest) (1896) for the third stage. Finally, after having evaluated the evidence, I will conclude the chapter.

#### 3.2 "Ama tu Ritmo" and the New Orphic-Pythagorean Shamanist Poetics

##### 3.2.1 The divination (*ideal melody*)

Probably, the sonnet "Ama tu Ritmo" (Love Your Rhythm), from *Prosas Profanas*, is the poem which more clearly expresses Darío's poetics: the role of the stress-accent as

the foundation of rhythm, of the shamanic function of the poet, and of the renaissance, the healing, of the Spanish language. The sonnet can be read as a poem of shamanic initiation for other initiates, that is, for other poets who want to become shaman-poets and aspire to master the sacred task of reviving the language. With this sonnet, the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet shares his knowledge and reinforces his shamanic status by delivering the divination —the sonnet itself— he has retained in his mind after having diagnosed language’s problem and having descended to the underworld in search of its *soul*. To clarify his divination, I will focus on its *ideal melody* —that is, on the “message” he utters as thinker— before analyzing its *verbal harmony*, where I will try to establish connections between the two, acknowledging that the shaman’s goal is to reproduce the unity and wonder he already experienced in *silencio profundo*. The divination, whose English translation does evoke the optimistic tone of the original sonnet in Spanish, begins as follows:

Ama tu ritmo y ritma tus acciones  
bajo su ley, así como tus versos;  
eres un universo de universos  
y tu alma una fuente de canciones.

Love your rhythm, and rhythm your actions  
under its law, as well as your verses;  
you are a universe of universes  
and your soul a fount of songs.

In *The Siren and the Seashell*, Octavio Paz comments the first verse of the sonnet, “Love your rhythm...”, stating that “[t]he poetry of the Spanish language had never before dared to affirm such a thing... nor had it seen in rhythm the way, not to salvation, but to reconciliation between man and the cosmos” (29). Consistent with Paz, we can succinctly put the divination’s melody as follows: rhythm is “the source of poetic creation and key to the universe” (ibid. 27). As conveyed by the melody of the first strophe, the initiation into

the shamanic spiritual task begins by exposing the main condition: “Love your rhythm...”. If love is the main trial of the initiate is because, just like his Orphic ideal, only by virtue of the initiate’s love he will run the risk of being shattered during his ecstatic, and yet despaired, descent while the magical substance completes its effects. But especially, the initiate must be in love with rhythm itself because it is the spiraling staircase through which he and the divination are to come back.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, he implicitly manifests that the initiate must cultivate himself into metrical knowledge, which is basic to master the drum and to create a solid rhythmic staircase.

In the following verses, the thinker-poet says: “and rhythm your actions/ under its law, as well as your verses;”. In addition to love, the shamanic initiate must learn to perform the healing treatment of language by tuning his “actions” and “verses” into the “law” of rhythm. Metonymically, the shaman says “actions” because the poet possesses the semantically well-established verbs of language, with which he exerts the “fundamental” *communicative doing* of the latter (Sodré 294, original emphasis). Therefore, they would correspond to *ideal melody*, to the Pythagorean-Apollonian beats of philosophy, and to the shaman’s divining power. Likewise, such an attunement must include the “verses” of the initiate, which are exemplary of the infinite Dionysian rhythms of language’s body, which are bonded to *verbal harmony*.

Then, when the shaman mentions the law of rhythm, he alludes to the sacred, which appears during the greatest of rhythms: *silencio profundo*. Then, by attuning both the melody and harmony of language under the “law” of the sacred, language tunes itself into

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in his text “Consejo” (Advice), Darío himself warned young people who “are born with the divine gift of poets” that in the poet’s existence there are “many serious tasks to fulfill” (n.p). Then he emphasizes the fundamental role of love in poetic vocation: “First, it is to love the lyre above all things, for it is the gift of God; then it is to love the love and faith” (13).

silencio profundo and recovers its *soul*, its sacred musical being. As a result, the initiate also becomes music, fusing himself with the *idea* through his poetry. Therefore, the shaman makes the initiate aware of his own authentic being: “you are a universe of universes”, as well as that of his stress-accent: “your soul a fount of songs”. He alludes to the stress-accent because Darío, and ourselves, know about the actual mechanism. We know that although the shaman says that the law is that of rhythm, he means to that of the irremediably fallen form of the *soul*: the stress-accent, since the rhythm of the poem depends on it. The second stanza goes as follows:

La celeste unidad que presupones  
hará brotar en ti mundos diversos,  
y al resonar tus números dispersos  
pitagoriza en tus constelaciones.

The celestial unity you presuppose  
will cause to sprout in your diverse worlds,  
and upon echoing your dispersed  
numbers, pythagorize in your constellations.

The shaman develops the divination by alluding to the “celestial unity you presuppose”, which is the unity of man and the *idea*, whose manifestness takes place only during silencio profundo. If this unity is “presupposed”, it is because faith and love together represent the shaman’s psychopomp. They lead his journey until he encounters the unity. Yet, he anticipates the arrival to the promised land of silencio profundo, where the *soul* lies, letting the initiate know that, once there, the *idea* will cause “diverse worlds” to “sprout” in him. In fact, this is the algid moment of existential despair because, as we will see, this is the instant in which the shaman, aware of the essence of silence, recovers his demiurgic virtue. Moreover, in such moment, and by virtue of his divining power, he will turn into the mouthpiece of a superior force. Here, the shaman’s mind is open to capture the divination. That is why he says that the celestial unity, by “echoing” the initiate’s “dispersed numbers”,

namely his stress-accents, will “pythagorize” in his “constellations”, a metaphor which would allude to his words. In this way, Pythagorically, the unity imprints rhythm in the shaman’s mind, which is why the initiate’s Pythagorean knowledge becomes necessary.

This is the following stanza:

Escucha la retórica divina  
del pájaro del aire y la nocturna  
irradiación geométrica adivina;

Listen to the divine  
rhetoric of the airborne bird and divine  
the nocturnal geometric irradiation;

“Listen to the divine rhetoric of the airborne bird...”. Here, the shaman emphasizes his divinatory power as “seer”. Especially, his ability “to read signs in the flight patterns of birds or in the entrails of sacrificial animals” (McGahey 34). Then, by virtue of these signs, he can divine the gods’ messages. The shaman makes the initiate aware that, in fact, the revelatory power of *silencio profundo* lies dormant in all things, only that he must master the art of listening first. In the last verse, “and divine the nocturnal geometric irradiation”, the shaman is more explicit when describing *silencio profundo*. The latter is bonded with the night, with unity, harmony and mathematics (“geometric”), and with energy (“irradiation”), with the force of the *soul*. To conclude, the sonnet expresses:

mata la indiferencia taciturna  
y engarza perla y perla cristalina  
en donde la verdad vuelca su urna.

kill taciturn indifference  
and link pearl after crystalline pearl  
where truth tips her urn.

When the shaman says “kill taciturn indifference” he alludes to the Orphic task of overcoming nothingness, specifically the effects of the magical substance of despair during the trance. This will be the initiate’s most difficult endeavor because, in addition to the

shaman's openness to retain the divination, implies the return journey, which cannot be completed without a poem. In order to build the staircase-song, the initiate must know that the shaman "links pearl after crystalline pearl", which means that he plays his drum to articulate the divination. The stress accents are called "pearls" because their selective character, their divinatory-sacred origin, makes them as beautiful as pearls, with the difference that they are to be found in the nocturnal sea of *silencio profundo*. Finally, the line "where truth tips her urn" alludes to the Pythagorean precision with which the shaman must order the pearls. The pearls must be like the steps of the ascent towards the surface—which would be the final verse of the poem— where the truth of the divination is revealed.

### 3.2.2 The drum (*verbal harmony*)

What follows is a brief analysis of the performance of the shamanic drum in order to see the extent to which it managed to link *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. Next, we will appreciate the syllabic division of the sonnet with the stressed-syllables in bold. Additionally, we will see the poetic meter, namely the type of hendecasyllables achieved. As I have noted, poetic meters give verses specific rhythms, which would not only be analogous to those of music —ballad, rock and roll, rap, etc., depending on the regularity of the stress-accents— but could also be associated with specific meanings. For instance, the iambic pentameter —with its non-stressed-stressed syllable pattern: × / × / × / × / × / — is said to emulate the heartbeat. This would mean that the poet's message comes directly from his heart. In "Ama tu Ritmo", one would expect a correlation between its music and the exposed principles of the shamanist poetics.

According to Almudena Mejías Alonso (241-242), the accentual scheme of the sonnet is the following<sup>17</sup>:

Verse:	Syllabic division:	Stressed-syllables:	Type of rhythm:
1	<b>A</b> -ma-tu- <b>rit</b> -mo-y- <b>rit</b> -ma-tus-a- <b>ccio</b> -nes	1, 4, 6, 10	Sapphic
2	<b>ba</b> -jo-su- <b>ley</b> , a- <b>sí</b> -co-mo-tus- <b>ver</b> -sos	1, 4, 6, 7, 10	Sapphic
3	<b>e</b> -res-un-u-ni- <b>ver</b> -so-de u-ni- <b>ver</b> -sos	1, 6, 10	Emphatic
4	y-tu <b>al</b> -ma <b>u</b> -na- <b>fuen</b> -te-de-can- <b>cio</b> -nes.	2, 3, 5, 10	Heroic
5	La-ce- <b>les</b> -te u-ni- <b>dad</b> -que-pre-su- <b>po</b> -nes	3, 6, 10	Melodic
6	ha- <b>rá</b> -bro- <b>tar</b> -en- <b>ti</b> -mun-dos-di- <b>ver</b> -sos	2, 4, 6, 7, 10	Heroic
7	y al-re-so- <b>nar</b> -tus- <b>nú</b> -me-ros-dis- <b>per</b> -sos	4, 6, 10	Sapphic
8	pi-ta-go- <b>ri</b> -za en-tus-cons-te-la- <b>cio</b> -nes.	4, 10	Sapphic
9	Es- <b>cu</b> -cha-la-re- <b>tó</b> -ri-ca-di- <b>vi</b> -na	2, 6, 10	Heroic
10	del- <b>pá</b> -ja-ro-del- <b>ai</b> -re y-la-noc- <b>tur</b> -na	2, 6, 10	Heroic
11	i-rra-dia- <b>ción</b> -ge-o- <b>mé</b> -tri-ca a-di- <b>vi</b> -na;	4, 6, 10	Sapphic
12	<b>ma</b> -ta-la in-di-fe- <b>ren</b> -cia-ta-ci- <b>tur</b> -na	1, 6, 10	Emphatic
13	y en- <b>gar</b> -za- <b>per</b> -la y- <b>per</b> -la-cris-ta- <b>li</b> -na	2, 4, 6, 10	Heroic
14	en- <b>don</b> -de-la-ver- <b>dad</b> - <b>vuel</b> -ca-su <b>ur</b> -na	2, 6, 7, 10	Heroic

As shown by the table, there are four types of hendecasyllabic rhythms in the poem: Sapphic, emphatic, heroic, and melodic. Interestingly, each can be said to be harmonized with the sonnet's *ideal melody* if we understand the latter as the expression of the three motifs of the divination: rhythm, the task of the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet, and silencio profundo. Consistent with the love-rhythm motif, the Sapphic rhythm of the poem

<sup>17</sup> I have corrected part of the analysis of Mejías Alonso, who made mistakes in the designation of some rhythms.

reproduces in Spanish the characteristic musicality of Sappho's poetry. This is so because the Sapphic verse, with its lethargic rhythmic base on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> syllable, creates a "slow-paced, tender rhythm" (Lobo 79). This is the rhythm which in "Ode to Aphrodite" invokes the goddess of love in order to recover Sappho's beloved. Likewise, this rhythm is used to describe *silencio profundo* as it "echoes" the "dispersed numbers" of the shaman and while it "pythagorizes" his "constellations". This connection of music and meaning reinforces the loving, and even erotic, relationship between the shaman and the *soul* of language. There is, however, a "melodic" pattern in the fifth verse, "la celeste unidad...". The melodic rhythm, with an accent in the third, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> syllable, is a "smooth, harmonious and peaceful rhythm" (ibid.). Its melodic nature, thus, would perfectly fit with the vision of *silencio profundo* as the "music of the *idea*". Finally, when the shaman alludes to his own being and to his spiritual task, he uses the "vehement, energetic, swift, emphatic rhythm" (Garcia-Abrines 1113) as well as the "plain, balanced and uniform" heroic one (Lobo 79). With the sententious rhythm produced by the stress-accent on the first, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> syllable, the former bonds the verses: "you are a universe of universes" and "kill the taciturn indifference". By linking these two verses, the shaman creates a rhythm not only of sound but also of ideas between the initial and final stanza. This bond gives the poem cohesiveness and it can be said that summarizes it. By virtue of the emphatic rhythm, the second verse makes the reader evoke the former in order to realize that both can be semantically associated. In effect, in view of the initiate's original being as "universe of universes", there is no reason for "taciturn indifference". Therefore, the latter must be "killed" all the more. Finally, the heroic rhythm, which is the more accentuated—with stresses landing even in five syllables (6<sup>th</sup> verse)—, is linked to Orpheus's heroic task. The heroic organization of the energy solemnizes the shaman's Orphic facet as demiurgic

musician (verses 4 and 6), as shaman-soothsayer (verses 9 and 10) and as underworld traveler-poet (verses 13 and 14). In this view, we can say that “Ama tu Ritmo” is exemplary of Darío’s effort to achieve a more intimate relationship between music and meaning, between poetry and prose-philosophy. Yet, the question of how he retrieves the divination, of why silencio profundo is the greatest inspiration source, of why the latter is “the melodious introduction that flows from the flute” (“I Seek a Form”, 1896), is still in the air. To answer this, it is necessary to analyze the poet’s technique of ecstasy, so that the actual mechanism of the shamanic spiritual journey can be grasped. Here is where Heidegger’s philosophy of Being will help us.

### 3.3 The Pythagorean Shaman Thinker-Poet and his Ecstasy Technique

#### 3.3.1 Heidegger and the Orphic Poetics

As explained by George Steiner in *On Difficulty*, Stéphane Mallarmé’s 1890s interpretation of the history of Western poetry is analogous to Martin Heidegger’s 1920s reading of Western philosophy (43). Both the French poet and the German thinker agreed that their respective fields had long forgotten their “essence”. For Mallarmé, poetic tradition failed when it forgot the magical power of Orphic music, while for Heidegger, philosophy had gone wrong while leaving the mystery of “Being” “unthought”. As for the origins of these histories of oblivion, Steiner explains, it is possible to assert that what Homer is to Mallarmé’s evaluation of poetry, Plato and Aristotle are to Heidegger’s diagnosis of metaphysics (ibid.).

In *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language*, Gerald Bruns establishes a more specific connection between the interest of the *fin de siècle* poets, mainly French, in music, and Heidegger’s concern on “Being”. According to Bruns, both were preoccupied, in their

own way, with a common issue: the truth of being (7). The truth of being, as Octavio Paz suggests, would be a “truth” both granted and thwarted by language. He explains that although language makes us participate in “the musical animation of the world” by granting us awareness of being —of the “is” of everything which is—, “it is also discord” (33). This is so because “[t]he distance between the name and the thing named, the meaning, is a consequence of the separation between man and the world” (ibid. 33-34). This leads Paz to conclude that language is “description and interpretation of the world” (ibid. 34) and never the world itself: being. In face of this, finding ways to make language transcend language’s instrumentalization, as reflected by the barrier of meaning, was the concern of not only the French symbolists, but also Heidegger’s. Their objective was to appreciate the truth of being, the truth of the thing named beyond its linguistic envelope. But to appreciate it through language itself. As confirmed by Bruns: “[t]he poet’s concern, in this context, is thus not with a language of signs but with what Heidegger calls ‘the language of being’, which is, we may say, the language of Orpheus. ‘The word must be the thing it represents’” (7).

If Heidegger invokes language is because, just like Darío and Mallarmé before him, he was convinced that the truth of “Being” —which he capitalized to differentiate it from everything which is: “being”— can only be fully revealed by reestablishing the essential “belonging-together” of what in *On the Way to Language* he called “thinking” and “poetizing” (90). This implied restoring the relationship that poetry and philosophy had before Plato’s rational metaphysics (Hoeller 12). But while the poets invoked Orpheus, Heidegger appealed to other figures associated with shamanism and Orphic practices: the Presocratics (Heraclitus) and Hölderlin (Steiner 43; Stults 4). In both, Heidegger found the

illuminations of authentic existence that, according to him, are to be found in a language close enough to one that has tuned itself into Being.

### 3.3.2 The Shamanic Contradiction, the Magical Substance of Despair, and the Journey to the Underworld in the “Nocturnos” in the light of Anxiety

#### 3.3.2.1 Anxiety as the Veil of the Nothing

For Heidegger, the human being is *Dasein*, a German word which in English means existence or “being-there” (Rivera, n.p.). *Dasein* is the only being who, according to Heidegger, possesses an “understanding of being” [Seinsverständnis] (Nicholson 319). This extraordinary ability makes him transcend the “nothing”, which means that he stands out from it thanks to his concept of being. Only on the basis of his metaphysical transcendence can *Dasein* encounter beings as such, theorize, and draw concepts from them. In “What is Metaphysics?” (1929), Heidegger points out that, as a metaphysical being, *Dasein* escapes sinking into nothingness, which traditional philosophy had always opposed to being, defining it as “unformed matter”, pre-world, “nonbeing” (94). Similar to the shamanic contradiction, however, an overwhelming paradox structures *Dasein*: death lurks behind his dominance over being. His transcendent condition is irremediably contracted. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger described *Dasein* as a “being-towards-death” [Sein zum Tode]. This expression means that death is his “ownmost possibility” insofar as he inevitably heads towards his end, towards his “absolute impossibility” (354 and 294). As put by John Caputo, “Being sustains [Dasein] and prevents its falling back into the abyss of Nothingness.” (30). Heidegger believes that *Dasein* cannot experience his own death, so that it only heralds itself as a possibility throughout his life. For this reason, he asserts, *Dasein* can occasionally feel anxiety (WIM, 93).

For Heidegger, the “original anxiety” manifests itself as an expression of *Dasein*’s repressed awareness of his finitude (ibid. 90). He feels anxiety as if a valve at his core opened itself up exposing the structural fissure of his being: his mortality. The German thinker explains that, unlike other feelings, anxiety originates in *Dasein* himself and not in other beings (BT, 395). For instance, he experiences fear as a result of external causes that he can determine well: other beings or circumstances that somehow threaten him (WIM, 88). Contrastingly, anxiety does not have a particular cause (ibid.). In fear, likewise, *Dasein* endeavors to rescue himself, whereas anxiety does not demand any response at all; a singular calm and lucidity pervades it (ibid)

Interestingly, it is the algid moment of anxiety which leads him to a mood close enough and far enough from death as to have a taste of nothingness. As Heidegger puts it, anxiety let the nothing be noticed, claiming that while experiencing it “all things and ourselves sink into indifference” (ibid.). The Chilean philosopher, Heidegger’s student and translator, Jorge Eduardo Rivera, clarifies that anxiety dissolves all purpose and meaning, making “all beings disappear. Things no longer appeal to us or interest us. Anxiety leaves us alone with ourselves in the openness of a world made of Nothing” (9:16-11:27). Rivera notes that, as Heidegger saw it, anxiety shows our openness to Being, our contingency as beings, by putting us face to face with a power that overpowers us (ibid). This feeling makes *Dasein*’s “authentic being” glitter while exhibiting his truth as being, Anxiety strips him of his shell of meanings, of language, to show something like his bare soul. It makes him contrasts himself with the nothing, with the pure background of Being (ibid).

Heidegger specifies that anxiety, while concealing beings —by “nihilating” them, that is, by reducing them to “nothing”, yet not literally making them disappear— permits *Dasein* to

experience the absence of being (WIM 90). Then, what appears instead would be “Being”, its truth.

#### 3.3.2.1.1 The Shamanic Contradiction and the Magical Substance of Despair

Three poems are titled “Nocturno” in Darío’s work, two of which belong to his 1905 poetry book *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza* and the third to the 1907 *El Canto Errante*. The three “Nocturnos” have a similar divination (motif), tone, and atmosphere. In them, the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet addresses the theme of insomnia, silence, and existential despair in the face of death and nothingness, taking the night as the most propitious moment for poetic creation. They are poems with a desperate and melancholic tone, and yet pervaded by a vital spirit, as reflected by rhythm, by its fulgurating and bold imagery, and by the evocative analogies traced between life and dream, vigil and sleep. As for their style, Paz points out that they are “written in a sober and reticent language, oscillating between monologue and confession” (47)

Below, I close-read fragments of the first two “Nocturnos” in the light of Heidegger’s vision of anxiety. The German thinker will clarify how Darío’s turned despair into a shamanic technique. The first “Nocturno”, along with its English translation, goes as follows:

##### Nocturno

Quiero expresar mi angustia en versos que abolida  
dirán mi juventud de rosas y de ensueños,  
y la desfloración amarga de mi vida  
por un vasto dolor y cuidados pequeños.

Y el viaje a un vago Oriente por entrevistados barcos,  
y el grano de oraciones que floreció en blasfemia,  
y los azoramientos del cisne entre los charcos  
y el falso azul nocturno de inquerida bohemia.

Lejano clavicordio que en silencio y olvido  
no diste nunca al sueño la sublime sonata,  
huérfano esquite, árbol insigne, oscuro nido  
que suavizó la noche de dulzura de plata...

Esperanza olorosa a hierbas frescas, trino  
del ruiseñor primaveral y matinal,  
azucena tronchada por un fatal destino,  
rebusca de la dicha, persecución del mal...

El ánfora funesta del divino veneno  
que ha de hacer por la vida la tortura interior,  
la conciencia espantable de nuestro humano cieno  
y el horror de sentirse pasajero, el horror

de ir a tientas, en intermitentes espantos,  
hacia lo inevitable, desconocido, y la  
pesadilla brutal de este dormir de llantos  
¡de la cual no hay más que Ella que nos despertará!

Nocturne

I want to express my anguish in verses that speak  
of my vanished youth, a time of dreams and roses,  
and the bitter defloration of my life  
by many small cares and one vast aching sorrow.

And the voyage to a dim orient in half-seen ships,  
the seeds of prayer that flowered in blasphemies,  
the bewilderment of a swan among the puddles,  
the false nocturnal blue of a sick Bohemia.

Far-off harpsichord, silent and forgotten,  
that never gave my dreams the sublime sonata;  
orphan skiff, heraldic tree, dark nest  
which the night made lovely with its silver light—

Hope still aromatic with fresh herbs; the trill  
of the nightingale in the morning in the spring;  
the white lily cut down by a fatal destiny;  
the search for happiness, and evil's persecutions—

And the dismal amphora with its divine poison  
that causes the inner torments of this life;  
the fearful knowledge of our human mire;  
and the horror of knowing that we are transitory,

the horror of walking blindly, among alarms,  
toward the unknowable, toward the inevitable;  
and the brute nightmares that rack our weeping sleep,  
from which no one but She can wake us up!

From the first stanza, the shaman thinker-poet clearly reveals the divination. He wants to express his “anguish”, manifest his pain in view of the lost youth and shattered dreams. In short, he wants to poetically revolve around the tragic feeling of life. In fact, the contradiction of life, its “being-towards-death”, is Darío’s shamanic contradiction. Like *Dasein*, the poet is subjected to forces beyond his control until the end of his life despite his metaphysical transcendence. In this “Nocturno”, the force beyond is death, which the shaman calls “She” (“Ella”) (Login Jade 22) quite significantly in the last verse. But “She” can also be said to be language’s *soul*, his beloved, who awaits for him in silencio profundo. In any case, by presenting herself as a possibility, “She” releases the magical substance of despair. In the fifth stanza, this substance is alluded by the oxymoron: “divino veneno”, “divine poison”. Like the “original anxiety”, the magical substance derives from the shaman himself. Therefore, it is “invisible”, for it is not an object but an experience. “She” releases it because of the shaman’s “horror of knowing that we are transitory”, which is why he calls it “poison”. Yet, the magical substance is also “divine”, since it comprises all his magical (*verbal harmony*) and divinatory power (*ideal melody*). Following the South-American shamanism, we could say that the shaman’s poems concretize such power and transfer it to the initiates from “mouth to mouth”. This would proceed while they read the shaman’s work. In this way, they would listen to the poetic voice of the master. But especially, if the magical substance is “divine”, it is because, like anxiety, it has the power to make being recede towards nothingness. This can be noted in the second stanza, where Darío’s dreamland, Orient, appears as dimmed (*vago*), his “prayers” —his faith, especially

in Christianity — turns into “blasphemies”, the swan —symbol of the *modernista* beauty— is anxious (azorado), and the “nocturnal blue” of Bohemia, its sky, is rendered as “false” and “sick”.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in the third strophe, poetry does not escape the nihilating power of the magical substance. The shaman depicts it as a “far-off harpsichord”, “silent and forgotten”, unable to play the “the sublime sonata”, the Orphic music. Let us remember that anxiety allows the authentic self to appear while its surroundings become nothing. In this way, the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet, while being intoxicated with the magical substance, loses his metaphysics of cosmic rhythm and no longer sees beauty and harmony. He finds himself face to face with his own ontological truth, alone with his openness and contingency. Transcending the barrier of meaning in order to understand the thing as it is, implies losing his own shamanic transcendence. But additionally, it entails enduring the shamanic contradiction and abolishing nothingness. As Caputo’s Heideggerian terms put it, it involves enduring the contradiction of being the founder of “Being” on the one hand, and being finitely based —that is, on nothingness— by the Being he himself founded, on the other (29).

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<sup>18</sup> In this strophe, the poet displays the cosmopolite and exotic elements and imagery typical of *modernista* aesthetics.

### 3.3.2.1.2 The Effects of the Magical Substance of Despair: the Descent to the Underworld

Seek the Fount's occult origin in the living grotto  
where the internal music of its crystal is unleashed,  
next to the weeping tree and the rock that feels.  
Be guided by the mysterious echo of its murmur,  
climb the rough crags of pride,  
come down through constancy and descend into the abyss

...  
The origin is in yourself.

—Rubén Darío, “La Fuente” (The Fount) (1896)

In the following “Nocturno”, we can appreciate the effects of the magical substance while leading the shaman’s spiritual journey through his inner underworld towards silencio profundo. Moments before his “death”, the shaman falls into a sleepless, silent, night in which vigil and sleep, the tangible and the hallucination, merge. With his perceptual abilities dilated due to the progressive sinking of being into nothingness, he performs an analysis of his mind and body before becoming the musical instruments of the Orphic divination. The poem, which would ideally complete the shaman’s sacrifice, is the following:

#### Nocturno

Silencio de la noche, doloroso silencio  
nocturno... ¿Por qué el alma tiembla de tal manera?  
Oigo el zumbido de mi sangre,  
dentro de mi cráneo pasa una suave tormenta.  
¡Insomnio! No poder dormir, y, sin embargo,  
soñar. Ser la auto-pieza  
de disección espiritual, ¡el auto-Hamlet!  
Diluir mi tristeza  
en un vino de noche  
en el maravilloso cristal de las tinieblas...  
Y me digo: ¿a qué hora vendrá el alba?  
Se ha cerrado una puerta...

Ha pasado un transeúnte...  
Ha dado el reloj trece horas... ¡Si será Ella!...

### Nocturne

Silence of the night, a sad, nocturnal  
silence—Why does my soul tremble so?  
I hear the humming of my blood,  
and a soft storm passes through my brain  
Insomnia! Not to be able to sleep, and yet  
to dream. I am the autospecimen  
of spiritual dissection, the auto-Hamlet!  
To dilute my sadness  
in the wine of the night  
in the marvelous crystal of the dark—  
And I ask myself: When will the dawn come?  
Someone has closed a door—  
Someone has walked past—  
The clock has rung three—If only it were She!

We can note that Darío expresses more sensations than feelings and ideas. The shaman's journey is less "spiritual" than physical because he is at the threshold of the dwelling of the *soul*: silencio profundo, where his body, like that of his ancestor Orpheus, runs the risk of being shattered. Let us remember McGahey's words when he said that "[t]he mind, the head" —of the Orphic poet — "breaks loose from the instrument, the skeletal frame strung with sinews" (xvi). Accordingly, the shaman manifests, as Orpheus —and even as Christ in the Olive Garden hours before his crucifixion— the bodily effects of existential despair: dolor ("pain"), "doloroso silencio" (painful silence) —the translation says "sad". Contrary to the "vasto dolor" (the vast aching sorrow) of the first "Nocturno", which is a rather existential pain, the synesthetic "doloroso silencio" is physical. Silence, for its part, takes a central role in the poem. This is so because, as Heidegger would say, the more the shaman ventures into the abyss enabled by his openness to Being, the more Being is silenced. This silencing, however, widens his perceptual abilities. This occurs because his senses, by recognizing the absence of Being, instinctively exacerbate. At this point, the shaman is

fine-tuned with himself, sensing all his being as he loses his Pythagorean rhythmic cosmovision. He feels his soul: “Why does my soul tremble so?”. But like in anxiety, his mind ignores the cause, for the magical substance has infested and undermined its cause-effect schemes. He senses, like in a cold fever, the “soft storm” of blood of his head. The latter is about to break loose from his body as a result of his “spiritual dissection”. Turned himself into his own “Hamlet”, the shaman dissects himself with a question that, nevertheless, he does not utter: “To be, or not to be (that is the question)”. Darío’s immersion into the depths of nothingness, Paz says, was unconsciously feared and desired, pointing out that this contradiction accompanied him throughout his life: “[h]e was living without a fixed course, scourged by anxiety; later he fell into lethargies that were ‘brutal nightmares’ and he saw death alternately as either a bottomless well or a glorious awakening” (47). Then, solving the mystery of being and nothingness —indeed, the mystery of the shamanic contradiction properly— makes him desire to dilute his sadness in the “wine of the night”, which is of course an allusion to the wine-god Dionysos. But he wants to dilute, in fact, his entire being, for he evokes the “marvelous crystal of the dark”, Lethe’s enervating waters, one of the rivers of the underworld. And yet, the shaman then implores: “When will the dawn come?”. He asks, at the same time, for the coming of Apollo, who has abandoned him into nothingness. The shaman suddenly finds himself alone without his Apollonian psychopomp. He is lost in his spiritual journey. The imploration to Apollo symbolizes the impossible reconciliation of the brother-gods, of being (Apollo) and nothing (Dionysos) other than the unity of *silencio profundo*. This is the insurmountable tragic feeling of life. This moment must be read as the algid moment of despair because it represents the shaman’s loss of faith. Indeed, his imploration can be said to be a distant echo of Christ’s cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”,

which according to the Gospels he uttered moments before his death. Finally, in the last verses, the last noises of the night commence to fade: “Someone has closed a door— Someone has walked past”. It seems the time has finally come: “The clock has rung three”. This is the moment of *silencio profundo*, of the final dissolution of the shamanic contradiction. The moment in which “She” may appear: “—If only it were She!”

### 3.3.3 The Nothing as the Veil of Being

We will now examine Heidegger’s vision of the “Nothing”. This will help us to understand the nature of *silencio profundo*. That is, its essence, not as absence of sound, but as the revelatory moment of rhythm and beauty. I argue that Darío understood this essence, an awareness that his condition as “thinker” would have granted him.

In his postscript to “What is Metaphysics?” (1929), Heidegger explained the nothing by the following metaphor: the “veil of Being” [der Schleier des Seins] (238). That the nothing is the veil of Being means that contrary to what metaphysics had believed since Plato when it asked: “Why is there something rather than nothing?”—namely, that there was clearly “being”, or rather, presence, awareness of beings—, Being as foundation only manifested itself in the nothing.

With the said metaphor, Heidegger proposed the nothing as the ground of being instead of *Dasein*. Heidegger realized that the true identity of the nothing was Being itself, for it worked as “metaphysical foundation” of being. In “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger stated: “[t]he nothing does not remain as the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself belonging to the being of beings” (94). Apparently, this idea was conceivable because the experience of nothingness first granted the possibility of being and of *Dasein*’s metaphysical transcendence as the inquiring being. Heidegger specifies:

Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of *Dasein* can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder —the manifestness of the nothing— does the “why?” loom before us. Only because the “why” is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds and ground things (ibid. 95-96).

In Heidegger’s vision, the origin of being as concept, and hence of all metaphysical thinking, can be found in the nothing. This is so because he saw that the very possibility of beings and of the “why?” question —which, as the fundamental question of philosophy, discloses those beings in the first place while giving them intelligibility— is granted by the previous experience of the nothing. It is because *Dasein* can experience nothingness, absence of meaning, that he realizes that being is itself without metaphysical ground. But especially, it is the uncanny persistence of being, its lingering above the abyss of nothingness, that puzzles and marvels him. Nothingness makes *Dasein* evoke wonder, awakening curiosity in him —the question of why?— by virtue of which the edifice of metaphysics is built. This is how the nothing would show the face of Being itself. The nothing would unveil it as such, as pure “background of possibilities” or of potential meaning (Käufer 483). For Heidegger, it is the receding of beings —along with the hitherto transcendent *Dasein*— towards the virgin background of nonbeing, what makes them nonetheless manifest their “full but heretofore concealed strangeness”(WIM 90). That beings become strange means that only against the background of a meaningless world can their very presence —for they are still there— contrast and glitter: “In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings —and

not nothing” (ibid.). That is why it can be said that *Dasein* can experience the “manifestness of beings” for the first time again (ibid. 91).

### 3.3.3.1 Silencio Profundo

“Music begins inside human beings and so must any instruction, not at the instrument, not with the first finger, nor with the first position, not with this or that chord. The starting point is one’s own stillness. Listening to oneself. The ‘being ready for music’: listening to one’s own heartbeat and breathing.”

—Carl Orff, 1932

In the second “Nocturno” of *Cantos de Vida y Esperanza*, Darío finally confesses the true source of all his poetry, of all his rhythm, imagery, and in fact of all the shamanic renewal of Hispanic poetry aimed at resurrecting Spanish: silencio profundo. The latter can be said to bear a similar “essence” to Heidegger’s nothing: the “essence of silence” is no other than the evidence that rhythm is merely the absence of a previous experience: silence. Only when the Pythagorean shaman thinker-poet experiences the absence of music, can the total strangeness of the stress-accent as it vibrates in the void make him evoke wonder. This is so because he bears witness to its manifestness for the first time, that is, as *soul*. Then, his encounter with the sacred inspires him, granting him an exceptional rhythmic divination which he now must play in his drum. The source of the divinations is confessed as follows:

#### Nocturno

Los que auscultasteis el corazón de la noche,  
los que por el insomnio tenaz habéis oído  
el cerrar de una puerta, el resonar de un coche  
lejano, un eco vago, un ligero ruido...

En los instantes del silencio misterioso,  
cuando surgen de su prisión los olvidados,  
en la hora de los muertos, en la hora del reposo,  
¡sabréis leer estos versos de amargor impregnados!...

Como en un vaso vierto en ellos mis dolores

de lejanos recuerdos y desgracias funestas,  
y las tristes nostalgias de mi alma, ebria de flores,  
y el duelo de mi corazón, triste de fiestas.

Y el pesar de no ser lo que yo hubiera sido,  
la pérdida del reino) que estaba para mí,  
el pensar que un instante pude no haber nacido,  
¡y el sueño que es mi vida desde que yo nací!

Todo esto viene en medio del silencio profundo  
en que la noche envuelve la terrena ilusión,  
y siento como un eco del corazón del mundo  
que penetra y conmueve mi propio corazón.

#### Nocturne

You that have heard the heartbeat of the night,  
you that have heard, in the long, sleepless hours,  
a closing door, the rumble of distant wheels,  
a vague echo, a wandering sound from somewhere:

you, in the moments of mysterious silence,  
when the forgotten ones issue from their prison—  
in the hour of the dead, in the hour of repose—  
will know how to read the bitterness in my verses.

I fill them, as one would fill a glass, with all  
my grief for remote memories and black misfortunes,  
the nostalgia of my flower-intoxicated soul  
and the pain of a heart grown sorrowful with fêtes;

with the burden of not being what I might have been,  
the loss of the kingdom that was awaiting me,  
the thought of the instant when I might not have been born  
and the dream my life has been ever since I was!

All this has come in the midst of that boundless silence  
in which the night develops earthly illusions,  
and I feel as if an echo of the world's heart  
had penetrated and disturbed my own.

In the first verse, the shaman addresses those who, like him, are aware of the essence of silence. That is, he speaks to other shaman-poets who, from their position as seers, as “thinkers”, as enlightened beings, are able to “auscultar” (auscultate) the “heartbeat of the

night”. Darío uses the word “auscultasteis”, which in Spanish means “to inquire, to investigate”. So, he refers to those who have been able to grasp the truth of being or, better said, who have known how to open themselves to being and poetry and thus have been able to experience their sacred forms. Only they will understand why he evokes such trivial things: “a closing door, the rumble of distant wheels, a vague echo, a wandering sound from somewhere”. In fact, those who auscultate the night must know about the beauty that the simplest things acquire “in the moments of mysterious silence”. In effect, in these moments, beings emerge out of the nothing like “the forgotten ones issue from their prison”, that is, from the concealment of their profane inauthenticity. But most importantly, their own emergence “retrieves” the shaman’s original “demiurgic virtue”. It turned out that this power, like the Orphic music, is not executed but only experienced while beings reemerge out of the nothing. Such a moment, for sure, is “the hour of the dead, in the hour of repose”, since being is silenced and withdraws itself. But above all, those who auscultate “will know how to read the bitterness of [his] verses”. This is so because they know about the shamanic healing process, his method and despaired journey. Then, in the fourth stanza, the shaman expresses his admiration of being a being, even despite “the pain of [his] heart”: “the thought of the instant when I might not have been born”. This verse manifests the fundamental wonder at the mystery of the contingent greatness of being. Finally, in the concluding strophe, captivated, he reveals the source of the being of his beauty and poetry, “silencio profundo”, which the translation rendered as “boundless silence”: “All this has come in the midst of that boundless silence”. It is in this silence that the shaman experiences his long-awaited unity, his fusion with the *idea*, with the world: “and I feel as if an echo of the world’s heart had penetrated and disturbed my own.”

This “Nocturno” has poetized the shamanic experience of *silencio profundo*. However, it is still missing the effects and alterations that such an experience have had in language and poetic practice. The return journey cannot be appreciated if we only focus on the recognition of the source. To appreciate the return, which is to appreciate the actuality of the renewal of Hispanic poetry and by extension of the “resurrection” of the Spanish language, it becomes necessary to analyze the very presence of the source in it. To do this, I will rely on Heidegger’s vision of Being.

#### 3.3.4 Being

For Heidegger, art and poetry are means by which “Being” reveals its truth. According to Heidegger’s interpretation, poetry is a form of *poiesis*, a Greek term that originally meant “creation”, “bringing-forth into presence” (qtd. in Bate 253). Andrzej Wiercinski explains that, as Heidegger saw it, poetry is an activity that brings “something into existence that did not exist before” and “will never be again” (175). As such, the German thinker believed, poetry manifests the truth of Being. The revealing nature of poetry relies on its power to exhibit the “authentic being” of the things named by means of beauty. Through beauty, poetry brings things into presence before the awe of the reader. Even if they are simple, poetic beauty reveals them, names them for the first time. As *poiesis*, poetry is a way of “allowing truth to emerge into the splendor of its radiant appearance” (ibid). That is why, in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935), Heidegger asserts that, by virtue of its ability to bring things out of their ordinariness, out of their habitual concealment, poetry highlights the “intimate unity of being with language and word” (74). However, the manifestness of truth enabled by poetry is not a full revelation, but an interplay between “lightning and concealing”, a correlation which Heidegger

identified with the Greek term *aletheia* (ibid. 14 ). To illustrate *aletheia*, Heidegger interpreted the following painting:



**Figure 3:** “A Pair of Shoes” (1886) by Van Gogh:

In principle, the painting shows nothing more than a simple pair of shoes. Yet, while interpreting it, Heidegger did not focus on the formal aspects of the work, but on what the painting “discloses” to us as such. According to Wiercinski, Heidegger discusses what is revealed by the painting: “the thinghood of this particular pair of leather shoes, with all the traces of being worn out, and as a result, the thinghood of a thing. In the presence of the work of art, we can experience what things really are” (ibid. 177). Moreover, Heidegger considers that it is only because of the painting that we have access to the world of a human being, as related to those shoes: “Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field” (OWA 14). According to Heidegger, by revealing the thingness of the shoes, their character as “mere” equipment, the painting nonetheless brings forth the world behind them. In this way, he thought, Van Gogh shows us what shoes are in truth.

### 3.3.4.1 The Dwelling of the *Soul* and the Shaman's Demiurgic Virtue in "Caracol"

*Poiesis* would correspond to the shaman's character as magus. Nonetheless, the shaman considered, like Heidegger, that the artist's creation is not *poiesis* in the "highest sense", which only belongs to Being itself (qtd. in Bate 253). Still, the shaman aims to reveal the "truth" of Being, of the *idea*, which is to say that he underscores its mystery through the unique being of the poem. This is his own demiurgic virtue. By interpreting the sonnet "The Seashell" (1905), I will show the extent to which the shaman comes near to the original *poiesis*. This is his way to abolish nothingness and ascend from the underworld. His poem consists in materializing the *ideal melody* of the poem. This implies turning its meanings into physical, palpable, forms. The sonnet, whose divination is the encounter with the *soul*, is the following:

Caracol

A Antonio Machado

En la playa he encontrado un caracol de oro  
macizo y recamado de las perlas más finas;  
Europa le ha tocado con sus manos divinas  
cuando cruzó las ondas sobre el celeste toro.

He llevado a mis labios el caracol sonoro  
y he suscitado el eco de las dianas marinas,  
le acerqué a mis oídos y las azules minas  
me han contado en voz baja su secreto tesoro.

Así la sal me llega de los vientos amargos  
que en sus hinchadas velas sintió la nave Argos  
cuando amaron los astros el sueño de Jasón;

y oigo un rumor de olas y un incógnito acento  
y un profundo oleaje y un misterioso viento...  
(El caracol la forma tiene de un corazón.)

## The Seashell

I found a golden seashell on the beach.  
It is massive, and embroidered with the finest pearls.  
Europa touched it with her sacred hands  
as she rode the waves astride the celestial bull.

I raised that sounding seashell to my lips  
to rouse the echoes of the ocean's reveilles,  
and pressed it to my ear and heard the blue  
fathoms whisper the secret of their treasures.

Hence I have tasted the salt of the bitter winds  
that swelled the sails of the Argonauts when all  
the stars were in love with Jason's golden dream,

and I hear a murmur of waves and an unknown voice  
and a vast tide-swell and a mysterious wind—  
(The shell I found is in the shape of a heart.)

The shaman has finally made it to the promised land of *silencio profundo*: the dwelling of the sacred form of the stress-accent, the *soul*. The elysian beach evoked would be the place he reached after having trespassed the underworld and having overcome all the trials of his descent. It is a holy place, as confirmed by the references to Greek mythology. In that beach, the shaman says he has found a "seashell". This is an ineffable object, not only due to its extraordinary size (macizo, massive) and material value (gold and pearls), but by its divine origin. The shaman affirms that the "sacred hands" of Europa have touched it. The myth tells the story of the daughter of the Phoenician King Agenor, Europa, who after having been captivated on the beach by a beautiful white bull, in which Zeus ("burning with loving passion") had been transformed, decides to ride him (Meyer-Minnemann 149). Ovid specifies that the princess clung to the "cornua parva" of the bull to prevent falling into the sea while being kidnapped by him. Cornua parva alludes to the extraordinary character of the bull's horns: they were "polished" as if they had been made by artist's hands: more diaphanous to light than precious stone (ibid).

In the second stanza, the shaman raises the seashell to his lips and plays its divine melody. The “dianas marinas” (ocean’s reveilles) allude to the sound of Triton’s horn—son of Poseidon and Amphitrite—which according to mythographers had the power to calm the waters of the sea. The melody reveals “en voz baja” (whispers) “su secreto tesoro” (the secret of their treasures). The seashell is thus associated with holiness, music, and revelation. This bond makes it very likely that the seashell is a metaphor of poetry (Ibid. 150). Specifically, of the stress-accent, provided that it is the source and unity of all the Darian poetry. In this way, the seashell reveals itself as the *soul*, as the renewed form of the stress-accent while emerging from silencio profundo. What is, however, the secret it reveals to the shaman?



**Figure 4..** Jorge Nopaltzin Guadarrama, an Aztec neo-shaman healer.

In the third stanza, the secret is an evocation of an even more ancient time, a time which, nevertheless, the shaman experiences as present, as a living experience. He uses the presente de indicativo (simple present), “Así la sal me llega...”, which the translation missed (“I have tasted”). The allusion to the myth of Jason and The Argonauts also reinforces the idea of the seashell as the sacred form of the stress-accent. Among those who

accompanied Jason in his quest to find the Golden Fleece was Orpheus. For Meyer-Minnemann, “los vientos amargos” (the bitter winds) is an echo of Orpheus’s singing (Ibid. 151). In this way, the seashell works as the conduit through which Orpheus’s chant can be perceived, just as the stress-accent rhythmically does with the mystery of the *idea*. But furthermore, McGahey points out that Jack Lindsay’s study of early Greek religion, *The Clashing Rocks*, sees “the voyage of the Argo as a shamanic journey which probably rests upon the oldest stratum of Greek pre-history” (8). In this sense, we can interpret the third stanza not only as an evocation of the Orphic descent into the underworld, but also as a sign of Orpheus. This sign restores the Pythagorean shaman’s faith by making him experience that he is still under his aegis.

In the final stanza, the shaman says that he hears a “rumor de olas” (a “murmur of waves”), an “incógnito acento” (“unknown voice”), a “profundo oleaje” (“vast tide-swell”, and a “misterioso viento” (mysterious wind”). And with a verse enclosed between parentheses he (or someone) says: “(El caracol la forma tiene de un corazón.)” (The shell I found is in the shape of a heart.). The peculiar shape of the seashell, along with the mysterious flow of both sound and water within it, suggests that the seashell is the beating heart of the shaman. This is how the divination finally reveals the stress-accent in “its truth”. That is, as rhythm, as the shaman’s own heartbeat and breathing.

#### 3.3.4.1.1 *Poiesis* and the Abolishing of Nothingness

“The Seashell” is composed by 14 alexandrine verses. As an alexandrine poem, it metaphysically questions the inscription technology (the sheet of paper) that created it in the first place, generating an interface between its imaginative world and its physical presence (Hayles 25). The first stanza says that the seashell is “massive” and such a

characteristic is indeed reflected in the physical form of the sonnet. Darío dedicated the poem to his poet friend Antonio Machado, and according to Michael Spiller, the sonnet belongs to a great tradition in which they were given as gifts. It was a way to “confer honour and impart wisdom” (128). In giving a 14-line sonnet gift to Machado, Darío gives him indeed a “massive” poem, since his sonnet is bigger than the conventional ones, which in the Hispanic poetic tradition had followed the typical 10-11 line scheme. The dedication is not abstract, it is a gift. In truth, Darío gives Machado the seashell he found on the beach.

In the first stanza, the shaman alludes to the myth of Europa, which is represented in a physical form as well. All the imaginary associated with such input is indeed visible, palpable, in the sonnet. By paying attention to what in Spanish are called “acentos ortográficos” (written accents), which in certain words mark the stressed-syllable by means of a graphical sign, ( ´ ), I discovered the following:



Representation of the Taurus Constellation  
by Johannes Hevelius (1690)

#### Caracol

A Antonio Machado.

En la playa he encontrado un caracol de oro  
macizo y recamado de las perlas más finas;  
Europa le ha tocado con sus manos divinas  
cuando cruzo las ondas sobre el celeste toro.

He llevado a mis labios el caracol sonoro  
y he suscitado el eco de las dianas marinas,  
le acerqué a mis oídos y las azules minas  
me han contado en voz baja su secreto tesoro.

Así la sal me llega de los vientos amargos  
que en sus hinchadas velas sintió la nave Argos  
cuando amaron los astros el sueño de Jaseón;  
y oigo un rumor de olas y un incognito acento  
y un profundo oleaje y un misterioso viento...  
(El caracol la forma tiene de un corazón.)

The figure of Zeus transformed into a bull. By linking the nine accent marks of the original version of the poem, that is, the accent marks of the words: *más*, *cruzó*, *acerqué*, *oídos*, *Así*, *sintió*, *incógnito*, *corazón*, and *Jasón*, we are able to see the head and the “cornua parva” of the bull the poem itself refers to. Four accent marks for each horn, the first one being formed by the first two stanzas and the second horn by the last two, while the triangle of accent marks, at the core of the sonnet, forms his head. The words *oídos* and *sintió* mark the junction point between both horns and the head. It can be said that while reading the sonnet we are not actually imagining the kidnapping of Europa, we are witnessing it in the sheet of paper in the shape of the Taurus’s constellation. In the following two stanzas, the shaman listens to the seashell, whose music reveals him the secrets of poetry. To what extent does the sonnet here fulfill the Mallarméan principle that equates evocation and *poiesis*?

The shaman brings-forth the secrets of poetry into presence by making the readers perform the scene portrayed in the sonnet. He uses the voice of those who listen to themselves while reading the sonnet in order to create reflexive loops between the fantasy of the poem and the real world. The piece talks about poetry, so in this sense it is a metatext. But it is not just a mere comment on poetry, it is performative poetry. It is a text that talks about a fictional character who plays a musical instrument whose music is the poetry of the sonnet itself that it is being read aloud by the reader “outside the text”. This means that while reading “The Seashell” we are indeed “playing it” and indeed performing the entire scene portrayed. The reader is then the one who witnessed Europa’s kidnapping, found the seashell (the sonnet), played its music, heard its secrets, tasted Orpheus’s distant singing, remembered Jason and The Argonauts, and finally heard his or her own heartbeats. Then, by performatively fusing word and being, by bringing being into poetry, into beauty, the shaman brings forth into presence the truth of Being, abolishing nothingness thus. That

is why the poem demands to be read aloud, for otherwise the interface between nothingness and being, between mere evocation and *poiesis*, will not occur.

Finally, the last stanza encompasses the idea of the seashell as the shaman's heart. How can a beating heart be materialized in a sonnet? Darío materializes his heart by attending to the form of the sonnet itself. The shaman changes the conventional construction of the sonnet, which is composed by two quatrains and two tercets: (4:4:3:3). Darío modifies this by enclosing the last verse between parentheses, as if it were an independent unit of the whole, working at the margin of the poem. The material mark of the parentheses makes the difference. The sonnet then has a different structure: 4:4:3:2:1. This means that "The Seashell" has a pointed end, like the typical iconic representations of the human heart (Meyer-Minnemann 151). But the most radical crystallization of the poet's heart is that of the last two verses: "y un profundo oleaje y un misterioso viento... (El caracol la forma tiene de un corazón.)". The performance of the sonnet indeed ends right after the first verse, which marks a long silence: "...". This is so because the last line, in being parenthesized, suggests that the shaman does not utter it, but only "thinks" it. It is thus also a silence, an internal revelation which arises from the pure contemplation of the seashell, the *soul*. It is then in this long silence that reader is able to feel and listen to the truth of the poem: namely, to his or her own heart.

#### 3.3.4.2 "Palimpsesto": the Spiraling Staircase of Rhythmic Ascent

Likewise, *poiesis* occurs in *verbal harmony* in Darío's work. The shaman takes advantage of the essence of silence in order to bring forth language as such into presence. Similar to what occurs in Van Gogh's "Pair of Shoes", "Palimpsesto" (Palimpsest), a poem found in Darío's *Prosas Profanas*, shows us, by means of rhythm, what the word's body is

in truth, its character of word as word and nothing more. And yet, it also exhibits the shamanic world as related to the word, its nature as the vehicle of rhythm and beauty. In this way, the shaman makes language transcend nothingness. The process is the following: the shaman builds something like a rhythmic spiraling staircase. This must be long enough to carry the *soul* of language to the surface and complete his spiritual journey. But since the *soul* can only be brought to being thanks to silence, the shaman does not continue to create rhythm. On the contrary, when the stair is high enough, he suddenly destroys it by means of a caesura, allowing silence to appear in full force.<sup>19</sup> The energy of the caesura, however, falls on the word immediately preceding it. Then, this word assimilates the energy in such a way that its body is brought forth into presence.

Although it is not possible to reproduce in English the original rhythm and sonority of the centaurs' stampede that the original "Palimpsesto" attempts to evoke, the singular presence of a caesura should likewise result uncanny for the English-speaking reader. The fragment goes as follows:

...  
otro alza al aire las manos blancas  
mientras le dora las finas ancas  
con baño cálido la luz del sol;  
y otro saltando piedras y troncos  
va dando alegres sus gritos roncoss  
como el ruido de un caracol.

Silencio. Señas hace ligero  
el que en la tropa va delantero...

...  
the centaur's white hand is up into the air  
his haunches are gilded  
by the bath of Phoebus's flare;  
from rocks or logs another centaur takes off  
joyfully uttering his guttural roars

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<sup>19</sup> A caesura is a rhetorical device, a rhythmical pause, a silence, in the verse by means of a punctuation or other sign, usually in the middle of the line, as in Classical poetry.

like a Triton does with his sonorous shell.

Silence. Lightly beckons the centaur  
who among the troops goes at the front...

As it can be appreciated, the rhythmic fluctuation is abruptly muted by a fleeting, yet fulminating, caesura at the beginning of the second stanza: “Silencio.” (Silence). This pause alone causes the decasyllabic structure of the poem —whose stair in fact descends much deeper than the quoted fragment— to collapse disastrously. It is as if the centaur stampede, at whose rhythm the reader’s ears had already become accustomed, suddenly ran into a wall. It is precisely such a silencing of rhythm what makes the readers realize that there is something like “rhythm” and “beauty”, therefore allowing them to think “metaphysically” about the nature of the poem and of its aesthetic mechanisms. But furthermore, the shaman makes sure to let the readers know the cause of their estrangement with the text: he uses the word “Silencio” (Silence). This word absorbs all the energy of the rhythmic collapse. This assimilation makes its meaning to overflow from the word’s body while coinciding with the disappearance of rhythm itself. But this correspondence is of such a force that meaning ends up pouring itself out completely, leaving the word empty as a pure, dead body. The emptying of the word, nonetheless, highlights it, “brings it forth into presence”. The word “Silencio” thus appears in all its contours, uncanniness and arbitrariness, bringing to light the contingency of language as a whole. And nevertheless, this is the principle of wonder, of the sacred, which makes things appear as if they had retrieved a pristine and mysterious condition. Then, through a word devoid of meaning, the shaman leaves the word’s imprint in the reader’s mind and a fleeting testimony of not only the very nature of silence as the base of the stress-accent and of rhythm, but also of the arbitrariness of the supremacy of *ideal melody* in language.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have analyzed the poetic evidence concerning Rubén Darío's shamanist poetics. We can thus affirm that the sonnet "Ama Tu Rimo" shows the poet's engagement with the shamanic origin of his Pythagorean worldview: the notion that there is *harmonia mundi*, rhythm, and cosmic unity, only after the shaman has overcome nothingness. In the sonnet, the shaman-poet displays his knowledge by sharing the divination he retained after his descent to the underworld.

As for the performance of the shamanic drum, I conclude that it is consistent with the shamanic task of bringing together the brother-gods. Indeed, Darío's drum attempts to bond divination and body, melody and harmony. There is a correlation between rhythm and meaning, only if we associate the former with the "meanings" established by traditional metrics, though. This confirms the Darian belief in the prevalence of meaning, which prevents language from attaining ideas essentially musical.

I then proceed to analyze the shamanic technique of ecstasy, which enables the spiritual journey. With the insights of Martin Heidegger into anxiety, nothingness and Being, I hope to have elucidated the three principles ruling the shamanic healing task of language: the shamanic contradiction, the descent motif, and the contemplation of the *soul*. After having illustrated these principles, I conclude that Darío sees his own "tragic sense of life" as a shamanic contradiction. This would be due to his conviction that he was, in his own right, the seer-poet of Hispanic-America. In the same way, it is viable to say that he understood his despair as the "magical substance" of poetic creation. There is enough evidence to assert that Darío, like Heidegger, was aware of the potential of existential despair to make him experience the world in its "enthraling contradictoriness" of being and nothing. As Heidegger showed, this contradiction would be the fundamental source of

wonder, and I am convinced that Darío saw it as the primordial source of poetic inspiration. Likewise, in the light of Being, I can assert that the shamanic healing task is present in Darío in the form of creation and beauty, which he alluded by using shamanic terms: “rhythm” (as a metonymy of his drum) and *soul* respectively.

As for the poetic evidence, the first “Nocturno” demonstrates Darío’s shamanic awareness of the epiphanic-ecstatic power of existential despair. Darío expresses his “angustia” in the face of a world devoid of beauty. This reinforces the conception of despair as magical substance, provided that the poem manifests its nullifying effects. But especially, it is possible to conclude that the poet links himself to the Hades-Eurydice motif and ventures into his “inner underworld” while despair turns rhythm into silence. This is where the second “Nocturno” endorses this interpretation. Before the evidence, it is possible to claim that this poem gives expression to the shaman’s interior journey, that is, to the instant of ecstatic despair, in which its bodily and psychotropic consequences are manifested. These effects, in conclusion, can be taken as the shaman’s sacrifice before encountering the *soul*.

For the third “Nocturno”, I relied on Heidegger’s vision of nothingness. Heidegger remarked that only by experiencing nothingness can being evoke wonder. This by virtue of the metaphysically groundless essence of being. During the experience of the nothing, the fact that there is being rather than nothing becomes more than evident, even though the nothing is the ground. Such an awareness is what triggers awe. This is how the ecstasy would work once the shaman finds the soul and returns from the underworld. Remember that as a “healer of souls”, the shaman is a hero. It follows that his ecstatic experience turns into joy once he has overcome it. For this reason, the third “Nocturno” confirms that, similarly, Darío can be said to be a shamanic hero while experiencing *silencio profundo*. At

this stage of his journey, he manifests his awe of being in its fullness inasmuch as the silencing of rhythm comes near to the nothing. I am convinced that the poet recognizes something like the holiness of being during his experience with silence, a practice which of course links him with the mystic poets of the Hispanic renaissance (San Juan de la Cruz).

Finally, in the light of Heidegger's concept of Being, I illustrated the effects of the shamanic healing treatment of language once it is completed. After having close-read "Caracol" and "Palimpsesto", I maintain that such effects express themselves as *poiesis* in both *verbal harmony* and *ideal melody*. *Poiesis* is the final evidence that language has endured the healing treatment of the shaman.

## 4.1 Conclusion

All things considered, I believe that there is enough evidence to assert that Darío developed a shamanist poetics. It is clear that the Nicaraguan poet was aware of the shamanic origin of his esoteric Pythagorean indoctrination. Furthermore, I conclude that such origin was thought, reinterpreted, thematized and embodied in his poetry. After having analyzed the evidence, it is possible to appreciate how Darío reinterpreted shamanic principles and apply them to language, to his own poetic context and personal circumstances. In the light of shamanism, I was able to reinterpret the extensively contested passage of “Palabras Liminares”, where Darío finally opened himself to speak about poetic practice. The relationship between *soul*, rhythm, *verbal harmony*, *ideal melody*, and the music of the *idea*, is consistent with the Orphic shamanist metaphysics of language. Remember that this music was characterized by the perfect unity of lyre (*ideal melody*) and lyrics (*verbal harmony*), of philosophy and poetry. Such ensemble allowed Orpheus to speak what Heidegger called the “language of being”, which Darío described as the music of the *idea* or as *silencio profundo*. Since Darío struggled to bring both harmony and melody together, it is evident that he was more ambitious and bold than the French symbolists whom he so much admired. The Nicaraguan poet strived to bring language closer to Orphic music in a more intimate communion with the shamanist tradition. Based on this reinterpretation, I came to understand that, in the actual poetic practice, the stress-accent became the cornerstone, the spirit and *soul*, of Darío’s language revolution. In a technical sense, *modernismo* relied on the shamanist Orphic-Pythagorean revolution of the stress-accent, which went from being a minuscule phonetic feature of language to become the incarnation of the *soul* in the syllable. But also, the insurrection of the stress-accent

entailed that of the syllable. In this way, together, they transformed the Spanish language into a shamanic-magical drum. As such, the language retrieved *poiesis* and, through rhythm, it was able to “bring-forth into presence” any sort of beings, as if it were the healer’s poetic laboratory. Likewise, I have pointed out the shamanic method that Darío followed. I conclude that he vindicated feelings such as anxiety and existential despair to the extent that they became almost “ecstatic”. As Darío believed, only under their aegis could he create beauty and authentic poetry. Then, just as the shaman travels to the underworld to bring the souls back to life, Darío immerses in the metaphysical abyss of his own being in search of the sacred form of the stress-accent, source of poetry and rhythm, and key to overcome nothingness and despair.

Once the shamanist poetics have been recognized, we can evaluate Darío’s renewal of Hispanic poetry in the light of the two aspects on which I grounded such poetics in the introduction of the thesis: the poet’s metaphysical and existential dimensions and language revolution. As for the former, my goal was to contribute to develop the “Darian thought”, an aspect which according to Alberto Acereda has been neglected by criticism. It is my conviction that I have highlighted such facet by rethinking, from both the shamanist and Heidegger’s vision, Darío’s idea of the *soul* and silence. In the light of both, it becomes evident the abilities of the poet for metaphysical reflection. In the first case, the *soul* is not the same as the “soul” that opposes the body. Rather, the *soul*, the deep soul, must be beyond a dichotomous thinking insofar as the poet seeks to transcend the barrier of meaning. Darío considered this “beyond” the sacred. However, he did not ponder it in a theological way, which would represent a set-back to dichotomous thinking and therefore to depriving things from their musical and mysterious essence. Here, Darío evokes Heidegger’s ontological-difference, which notes that the being of beings, Being, or the

ground of being, cannot be itself a being (BPP 78). In other words, the source of meaning cannot be itself a particular meaning among other meanings, for otherwise would cease to be the source. The Nicaraguan poet was aware of this difference, to the extent that he realized, like Heidegger, that such source could only be experienced in the absence of meaning, which the poet identified with *silencio profundo*. Furthermore, Darío never took silence as a poetic-existential impasse. Rather, he noted, in astonishment, the groundless character of poetry. Through his shamanist Orphic-Pythagorean vision of silence, he subverted the traditional philosophical proposition that says *ex nihilo nihil fit* (“Nothing comes from nothing”) and turned it into “[f]rom the nothing all beings as beings come to be” (WIM Heidegger 95 ). Following these principles, the “Nocturnos” underscored the “thinker” component of the Pythagorean shaman-poet. This component is fundamental because only by virtue of his being thinker could he discover the essence of silence and the “magical” character of despair. Like the Orphic shaman, the poet must also become a thinker, a “seer”. This is of vital significance for the initiate if he wants to master the ecstasy techniques and come to experience the musical *soul* of language.

As for Darío’s language revolution, we can conclude that he indeed achieved a “revolution”, but only if we understand the latter as an inferior form to that of “restoration”, which was in fact not only his ideal but also that of the French symbolists. The difference can be explained by considering the traditional and modern concept of revolution. According to Hanna Arendt, the modern concept of “revolution” —originally an astronomical term indicating the cyclical movement of the stars— acquired its political connotations only until the 17th century (33-32). However, the modern term never lost its astronomical meaning, for it has lurked behind every revolutionary struggle in history. In *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude), Paz point out that all revolutions

—included those of the arts— are in principle cyclical movements, restorations (59). They begin as attempts to swing back to a certain order of affairs —one seemingly pristine and untarnished— to turn themselves, quite often by “inadvertence”, into revolutions when the restoration effort transforms the order during the process (Arendt 34). Thus, revolutions are those that imply a new beginning, which nevertheless must be made evident “institutionally”. For instance, by means of a “declaration of independence” in the case of a social-political movement (ibid. 33). In Darío’s case, it is possible to say that what he had thought was a restoration, the retrieving of the pristine condition of silence, of the music of the spheres, in language, ended up becoming a revolution: a rhythmic resurgence of the Spanish language. We know, however, that the poet was aware of the revolutionary character of his endeavor from the beginning, although he always yearned for the restoration. This is the longing that kept alive his “sed de ilusiones infinitas” (thirst for endless illusions) until the end of his life.

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