

THE SCIENCE OF SOUND: RECORDING TECHNOLOGY AND THE LITERARY

VANGUARD

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: The Science of Sound: Recording Technology and the Literary Vanguard

This project is a comparative study of Irish and Latin American modernisms and the literary responses to the advent of recorded sound. It focuses particularly on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, Leopoldo Lugones's short stories "La fuerza omega" and "Yzur," and Jaime Torres Bodet's novel *Proserpina rescatada*. It examines how each author grapples with the dislocation of the human voice from the body made possible through new recording technology. This selection of texts displays a range of engagements with this new technology, from a critique of rising positivism and machines in the early twentieth century, to experiments with aural metaphors in the wake of sounded film, and finally to the 1930s, when sound recording becomes an arm of government surveillance against its citizens. In each instance, the circulation of sound technology causes a shift in modes of representation that require new definitions of what it means to be human in an increasingly mechanized world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The past 15 years has seen a re-examination of the field of modernist studies. As Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz claim in their essay “The New Modernist Studies” the future of modernism and modernist studies lies in an expansion of the canonical definition of modernism, which, in English departments, has traditionally referred to texts from Britain, Ireland, the U.S. and Europe from 1890-1940. The expansion of modernism is occurring in three ways “the temporal, the spatial and the vertical” (738). Mao and Walkowitz characterize the vertical as the increased attention to “production, dissemination, and reception” of texts and the interrelation between high and low cultures (738). The vertical expansion can be seen in the rise of periodical studies in the work of critics like Mark Morrisson, Sean Latham, Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman who examine the initial places of publication in modernism’s “little magazines.” As Mao and Walkowitz point out, the temporal and spatial shifts have been demonstrated in recent critical scholarship like Laura Winkiel and Laura Doyle’s collection of essays *Geomodernisms: Race Modernism Modernity*. This collection conceives of modernism as a plurality that can be carried transnationally and cross-culturally to include texts that range from “traditional” modernism in 1920’s England to 1980’s China. In this sense, “the term modernism breaks open, into something [called] geomodernisms, which signals a locational approach to modernisms’ engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity” (Doyle 3). This extensive repositioning of modernism opens new ways of examining the canonical works of modernism as well as creating space for a broader canon that includes transnational, more popular, and less experimental texts.

Though this effort is admirable in bringing attention to texts outside the general scope of a Western literature department, its inclusivity often looks toward postcolonial texts writing back to the empire as in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* or in pairings of 20th century postcolonial texts with canonical modernist texts through theories like Susan Stanford Friedman's "cultural parataxis" (Mao 747). This kind of work highlights the effects of colonization on culture, economies and education; yet too often it carries a notion of "re-writing" or "re-appropriation," taking literary forms back from the colonizer. The emphasis on the prefix "re" implies that the west is the source in a unidirectional idea of both progress and artistic expression. Such accounts insist on a singular concept of modernity that places the west (the first world/developed nations) ahead of other nations and regions (the third world/underdeveloped nations). The disjunctions of time and place in geomodernist comparisons have the potential to envision a colonial space as having no "literature" prior to contact with the colonizer, therefore these regions take time to catch up to the west, creating their own modernism decades after the "original."

In creating this disjuncture, transnational modernist criticism often looks east to former colonies of the British Empire, typically examining work in the Anglophone colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. The direct contact with the British Empire and its literary canon through the imposition of colonial education policies offers a fertile ground for exploring the impact on local languages and cultures evident in, for example, Chinua Achebe's response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. However, my dissertation shifts the focus to the south and away from the Anglo/American axis of modernist studies in English. My approach does not require a temporal expansion of the

category of modernism as Latin America, though also a colonial sphere, does not fit into the reigning account of postcolonial literary history in relation to the British Empire. As colonies of Spain and Portugal first established in the 15th century, the nations of Latin America colonial history follow a different trajectory in their colonial history. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga argues that Latin America is trapped in a triple bind of multiple colonialities: “Spain lives in a double cultural world, its nonexportable own and in an imported one, while Latin America lives in at least a triple culture: the pre-hispanic, the Spanish/Portuguese, and the European-Yankee” (4). The multiple layers of colonization and marginalization along with their much longer colonial history make it difficult to place this region in conversation with more contemporary visions of postcoloniality or subaltern studies particularly when viewed along a temporal axis.

This is not to say that my dissertation looks to “recuperate” Latin American texts as modernist or to rewrite a new modernist canon per se. To do so would be a disservice to the complexity of Latin American literature and literary history. Placing Latin American and canonical modernist texts in conversation with each other raises particular problems of appropriation and incongruence. In Latin America, the term modernismo is linked to Rubén Darío’s call for a new poetics at the turn of the 20th century. This movement worked to establish a new poetry separate from that of the Spanish tradition to give new voice to Latin America as a distinct literary sphere and thereby does not map easily on to Anglo/American modernism. To identify other writers in this period not directly affiliated with Darío’s movement as modernist would be a false cognate. According to Aguinaga, accepting the western definition of modernism would be another form of literary colonialism:

We may stubbornly insist on our two meanings of "modernismo" or, like truly neocolonized little lambs we can accept the -for us- new meaning of modernism. If we choose the first option one of the most significant moments of our modern culture will, at best, be relegated to a brief footnote about some irrelevant part of the border while the rest of the world moves on. Accepting the second option will, perhaps, permit us to speak with those who study Eliot, or Pound, or Kafka, but will make it more difficult, if not impossible, to speak coherently among ourselves about Rubén Darío or Valle Inclán. (6)

Absorption into the modernist canon comes at a price. While it may open the modernist discourse to new voices and break with its myopic tradition, it also has the potential to erase or modify the specific generic, historical and political position of Latin American texts in favor of a more universal approach, cutting them off from their origins and Latin American peers. As Doyle and Winkiel warn, such projects of cross-cultural analysis should be careful to avoid the tendency to “absorb and ultimately re-erase these other histories” (6). For these reasons, my dissertation juxtaposes Latin American and Anglo/American texts not to privilege one over the other or to place them in opposition, but to examine a contemporaneous phenomenon from two distinct vantage points to show the polyvalent nature of literary responses to modernity and more specifically to the advent of recording technology.

Rather than pair late 20th century texts with canonical modernist texts, I will follow Fernando Rosenberg’s model that moves away from fetishizing the temporality of modernity as arriving, early or late, uneven or unfinished. In his book *Avant-Garde and*

Geopolitics in Latin America he suggests a turn toward the “geopolitical” which would “recognize the modernity of the Latin American avant-gardes as enunciations from and about a global, simultaneous dynamic” (16). From this vantage point, the avant-garde can be viewed as a part of a worldwide culture that displaces the center-periphery model in favor of a mutually constitutive dynamic (16). This decentered approach reveals a plurality of simultaneous modernities that interact with and influence each other to form a network of interrelations that does not privilege one modernity over the other. Similarly, I will take a synchronic view of the modern literary experiments in both the Anglo/American and Latin American traditions using the advent of recording technology, such as phonographs and gramophones, as representative of this “global simultaneous dynamic.” My methodology will answer Doyle and Winkiel’s call for a locational approach to modernisms by grounding the Latin American texts in their own historical moment and cultural contexts while also aligning with Mao and Walkowitz’s vision of new modernism, as my method expands the categories of modernism vertically through the encounter with media and technology.

A synchronic view with science and technology as the fulcrum offers a way out of Doyle and Winkiel’s methodological and generic complications. The simultaneous arrival in Latin America and Anglo/America of the technologies of sound provides a congruence that brings these two seemingly incommensurate cultures and histories of modernity together. With this approach, Latin American literature does not have to be read through a Eurocentric lens or as a footnote to a larger literary history. Instead, it can retain its status as an independent cultural production that emanated from the same global phenomena in a moment of enormous change and rapid modernization. My dissertation

juxtaposes these literary contexts to shed light on the systemic interrelation of national literatures that critiques the assumption that modernism occurs only in one singular moment in one singular place.

The impact of the gramophone's arrival worldwide varies depending on the cultural context. As Bruno Latour describes, science happens not in its own isolated "black box" of knowledge. Instead it is dependent on a much larger network of allies, colleagues, instruments, and most important to this discussion, public representation (98-101). Latour uses the metaphor of the circulatory system to explain this network wherein the heart is science and these external contingencies and influences are the arteries and capillaries coursing through the heart. Without this supporting circulatory system of players outside of the laboratory or field of study, innovation could not occur. The representations of science in literature and cultural productions are part of this circulation and are key in anchoring a new theory or technology in the popular imagination.

Sound technology entered the public sphere in a number of ways ranging from newspaper and magazine articles announcing key technologies like the gramophone, to public lectures by high profile scientists. The variety of exposure blurs the line between elite or hard science and popular or pseudo science, filling the public discourse with technical jargon alongside inventions, interpretations, and re-imaginings of the technology. Recording technologies made the dislocation of the voice from the body possible through the new ability to preserve speech across time, which in turn, sparked new investigations into the potential applications of vibration, recording and wireless transmission of sound and information. When placed in the public sphere, these advances merged with older superstitions like the possibility for mind reading and ESP. Pamela

Thurschwell notes that “at the end of the nineteenth century science is severing the links between materiality visibility and transmission, allowing for a sort of telepathic imaginary” (qtd in Goody 11). The mental, the imaginary and the mechanically possible were becoming indistinguishable.

From mesmerism and telepathy to psychophysics and electromagnetism, the once impossible now seemed very real, re-opening thinking about superstition and spiritualism. As the hyper-rational world of science comes in contact with the general population, the seemingly fantastic new discoveries in sound, physics and energy start to resemble ancient superstitions and mythologies. Even the voice of the pragmatic, positivist scientist, the marker of authority and precision, seems fallible when the experiment enters the world traditionally reserved for the occult or when the results are beyond common perception. Prominent scientists like Michael Faraday and John Tyndall give public lectures on science in the hopes of translating the mysteries of the world to the layperson. While these lectures often seek to debunk pseudo science and quackery, “legitimate” science often appears just as marvelous as the imagined for the audience. As Gillian Beer explains,

Such lectures were arresting entertainment, expanding the scope of the senses and putting credence to the test. Yet such demonstrations also asserted the real presence of unforeseen phenomena ‘out there’: singing flames, invisible rays made visible, artificial blue skies. Materialism became a form of magic spectacle, and the spectacle implied both the relativity of knowledge and the actuality of phenomena beyond the customary reach of unaided senses. (305)

The new reaches of science extend human knowledge beyond the immediately knowable. To understand these concepts meant to stretch the boundaries of the real. Audiences must suspend their disbelief in the same way one might at a magic show, and the average person cannot count on his or her own knowledge or experience to determine the relative truth of the experiment. Instead, these advances usher in a new era in which materialist explanations and experience are no longer seem sufficient.

New modes of perception open new space for literary experimentation. The gramophone and its kin serve as points of contact between the material and immaterial world with the voice as a bridge between them. Travelling invisibly through the ether, the voice, once a unique element of the individual, becomes defamiliarized and removed from its immediate experience, warranting the creation of new modes of expression to represent this new phenomenon. In literature, these new modes are evident in both form and content. As Angela Frattarola argues “modernist writers use sound and auditory experience to subvert traditional Enlightenment notions of self and narrative, which tend to privilege sight. While vision indicates an analytical self, distanced from the world, audition allows for a self immersed in the world...much of the formal experimentation associated with modernism is dependent on this representation of sound and auditory experience” (132). Disembodied narrators and speakers mark many modernist texts. For example, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* refuses the third person omniscient narrative voice of the 19th century in favor of multiple voices and free indirect discourse, and Eliot's *The Waste Land* contains snatches of conversations and bits of voices as if running the dial down the radio frequencies (Suárez 758). Voices are no longer connected to distinct bodies, but can be recorded, claimed, and reintroduced without explanation. This

separation of voice and body and self and speech helps facilitate more experimental forms of narration that break the connection between author and speaker and speaker and character.

I will examine these new possibilities for representation and perception as they occur in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, Leopoldo Lugones' two stories "Yzur" and "La fuerza omega," Jaime Torres Bodet's novel *Proserpina rescatada* and short story "Parálisis" and Flann O'Brien's novel *The Third Policeman*. The spectrum of texts selected for this project show a range of responses to sound technology and its impact on literary expression. The simultaneous arrival of this technology in both Latin America and Ireland allows for an interrogation of notions of uneven development and linear ideas of modernity. Within the modernist canon, both spaces are often appropriated or discounted as capable of reflecting their own form of modernity. Irish authors are often discussed as if they were British, erasing any cultural specificity. Conversely, Latin American authors are often left out of the conversation entirely and viewed by many Anglophone scholars as lagging behind in literary achievement. Yet, the texts of Shaw, Lugones, Torres Bodet and O'Brien confirm that modernist sensibilities are alive and well contemporaneously with Anglo/American Modernism.

The first two chapters examine early twentieth century reactions of skepticism toward technology and the erasure of the human beneath the rising power of positivism. Argentine writer Leopoldo Lugones' short story "Yzur" (1906) and Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1912) both include scientists whose disregard for the well-being of his subject serves as a critique of the dangers of positivism without compassion or allowance for human care. Shaw uses speech as a key element in identity

and in marking class, while Lugones marks speech as the divide between human and animal. In both texts, phonograph records and grammar lessons are the methods for allowing their subjects to “pass” into a new social stratum while engaging with alternate theories of linguistic evolution.

By the 1930s these initial innovations in sound technology no longer prompt an interrogation of the encroachment of science over the human; sound technologies have become a part of the general cultural landscape and therefore appear as naturalized elements in modernist texts. The fourth chapter analyzes the impact of sound on narrative form in Mexican novelist Jaime Torres Bodet’s *Proserpina rescatada* (*Persephone Rescued*). Using metaphors of sound rather than sight to represent his ephemeral title character, Torres Bodet opens new modes of writing in the modern age of sounded film and machinery while also wrestling with the viability of an intuitive character in a positivist world.

The final chapter examines the weaponization of sound on the brink of World War II. 1930s Ireland had survived a war for independence as well as a civil war and recording had been used as a means of surveillance against Irish citizens. Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman* takes surveillance to its extreme, rendering a world in which voices can be collected, stored, and literally turned into energy that the policemen use to heat the police station. In an absurd extension of the Irish government’s actual surveillance, O’Brien’s novel turns the power of the human voice into energy for the state. O’Brien’s dark satire reflects the new pessimism of the modern era.

These approaches and reactions to developments in sound reveal the complex relation of 20th century science to culture, specifically literature. Each of these texts

illustrate a specific response to the growing incorporation of technology into every day life and manifest not only the excitement and exhilaration of discovery, but also the fear of the unknown. These authors all participate in world culture and respond to the tide of modernity through their own local lenses. My dissertation views their worlds from a macro level and from an international perspective. Together these texts evidence the exchange of ideas and technologies across borders and show a spectrum of aesthetic responses to modernity and modernization. My approach, which crosses national boundaries as well as disciplinary ones through technology and sound studies, expands current methodologies in transnationalist Modernist Studies. Rather than applying an Anglo/American model of modernism to world literature, I employ a comparatist approach that grounds the individual texts in their own contexts and examines the monumental shifts in literature and art in response to rapid industrialization and mechanization as a simultaneous, interconnected process.

CHAPTER II: LINGUISTIC METAMORPHOSIS AND SCIENTIFIC CONVERSION IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S *PYGMALION*

As an advocate of language reform and student of phonetics, George Bernard Shaw had a deep investment in the language politics of his day. He was an Irish immigrant and a Fabian socialist who knew all too well that his Irish accent was an immediate marker of both national origin and class. In his view, if this linguistic marker were eliminated through language training, the speaker would be able to more easily transcend class boundaries and break out of Britain's stringent class hierarchy. *Pygmalion* dramatizes this possibility through Eliza Doolittle, a beggar who sells flowers on the

streets of London in order to survive. Phonetician Henry Higgins and his fellow linguist Colonel Pickering hear her deep cockney accent and make a bet that Higgins can pass off this girl as a duchess in six months time, simply through language training. Although Eliza agrees to the terms of the experiment, the central conflict in the play is the clash between Higgins's treatment of Eliza as a specimen, something to be tested, trained and set loose and the fact that Eliza is a human with her own thoughts and feelings, not simply a blank slate for experimentation. While Shaw is an advocate of phonetics, the play critiques Higgins's blind faith in science and favors a transformation of self that originates not from outside sources like science or religious faith, but through self-awareness and introspection. Eliza's transformation through language does not entirely achieve its aims in advancing her social position permanently. It does, however, enable her to move beyond her extreme poverty to a new, articulate state that gives her the vocabulary to explain her point of view to Higgins and to find her own inner strength. These qualities are those that will remain with Eliza long after Higgins's experiment ends.

The drive toward self-actualization that Shaw valorizes is connected to his belief in Creative Evolution. Rather than Darwinism's concept of change over time through adaptation to environmental pressures and genetic anomalies, Shaw follows a more Lamarckian view of evolution that understands evolution to result from willed change and acquired characteristics that can be passed down to future generations. Taken to a socio-political level, if all people were able to reach their highest individual potentials in life, working toward an idea of positive progress for all people, the following generations

would be able to take even greater steps forward. For Eliza, acquiring language is the first step in this process.

CHAPTER III: LUGONES AND THE HUMAN EDGE OF SOUND

Like Shaw who followed alternate theories of evolution that leave room for a Life Force or organizing principle other than materialist science, Argentine Leopoldo Lugones turned to theosophy for a new epistemological grounding. Theosophical ideas of evolution include a similar Lamarckian idea of inherited, willed change with the end goal of an advanced human civilization that includes both science and the ancient wisdom and knowledge of the world. Theosophists also embrace a notion of devolution in which evolution is not simply a tool of progress but a process that can also operate in reverse. Lugones uses this concept of theosophical evolution in combination with a physiological notion of language in his short story “Yzur.” His scientist narrator claims that over the course of generations, monkeys have willed themselves not to speak in order to avoid work and subjugation at the hands of the competing human species. His hypothesis is that if he can retrain the physiology of a monkey to speak, he can then return the monkey to his full human status. The activation of the speech organs will in turn activate the metaphysical aspects of the human soul.

The third chapter also examines the exchange between scientific jargon and the genre of the fantastic in the use of the authority of science to bend logic into a new form through an analysis of Lugones’s story “La fuerza omega.” In “La fuerza omega” voice functions not as an evolutionary tool, but as a component of sound to be used as energy. Lugones’ work cites the same lectures by Fourier and Tyndall as his Anglo/American contemporaries, as well as developments in wave theory that further complicate the

relation of voice to the body. Heat, energy, and sound collapse into one and this collapse leads to nightmarish consequences, especially when viewed through the eyes of an unreliable and potentially dangerous scientist.

The narrator of “La fuerza omega” is an eccentric scientist working on the edges of the scientific community who develops a theory of sound based on his modifications to phonograph discs in an attempt to replicate the harmonies of the human voice. He discovers that sound waves have a potential power, and this power can be harnessed to disintegrate matter by disrupting the cohesion of an object’s molecules. When he runs the test with his new apparatus the narrator describes the effect of the machine:

Un adoquín que calzaba la puerta rebelde se desintegró a nuestra vista, convirtiéndose con leve sacudida en un montón de polvo impalpable. Varios trozos de hierro sufrieron la misma suerte. Y resultaba en verdad de un efecto mágico aquella transformación de la materia, sin un esfuerzo perceptible, sin un ruido, como no fuera la leve estridencia que cualquier rumor ahogaba.¹ (58)

The powerful force delivers on its promise and demolishes the objects in its path without a sound, reducing them to dust. In the scientist’s mind, this experiment is purely an intellectual pursuit with the aim of discovering the harmony of the human voice in accordance with the ancient theory of Orpheus’ lyre and modern day wave theory. The observers of the experiment, and potentially readers, however, can immediately see the potential this invention has as a weapon (59). If this machine can shatter rocks, then it can

¹ A cobblestone that held open the door disintegrated before our eyes, changing with a slight tremor into a mountain of impalpable dust. Various fragments of iron suffered the same fate. And that the transformation of matter resulted in a truly magical effect, without a perceptible force, without a sound, except for a slight shrillness that any whisper drowned.

surely shatter an enemy or a target. In this final turn of the narrative, Lugones reveals the destructive potential of science, even when the impetus for investigation is a benign one. In the wrong hands, this beautiful machine that unlocks the complete, harmonic capacity of the human voice, could be turned deadly. As machine culture becomes more prevalent, these dangers increase exponentially and while scientific knowledge can be beneficial, in Lugones' view it has a very real potential for harm.

This interplay between science and the fantastic questions the authority of science. By simultaneously voicing physics with long vanished ideas of mystical harmony, Lugones advances a theosophist perspective that claims that modern science is merely rediscovering ancient truths. Theosophists and other occultists “believ[ed] that they were engaged in the true mission of science – a thorough and open-minded investigation of the mysteries of the universe” (Owen 34). The distrust they had of science was lodged not in the discipline as a whole, but in how it was practiced in the Victorian era: with an eye toward instrumentalized reason and a denial of the possibility for a spiritual life. The Theosophists wanted to rigorously examine the potentials of the universe, while also giving real attention to a spiritual life. The narration of both “La fuerza omega” and “Yzur” illustrates this impulse to draw these two discourses together while also establishing limits on the knowledge of man. Though these stories contribute to the circulation of scientific knowledge, they also warn of the consequences of assuming human knowledge or scientific progress could ever completely explain the mysteries of the universe.

CHAPTER IV: AURAL REPRESENTATION AND THE MODERN SENSORIUM IN JAIME TORRES BODET'S *PROSERPINA RESCATADA* AND "PARÁLISIS"

The fourth chapter of this project connects the post-revolutionary space of Ireland with that of Mexico through Jaime Torres Bodet's 1931 novel *Proserpina rescatada* (Persephone rescued) and his 1928 short story "Parálisis." While O'Brien's work created a hellscape from the doldrums of de Valera's conservative nation building, Torres Bodet presents an era in Mexican history with a rapid influx of technology after the Mexican Revolution. Torres Bodet writes both pieces in a critical moment of the development of cinema in Mexico. In the 1930s, the Mexican studio system was making the shift from silent film to sounded and in this shift there is a hyper focus on the role of the voice in representation. Experiments in adding sound to image exaggerate the separation of the voice from the speaking body and the voice from the image on screen. The recorded voice, still a novelty in the 30s, has a new, even stranger role in film. With artists and filmmakers wrestling with the place of sound in this new medium, comes a new space for literary experimentation. These two works experiment in the inversion of the textual sensorium to represent characters phonically rather than simply visually and are representative of a modern narrative sensibility that is forced to compete with the sights and sounds of the mechanized world.

The flood of technology that opens the door for vanguard experimentation in literature begins with the rapid industrialization in Mexico under the modernization project of Porfirio Díaz in the 1910s and 20s, which ushers in a wave mechanical innovations. These inventions significantly altered the way the populous perceived and interacted with the world around them, particularly in urban centers. Under the Porfiriato,

writers and artists had largely retreated to the aesthetic space in opposition to the regulated sphere of efficiency, modernization, and instrumentalization. They viewed technology with suspicion due to its ties to the governmental structure and often figured it as equipment for the further repression of the individual citizen. When this regime collapses and modernization becomes a way forward rather than a conservative space, these technologies are embraced in a new way, engaging with the new vanguard in literature and art in a way that was impossible under Díaz.

The influx of technologies of recording and the experience of modernity expands the possibilities for text and creates the space for the polyphonic, polyvalent, multiplicity of Proserpina. Much like the mythical Persephone, who is forced to live two lives, one in the summer above in “real” world and the other in the winter in the underworld, the novel’s Proserpina is a character cut in half. She is both a doctor and a medium for séances. She is both a modern and a mystic. In her duality she is a symptom of a rapidly shifting modern world ready to embrace science and technology but still clinging to the remnants of superstition. For Proserpina these two sides are distinct and incommensurable, while Delfino her friend, colleague, and lover struggles to connect these two sides into a single cohesive narrative. Delfino is a man of science and his first person narration relies on modern technology as the mediation between him and Proserpina. Though the text is not *about* cinema or sound recording, it confronts the problematic dislocation of body from voice and representation from reality that results from these technologies. In doing so, it also positions the positivist, Delfino, in opposition to Proserpina, who exists in the realms of both the positivism and spiritism with Delfino the victor.

CHAPTER V: "I DO NOT CARE FOR CELERY": SOUND, REPETITION, AND SURVEILLANCE IN *THE THIRD POLICEMAN*

In Ireland, Flann O'Brien's 1939 novel *The Third Policeman* moves from the fantastic to the absurd in creating a surreal world where the laws of science and philosophy have been turned inside out. O'Brien's text, though written later than Lugones's, calls upon these same scientific sources and filters them through the fictional philosopher/scientist De Selby. *The Third Policeman* is a spiraling novel of a man caught in a hellscape of his own creation. After a botched robbery attempt that results in the narrator's death, he finds himself trapped in an odd world governed by strange rules of physics and guarded by three policemen. Most importantly in this context, this alternate world is based on "omnium," an all-encompassing substance from which all things are created. As one of the officers, Sergeant MacCruiskeen, explains how this substance works to combine elements of both energy and sound: "light is the same as omnium on a short wave but if it comes on a longer wave it is in the form of noise, or sound" (110). To illustrate how light and sound work together MacCruiskeen uses a mangle, a machine with a hand crank originally used to wring out clothes, that he has altered to physically stretch out light until sound is emitted, usually in the form of a scream or a simultaneous screech of all noise which can then be converted to heat. The officers spend their summers collecting noises to use for heat in the winter (111). Anyone in charge of the omnium has control of all that happens in this world. The collection of voices converts noise and speech into energy, reincorporating all of this energy back into the workings of the space/state. This is the shape of the narrator's hell, held together by omnium and driven by the regulation, monitoring and mutability of energy.

Those who control the forces of the hellscape are not gods, deities, or scientists; they are the police. By the 1930s the recorded voice had already become part of the surveillance of the state, a phenomenon all too familiar during the Irish Civil War of the 1920s, in policing tactics against the IRA (Plauder 216), as well as in secret police forces that arise globally, particularly in fascist states. In the novel, the narrator's own words, which the officer had stored in the mangle, are used as evidence of his original crime and as the site of repetition for the novel. The elements of surveillance in the text are indicative of Eamon de Valera's post-independence Irish government, a government focused on establishing the infrastructure of a new nation while simultaneously enacting conservative social policy. In this atmosphere, the shadow of the impending Second World War shatters the idea of progress and the advancement of human potential in a century already ravaged by economic and political upheaval. Instead, these technologies are increasingly turned against the populace. Science, theosophy, and politics have all proven ill-equipped to make sense of the new century. The multiple layers of O'Brien's narration and the grandiose theories of atoms, light, and energy all prove ineffectual and meaningless in the shadow of a post independence republic where speech itself is dangerous.

CHAPTER II

LINGUISTIC METAMORPHOSIS AND SCIENTIFIC CONVERSION IN GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S *PYGMALION*

In an 1878 article, Thomas Edison proudly proclaims that his latest invention, the phonograph has already made major changes to the human relation to sound. Among the phonograph's miraculous feats, he lists the "indefinite multiplication and preservation of [sounds] without regard to the existence or non-existence of the original source" and "the captivation of sounds, with or without the knowledge or consent of the source of their origin" ("Phonograph" 530). This technology no longer requires a human being to articulate speech. Replaced by a cylinder and the turn of a crank, there is no longer a need for a specific speaker, a revelation in efficiency in the workplace and in the preservation of information. With this technology, the voice can also be isolated and studied as a discrete element without concern for the original speaker or the human body. By the turn of the twentieth century, the phonograph and other sound technologies like the radio have revolutionized the notion of the voice. Separated from the body, sound moves from an ephemeral phenomenon to one that can be replicated and codified. The scientific treatment of language, breaking it down into its linguistic parts and isolating the human voice through recording technologies, creates an objective standard for speech, a baseline for "proper" pronunciation and norms of articulation.

Voice and accent provide an instant recognition of place, and therefore caste, for the listener, that recording technologies now bring into sharp relief. This is particularly true in early twentieth century Britain where the range of accents from cockney to the

King's English are immediately intelligible by the average citizen. Neutralizing the negative connotations of a lower class accent is key to ascending from the lower caste into a more egalitarian class system not so stringently constructed through superficial markers. Playwright, philosopher and political agitator, George Bernard Shaw sees the opportunity to break down these markers of class in this moment of linguistic codification. In Shaw's socialist vision for a new British society, he views accent, including his own Irish accent, as a barrier that can be overcome through training. Shifting one's linguistic code has the power to change external perceptions of class making it easier to cross economic and social borders.

Shaw's answer to this crisis of accent is in the study of phonetics. He is an avid supporter of the democratic aims of this linguistic dissemination, leaving most of his estate to the founding of a phonetic alphabet that would allow for easier language acquisition and a more efficient form of writing. Yet, he is also aware that these kinds of programs and reforms are a stopgap measure until a larger reform of the entire economic system can occur through gradual change, an economic program based in Fabian socialism. His play *Pygmalion* recognizes language as a product of class and breeding that can be corrected; yet, it also criticizes the mediation of the voice through science and technology. This mediation ruptures the self, violating the individual's autonomy, the one thing that must be preserved in Shaw's ethics.

Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts, centers not on a love plot as the title might imply, but instead on a bet between gentlemen that they can pass off a lowly beggar as a duchess through linguistic training. The gentlemen, Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetician, and Colonel Pickering, a moneyed gentleman with an interest in the science,

find their subject in the boisterous Eliza Doolittle, a flower-seller who hopes their language training can improve her station in life. For the two men, this project is a lark, an experiment, while for Eliza it has very real consequences for her future. The central conflict in the play is in the collision between the carelessness of the two men in regards to Eliza, and her refusal to be relegated to the status of mere experiment.

This play is seemingly didactic, a pleasant play about scientific morality and the possibility of transformation once the shackles of poverty have been lifted. As a vocal supporter of linguistic change through phonetics, it should follow that Higgins, a representative of phonetics, is the hero, the key reformer that will prove the effectiveness of language training to help alleviate class bias. Higgins appears to be the holder of truth and morality in his role as scientist and catalyst for change, yet this phonetician, seemingly the perfect advocate for Shaw's own policies ultimately fails in his endeavor. The complexity of Higgins's role in the play becomes clearer when one takes Shaw's "sequel" to the play into account. Shaw writes this prose piece, an epilogue of sorts, to make clear the nature of the relationships between his characters. His sequel enforces a specific reading of the text and leaves little room for reader or actor interpretation, but more importantly, it illuminates his political investment in this play, which is not entirely clear in the play itself.

In the sequel, Shaw describes what happens after the training is over revealing that Eliza and her middle class husband Freddy, despite having the accent and the clothing to make their way in the middle class world do not have the basic skills necessary for survival in that world. Eliza cannot read nor calculate sums, and her husband's classical education has not provided him with any functional skills. Language

proves not enough to successfully cross these boundaries. The root of Higgins' failure is in his attempt to cause a change in Eliza from an external source rather than that change coming from a deep-seated need within Eliza herself.

This key premise of self-motivated change evident in the sequel connects this play to Shaw's broader oeuvre and to his philosophical and political ideals more often attributed to his more overtly political plays like *Major Barbara*, and *Man and Superman*. Higgins's failure is not in his instruction, but in his intention. Eliza is an apt pupil and learns her lessons quickly, but the linguistic transformation is one that is administered from Higgins' external influence. In Shaw's allegiance to Creative Evolution, vitalism, and Fabian socialism, any lasting change must come from within, driven by an intense recognition of the imperative for change. Those who can achieve this level of actualization are those who will create a lasting impact in their own lives but also on the creation of an equitable, progressive world.

Much has been written on Shaw's notions of morality and politics from his connections to Stalinism, Nietzsche, socialism, and most recently his connection to Irish politics of the era. The criticism of *Pygmalion* tends to rest on its use of phonetics, its critique of class structure, or Eliza's place in Shaw's pantheon of unruly women. Rarely are these two strands connected, often discounting *Pygmalion* as a mere lark due to Shaw's superficial rendering of his characters and light-hearted subject matter. I argue that when read alongside of Shaw's articulations of Creative Evolution and its political applications, most clearly evident in his prefaces to *Back to Methuselah* and *Androcles and the Lion*, *Pygmalion* takes on a new political resonance that connects the play to

Shaw's larger body of work and clarifies both Higgins and Eliza's positions in regard to Shaw's own ideologies.

As writer at the turn of the century with an investment in the politics and sciences of the era, George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) offers a window into this age of immense change and development. In his enormous output of plays, novels, political treatises for the Fabian Socialists, and pamphlets, letters and articles about language reform, Shaw shows a consistent engagement with the debates of the era, particularly of evolution and phonetics. Behind Shaw's views on willed change in politics and economics lies an investment in overturning the Neo-Darwinian trend in culture that denies any willful progress in favor of random evolution over time. Although Darwin publishes *Origin of Species* in 1859, the impact of this groundbreaking book is still filtering into the political and social realms at the end of the 19th century. In Shaw's view, the encroachment of Neo-Darwinism into the social world means a validation of the most brutal elements of the economic system that let the vulnerable die and the rich rise to astronomical heights due to nothing more than the accident of their birth into privileged circumstances.

To combat this linkage between the inevitability of social progress through circumstantial change and biological development over time, Shaw backs the (now obsolete) theory of Creative Evolution. Following the theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Shaw advocates for a version of evolution that includes an element of free will and self-determination that can be carried forward across generations. The idea of a willed change is critical to his stance as a social reformer because change can then be created in the world through positive action. In contrast, under Neo-Darwinism, improvement of the human condition and passage into a new phase of existence, presumably for the better,

depends entirely on random events. Creative Evolution does not relegate men to a predetermined position from which no escape can be made. With enough intensity, desire, and internal drive, an individual can will a change in themselves that will set a new course for those that follow.

Shaw is aware that his position as a Lamarckian evolutionist is not a popular one in his era and that it is a difficult biologic position to take. He describes his complicated relationship to the science in his lengthy preface to his work *Back to Methuselah*, a trio of plays that address the metaphysical aspects of civilization. In the preface, he critiques August Weismann's experiments to disprove Lamarckian evolution as an example of a scientist blinded by method. Weismann sets out to disprove Lamarck's concept that if an organism acquires a trait in life, as in the famous example of a giraffe stretching its neck to reach leaves higher on a tree, it would then pass those traits on to its offspring, in this case baby giraffes with longer necks than their peers. In Weismann's experiment, he cuts off the tails of a colony of mice and waits to see if their children will be born without tails, which, of course, is not the case (Shaw, *BM* lvi). While for many this is an effective, if not brutal, experiment, for Shaw it illustrates a mistake in intention. As Shaw explains it, in order for the change to be effective, Weismann should have found a colony of mice who were susceptible to hypnosis and then "hypnotized them into an urgent conviction that the fate of the musque world depended on the disappearance of its tail...Having thus made the mice desire to lose their tails with a life-or-death intensity, he would very soon have seen a few mice born with little or no tail" (lvii). The key to this change is in the mind of the mouse. It is obvious to Shaw that without addressing the internal and urgent need of the mouse to lose its tail no change will happen.

Shaw aligns the internal aspect of Creative Evolution with Vitalist philosophy. In the preface to *Back to Methuselah* he concludes “Nietzsche, for example, thinking out the great central truth of Will to Power instead of cutting off mouse tails, had no difficulty in concluding that the final objective of this Will was power over self, and that the seekers after power over other and material possessions were on a false scent” (lxi). Shaw privileges those who will change to occur in their own lives as the superior beings above those who seek material goods and power over others, or the capitalists who survive on the backs of the laborers of production below them. In his political views, he believes that humankind has not yet reached its culmination and awaits the unique man who can advance human civilization past its current capitalist, Neo-Darwinist barbarism.

To examine how this idea of Creative Evolution plays out in Shaw’s politics and in *Pygmalion*, it is helpful to first examine its application in *Major Barbara*, a play that more immediately addresses these concerns. In *Major Barbara*, Shaw contrasts the pious Barbara, a middle class woman who has dedicated her life to saving souls and serving the poor with the Salvation Army, with her estranged father Andrew Undershaft, an affable and charming arms dealer. While negotiating the terms of the inheritance of the company with the rest of family, Barbara and Undershaft make a deal that she will have the chance to try to convert him through the Salvation Army, and in turn she will have to come visit his munitions factory and he will attempt to convert her to his system of economic ethics.

While touring Undershaft’s community around his munitions factory, a gleaming white utopian town free from strife and poverty, he explains to his daughter the differences between his own viewpoint and Barbara’s. She asks him what virtue and light exist behind the cleanliness and order that he finds in his factory, and he explains:

Undershaft: Cleanliness and respectability do not need justification, Barbara; they justify themselves. I see no darkness here, no dreadfulness. In your Salvation shelter I saw poverty, misery, cold and hunger. You gave them bread and treacle and dreams of heaven. I give from thirty shillings a week to twelve thousand a year. They find their own dreams; but I look after the drainage. (Act III)

Whereas the conversion that Barbara promotes through the Salvation Army advocates humility and service to the Lord as virtue despite the grinding poverty that surrounds them, the work that Undershaft pursues is immoral on its surface (providing arms to conflicts and wars) but his workers are given the immediate reward of a decent wage, shelter, and adequate food. They do not have to rely on the promise of eternal salvation after a mortal life of suffering. Through meeting the basic needs of his workers first, Undershaft leaves their minds and their souls to their own steering. He believes that delivering them from suffering and toward a self-sufficient life, is an inherently godly operation.

While Undershaft does not pull Barbara away from her piety, and she does not convert Undershaft from his faith in economics, their true conversions come in moments when they recognize their own inner strength and identify the power of the self. Undershaft recounts his conversion with conviction.

Undershaft: [his energetic tone dropping into one of bitter and brooding remembrance] I was an east ender. I moralized and starved until one day I swore that I would be a fullfed free man at all costs--that nothing should stop me except a bullet, neither reason nor morals nor the lives of other

men. I said "Thou shalt starve ere I starve"; and with that word I became free and great. I was a dangerous man until I had my will: now I am a useful, beneficent, kindly person. That is the history of most self-made millionaires, I fancy. When it is the history of every Englishman we shall have an England worth living in. (Act III)

In his conversion narrative there is a clearly defined moment of recognition and transformation in which he realizes his true purpose. His conversion, however, is secular and based in transcending the morals and limits of man until he has found a productive space for him within the confines of the material world. Once he recognizes his own power and refuses to be the victim of the system, he becomes capable of harnessing his full potential. Shaw provides lengthy protestations in the preface to *Major Barbara* that Undershaft does not in fact resemble Nietzsche's concept of the ubermensch, admitting simply that he borrowed the term Superman from Nietzsche, but found the base concepts in philosophers of the British Isles, not needing to rely on the continent for brilliant philosophical propositions. Yet, through his protestations there is a bit of truth. Undershaft does embody the characteristics of a man who can see beyond the boundaries of conventional morality to create great change in the world.²

Next to this ideal form of conversion, Barbara can only manage a more limited change beginning after her encounter with her father. His broad views of morality and his cynicism toward faith shake her to the core:

Barbara: ... I was in the power of God. [...] I stood on the rock I thought eternal; and without a word of warning it reeled and crumbled under me. I

² For more about the connections (or disconnections) between Shaw and Nietzsche see Shaw's "Preface to *Major Barbara: First Aid to Critics*," Turco's *Shaw's Moral Vision* and Gassner's "Bernard Shaw and the Making of the Modern Mind."

was safe with an infinite wisdom watching me, an army marching to
Salvation with me; and in a moment, at a stroke of your pen in a cheque
book, I stood alone; and the heavens were empty. (Act III)

This conversion seems incomplete. The miraculous moment comes with a signature in a checkbook rather than in a moment of self-reflective activation. After Undershaft supplies the needed donation to keep her shelter open with money procured through the sale of arms, Barbara can no longer continue her work in good conscience. With the foundation of the Salvation Army taken away from her, she is left empty and purposeless. She has to look within herself for a new way to define who and what she is and find her own definitions of salvation not dependent on the structure of the Salvation Army. She needs to tear down the structure holding her back in order to find a space for her own conversion, yet she finds nothing there.

Barbara's conversion remains unfinished by the end of the play. She has found a new outlet for her teachings, but the inspiration comes from an external source:

Barbara: My father shall never throw it in my teeth again that my converts were bribed with bread. [She is transfigured]. I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank. (Act III)

By preaching to the workers of her father's community rather than to those on the brink of starvation, she can convert their souls in a more substantive way than simply trading platitudes for bread and a blanket. In this community, any soul she converts has been

converted in an earnest commitment to God, thereby freeing Barbara to do the best work she can. Free from the accusation of holding bread hostage for souls, she is nonetheless dependent on Undershaft's economic order for this tranquility. The stage directions "she is transfixed" marks a Pauline moment of conversion, but, in effect, this moment is an act of resignation rather than conversion. She has found her vocation but perhaps not herself. Her work is only possible within the confines of Undershaft's utopia. In her final lines in the play she calls out for her mother, clinging to her skirts like a child, undermining the possibility that she has achieved her own enlightenment.

The narratives of salvation parodied here are reformer tracts that, in transforming the souls and bodies of young girls and the poor, find their origin in the long Protestant history of Pauline conversions stories. The performative function of the narratives (i.e. public confessing of sins and the detailing the exact moment of salvation) finds a new application in the contemporary moment in self-help organization and support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers while in the 19th Century, they were used by reform groups like the Salvation Army. The original source for this kind of narrative is in Chapter 9 of the *Acts of the Apostles* in the *New Testament*. The passage tells of the instantaneous and miraculous conversion of Judaic Saul to the Christian Paul that forms the cornerstone of many Protestant denominations. On the road to Damascus, Saul is shouting out "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (*Acts 9:1*) when a bright light descends from Heaven and Jesus himself appears to Saul. The encounter strikes Saul, now reborn as Paul, blind for three days. With his sight restored, he immediately begins preaching "Christ in the synagogues" (*Acts 9:20*). According to Giorgio Agamben, the shift in name from Saul to Paul marks not only of conversion in

nomenclature, but of conversion in his relationship to God as well. In the Koran, Saul is named *Talut*, a word that translates to highest. To the Israelites, Saul was also depicted as regal in both beauty and stature. Therefore, the shift from “s” to “p” “signifies no less than the passage from the regal to the insignificant, from grandeur to smallness – *paulus* in Latin means ‘small, of little significance’” (Agamben 9). This new relation to God means a humbling before God and for many Christians shifts the religion to one of proselytizing and outward proclamations of faith.

Shaw, though Protestant, does not adhere to the Pauline philosophy. In the preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, one of Shaw’s few plays that addresses religion directly, he discusses the notion of Pauline conversion as a theatrical sham: “The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all: it was Paul who converted the religion that had raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their own common nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life” (qtd. in Grene 63). In Shaw’s view, Christianity after Paul became a religion of fear, doubt, and shame that worked to repress the individual and contain the baser aspects of human nature. It also became a weapon to wield over believers, requiring them to take Paul’s stance of humility before God. From this position of prostration, it is nearly impossible for the individual to find an inner salvation or self-actualization, which Shaw feels is far more important than adherence to dogma.

The consequences of this shift in Christianity can be seen in some of the more extreme versions of conversion narratives, which belong to the Puritans of colonial America. Following the example of preacher Thomas Shepard, the members of the Cambridge congregation would publically confess their moment of calling and direct

connection with God. These moments provided evidence of the speaker's "visible sainthood" or membership as one of the elect chosen by God for salvation. This elect can never be taken for granted and must constantly be re-assessed, questioned, and sought after with constant vigilance (McGiffert 136). The telling of conversion stories takes on a kind of performativity and narrative form that was overseen by the community. Stories could not be too long, contain too many Biblical citations, or too many details, or else they would be seen as false and told out of vanity rather than faith. The culture that surrounds the telling of conversion narratives is one of self-punishment, and self-denial where the threat of eternal damnation looms large.

The Salvation Army used similar tactics, advertising meetings with tales of abuse, hardship, and misery from people who were delivered from this pain by the Army. When salvation, or the promise of bread and a warm bed depend on a formulaic story, the more heartbreaking the better, there is a natural inclination to embellish. Shaw describes his rancor towards these kinds of confessions in his preface to *Major Barbara*:

Then there is the nasty lying habit called confession, which the Army encourages because it lends itself to dramatic oratory, with plenty of thrilling incident. For my part, when I hear a convert relating the violences and oaths and blasphemies he was guilty of before he was saved, making out that he was a very terrible fellow then and is the most contrite and chastened of Christians now, I believe him no more than I believe the millionaire who says he came up to London or Chicago as a boy with only three halfpence in his pocket. ("First Aid")

Confessions are performance and not salvation. In this context, they only function to raise the status of the savior, the Salvation Army, rather than to tend to the souls in need of saving. The greater the scoundrel, the greater the salvation, the greater the donation to the Army. Shaw does not blame the person seeking salvation; why not trade a story for some bread? Instead, he blames the system that does not see poverty as the real crime, the real atrocity. The promise of an eternal reward in the afterlife as payment for suffering through a mortal existence does nothing to alleviate the pain of the mortal world. Instead, Shaw sees it as a moral imperative to improve conditions on earth in the present moment.

Shaw's belief in the self as the root of conversion as seen in Undershaft moment of clarity, is based both in his politics and his notions of evolution. Fabian socialism advocated not for an immediate revolution but for a gradual change over time, advancing policies like minimum wage and pensions in order to provide security and move toward a better economic system. But while the idea of change over time seems in line with Darwinian notions of evolution, Shaw subscribed to the vitalist idea of Creative Evolution. In contrast to what he saw as amoral, animalistic and random evolution in Darwinism, Shaw believed that a Lamarckian view of evolution allowed space for will driven evolution that strives for positive change rather than simply survival (Griffith 9). Like Lamarck, Shaw believed that evolutionary changes come from within an organism and are not solely the result of environmental pressures. Such changes would then be passed on to the offspring of the newly adapted organism. Moreover, Shaw subscribed to the idea of a Life Force, or *élan vital*, that functions as a progressive, organizing force in the world and helps activate these evolutionary advances. The root of this Life Force is not divine, but rather it operates as a teleological proposition (Mills 124-125).

To be a socialist, vitalist, realist is no easy feat. And while Shaw's concepts can seem at odds with one another, his complex web of politics, science, and morality converge in the idea of self-evolution toward a greater good. Fabians advocate for economic reform that eradicates the grinding poverty that results from capitalist exploitation of productive labor. To achieve this goal they envision a "professionally administered society" headed by the Ablest of men rather than the wealthiest (Ray 218). Progress in such a system requires that the Ablest come to the fore to lead and guide the proletariat forward. This man needs to be the best suited for the task at hand and have the will to create positive change, a tenet he describes in one of his clearest applications of Creative Evolution in his 1944 political treatise, *Everybody's Political What's What?* in which Shaw describes the qualities of an ideal future leader:

His God must not be an existing Omnipotent Omniscient Perfection, but as yet only an ideal towards which creative evolution is striving, with mankind merely its best attempt so far, and a very unsatisfactory one at that, liable to be replaced at any moment if creative evolution gives it up as hopeless. He must face the evil of the world, which apparently reduces the goodness of God to absurdity, as but the survival of errors originally well intended. He must treat life as everlasting, but treat his contemporaries as ephemeral mortals having no life beyond the grave to compensate them for any injustice they may suffer here and now. (qtd. in Griffith 154)

Evident here is Shaw's faith in the exceptional man, again reminiscent of Nietzsche's philosophies. This man must understand that utopia is always a future oriented

proposition and humankind is always in a state of evolution forward. In contributing to the growth of future generations, he must also work to make the current state as the best possible given contemporary conditions. Like *Major Barbara's* Undershaft, he must be able to face the true causes of unrest and with a clear pragmatism work to better these conditions, offering citizens a better life in the present moment rather than promising redemption in some eternal afterlife. Like many of his generation, Shaw favored a government that while operating outside of a capitalist system that depends on poverty and oppression also has at its head an extraordinary man of genius. This position would later lead to his questionable positions on Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini (Gassner 524).

The evolutionary force involved here is not just a gradual, progressive, social evolution, but also entails a Lamarckian evolution of Shaw's leader. In order for the man of genius to exist, he must recognize the power within himself to bring about a rupture in the current status quo. Not a conversion manipulated by an outside force or omnipotent God, Undershaft's conversion results in a willed change from within. As Alfred Turco explains, this will is at the heart of Shaw's views on socialism as a potential economic and political structure. As such Shaw "never urges anyone to become a socialist by sacrificing his own interests: on the contrary, he argues that socialism is in the long-range interest of all persons. His very insistence that the common man has no choice but to look out for himself until the system changes is intended to provoke the uncommon man into seeing the value of changing the system" (Turco 128). Undershaft recognizes that no one else will look out for his interests and without his own determination, he will starve, unnoticed, amid the throngs of others starving in the London slums. With his own

liberation he is able to become the uncommon man who can help to raise others up from the same circumstances, seeing the benefit to all.

This same array of characteristics can be seen in *Pygmalion*, a play most remembered for inspiring the musical *My Fair Lady* and not typically aligned with politics or Shaw's philosophies aside from his engagement with the study of phonetics. I argue that the idea of the evolution and metamorphosis through language in *Pygmalion* functions in accordance with Shaw's moral and political positions articulated in his earlier play *Major Barbara*, and in his socio-political understanding of Creative Evolution. Whereas *Major Barbara* presents the idea of conversion through a dichotomy between religion and economics, *Pygmalion* presents this same proposition through a dichotomy of science and social morality. In this modern day conversion narrative the Shavian scientist fails in the same way as religion and economics have before; linguistic reform from the outside functions no differently than Weismann's experiment in cutting off mice's tails. The only true Shavian conversion occurs when one is able to see the hypocrisy of the economic system to break free of the confines of middle class morality from an internal will to change. The linguistic change must match the internal notion of self in order to create a true metamorphosis of character.

Shaw sets up an intrinsic relationship between voice and self in the initial scenes of the play in which Professor Higgins first encounters Eliza selling flowers in Covent Garden to the passersby.

The Bystander (to the girl): You be careful: give him a flower for it.

Theres³ a bloke here behind taking down every blessed word youre saying[...]

The Flower Girl [Eliza]:...Oh sir, dont let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. Theyll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. (222)

The Flower Girl, Eliza, is immediately concerned that the man taking down every word she says, Professor Higgins, is a police officer. She is afraid that by being so bold as to speak to a gentleman from her position as a beggar, that her actions could be misinterpreted as prostitution or some attempt to rob the man. From her social position there is little she can do or say to counter such an accusation, as the word of a gentleman holds more weight with a court than her own. In this moment all she can do is plead with the crowd in hopes that they will confirm that she is simply selling flowers and not soliciting anything or being untoward with the gentleman at hand. The act of recording her words is, in Eliza's view, a violation that could turn her own words against her. The threat of injury to her person springs from an act of surveillance and the ability of strangers to identify her as out of place among the "civilized" members of society. Her accent and her clothing immediately expose her as an outsider and put her in danger.

While her voice and diction are what the Professor is recording, his interest is not in Eliza herself, but rather in her pronunciation and her speech patterns. He is out collecting sounds and voices of the people around him to add to his collection and his knowledge base. Eliza is, in Higgins' eyes, an object of study and a potential specimen.

³ Shaw often omitted punctuation like apostrophes unless they are used for orthographic purposes. I have preserved this system as it appears in the version consulted for this project.

Therefore, he sees value in her as a way to advance and reaffirm his own research agenda. Higgins makes a wager with Colonel Pickering, an officer with an interest in phonetics who has recently returned from India and met Higgins at Covent Garden:

The Note Taker [Higgins]: You see this creature with her kerbstone English: The English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. That's the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires. And on the profits of it I do genuine scientific work in phonetics, and a little as a poet on Miltonic lines. (228)

This lowborn subject is nothing more than a "creature" he can mold into a new form, advancing her through science in a way that economics and breeding cannot. Higgins' interest in the intricacies of language is the driving force of the play, one that ensnares Eliza and examines the human edge of sound and voice. He contends that his teaching will help Eliza evolve from her bestial state and be able to pass through society as any proper lady might. Language use is the evolutionary leap necessary to move this girl from beast to duchess. Higgins imposes his experiment on Eliza, dooming the experiment in terms of Shaw's worldview because the impetus for this change does not come from Eliza but instead from Higgins, a force external to Eliza.

At the same time, Shaw does find redemptive qualities in the advancement of phonetics. The character of Henry Higgins is based, at least in part, on the real-life phonetician Henry Sweet, a friend and colleague of Shaw's, whose work he admired. Shaw had known Sweet since the 1870s and both men saw phonetics not simply as a new

science of language, but as a tool that could be applied directly to social ills in accordance with Shaw's Fabian ideals. In the preface to the play, Shaw explains that because the study of phonetics provides linguistic access to higher levels of employment and access to economic advancement, "the reformer England needs today is an energetic phonetic enthusiast" (213). According to Lynda Mugglestone, "phonetics becomes the agent of Fabian ideals in the consummate ease with which it levels class distinctions and fills in class divides, providing, as a cancelled passage of *Pygmalion* made clear, the means for 'the regeneration of the human race through the most difficult science in the world'" (382). If the barrier of language is lifted, there is one less impediment for those in the lower classes to gain passage through to a self-sustaining economic state. The use of the term "regeneration" in this passage also reaffirms the notion of evolution through language that will help humankind advance to a new stage of evolutionary progress if these outdated modes of social hierarchy can be undone.

Higgins functions as a representation of this kind of reformer and the work he pursues is akin to that which was practiced by phoneticians in the early 1900s. As a believer in the potentials of phonetics, Shaw takes great care in the stage directions to provide a very specific description of Higgins' lab to identify him as a proper scientist:

In this corner stands a flat writing table, on which are a phonograph, a laryngoscope, a row of tiny organ pipes with bellows, a set of chimney lamps for singing flames with burners attached to a gas plug in the wall by an indiarubber tube, several tuning-forks of different sizes, a life-size image of half a human head, shewing in section the vocal organs, and a box containing a supply of wax cylinders for the phonograph. (230)

The setting provides all of the trappings of a legitimate lab for a legitimate scientist. The collection includes traditional scientific tools, a laryngoscope, rubber tubes, anatomical drawings etc, as well as more contemporary items like the gramophone. This setting gives Higgins the authority of a scientist, which would be easily identifiable to someone like Eliza, and as a scientist, Higgins holds a societal position above common morality. The scientist/sage enjoys a certain degree of reverence and this setting allows for that title to be bestowed upon Higgins.

The presence of the chimney lamps for singing flames signals an interest not only in linguistics, or the structures of speech and language, but also in sound as an object of study in and of itself. Experiments with singing flames use heat to create vibration and when enclosed in an appropriately sized tube, the vibrations create a tone akin to the sound of the human voice. Irish physicist John Tyndall explains the phenomenon at great length in his 1867 treatise on sound. According to Tyndall, this idea harkens back to the 18th century when, a perhaps not coincidentally named, Dr. Higgins first heard the sounds while working with hydrogen flames. There is a renewed interest in its potential in the 19th century when experiments from Michael Faraday begin work on energy, heat, and sound. In 1818, Faraday advances the hypothesis by discovering that the sounds were produced when the temperature surrounding the tube was higher than 100 degrees Celsius (Tyndall 226). After subsequent experiments in Germany in 1857, Tyndall attempts to repeat the experiment himself and his results are of particular interest for Shaw's Dr. Higgins.

Tyndall discovers that he can extinguish the singing flame with the power of his own voice by matching the tone exuded from the cylinder.

While executing these experiments, I once noticed that, on raising my voice to the proper pitch, a flame which had been burning silently in its tube began to sing. The song was interrupted, and the proper note sounded several times in succession; in every case the flame responded by starting into song. (28)

The human voice is able to spark the flame into producing the singing effect. Tyndall is able to repeat the experiment using tuning forks and a siren, matching the tone and the vibration from the cylinder with the outside stimuli. The voice, then, operates in the same way as any sound vibration. It can be manipulated and can also manipulate other forces in the world. In its reduction to a physical force, the metaphysical aspects of voice become knowable. If Shaw's Higgins has these materials in his lab, they signal his own preoccupation with voice as a manipulable force, rather than as a uniquely human possession. As a linguist, he interprets the voice as its atomized parts of inflection, speech, and tone without reverence for the speaker as a specific, individual human.

The gramophone in the lab aids in separating the voice from the body, recording and preserving this otherwise ephemeral phenomenon. With the human voice frozen in time, the aural record can work together with the visual to provide a more comprehensive record of a subject's speech pattern. For the student of language, these tools provide access to an unprecedented wealth of information. To be able to copy, transfer, and share a subject's recorded voice rather than having to rely simply on the phonetic notations of visible speech or other graphic modes, the student can directly correlate these signs and the utterance. The permanence of the recording allows for endless playback, a technique that allows Higgins to learn to distinguish such a broad number of vowel sounds and

methodically memorize the linguistic idiosyncrasies of a host of regional English accents. The value of the gramophone is evident in the description that Higgins provides to Pickering about his working process upon Eliza's arrival at his laboratory.

Higgins: This is rather a bit of luck. I'll shew you how I make records. We'll set her talking; and I'll take it down first in Bell's Visible Speech; then in broad Romic; and then well get her on the phonograph so that you can turn her on as often as you like with the written transcript before you.
(232)

Higgins' system of symbolic representations of Eliza's speech patterns uses both the Visible Speech and Romic notation systems. He then records a phonograph record to correspond with the written transcript. The process allows him to collect and store his aural data. With this information Higgins no longer needs Eliza. Her insignificance to the long-term goals of the project is evident in the final sentence of the passage in which he explains that once Eliza's voice is on the cylinder, Pickering can "turn her on" as often as he likes. The pronoun "her" refers back to both Eliza and the machine, conflating the two. Once the voice has been preserved, the body becomes disposable. What happens to the person Eliza is of little consequence to Higgins who sees her as merely a data point, a specimen for dissection. Separating the voice from her body seems natural to Higgins, while for Eliza, having Higgins break her down into components of speech, speaker, body and soul, presents a complex dissolution of the self that cannot easily be repaired.

Higgins process as described above provides insight into the phonetic practices contemporary to the play. Bell's Visible Speech refers to Alexander Melville Bell's (father of telephone inventor Alexander Graham Bell) physiological phonetic alphabet.

His notation system uses symbols that represent not syllables, but the mouth shape required to make the sounds in the word. His system is one that could make a stronger correlation between word and sound than the standard English alphabet (Conolly 2 n.3). In the early 20th century, it was used as a tool for the instruction of deaf students, who, without the aid of the sonic representation of speech, could mimic sound, forming the unheard sounds in the mouth instead of in the ear. The Romic alphabet is one of Henry Sweet's developments, a phonetic alphabet that served as the precursor for the International Phonetic Alphabet still in use today. The Romic symbols aim to reproduce the phonetics of a word, including tone, accent, and diacritical qualities in a manner that renders them pronounceable to speakers of any language (Conolly 28). Shaw values both systems as alternate methods of providing accessible and universal forms of written language as opposed to the non-intuitive English spelling and pronunciation.

Shaw felt so strongly about the creation of a new English alphabet that he left provisions in his will to create a proposed British alphabet of at least forty letters “enabling the said language to be written without indicating single sounds by groups of letters or by diacritical marks, instead of by one symbol for each sound” (166). He also specified that his play *Androcles and the Lion* should be transliterated into this new alphabet and distributed in a side-by-side translation, including a glossary for the promotion and dissemination of this new phonetic alphabet. Although a judge later ruled that the will could not be enforced because the conditions set forth were not enough to establish a specific charity where the funds could be channeled, the will illustrates Shaw's deep commitment to language reform and its potential as a social good.

Part of the appeal of language acquisition, made easily available to the average consumer through the gramophone, was its ability to democratize language. Though the play will eventually show that blind faith in science is just as detrimental to the subject as religious zealotry, phonetics offers the hope of leveling the linguistic playing field. By the early 20th century, several companies had already seen the same potential to provide a broader base for language acquisition. The Cortina Company claims to have been the first to institute “language–phone” methods in language instruction. The company, founded in 1882, won awards at the World’s Fair in both 1893 and 1901 for their innovations. Emma Gertrude Kunze describes the uses of the gramophone in perfecting intonation and achieving a proper accent in her 1929 article detailing the array of products available including a class from the taught by one Professor Fougeray:

The recorder, Professor Fougeray, has an excellent accent. His voice is clear, he pronounces slowly, with a pause long enough for the student to imitate him immediately. When he pronounces a single word, he sustains the last syllable, raising his voice slightly, thus getting the pupils used at once to the tonic accent. How hard we have to work to prevent their saying “con-ver-sa’-tion” instead of “con-ver-sa-tión.” But if they hear it often enough and correctly before they try to imitate, they acquire the property intonation as a matter of course. (540-541)

The focus of this review is on attaining the “correct” accent and in defeating students’ proclivities and bad habits of pronunciation. The repetitive training available through the gramophone allows students to hear the exact same pronunciation over and over again in a way that even the most practiced linguist would have difficulty repeating in a physical

classroom. Students can then perfect their imitation of the sounds, replaying the disk as often as they need for their own, personalized training.

Linguaphone, a company still in existence now and offering web based language training, sells gramophone disks that the student could use at home. Their 1939 advertisement claims: “You listen to the records – spoken by a native speaker, and automatically become able to understand the spoken language, and to speak it yourself. Simultaneously, the famous Linguaphone Key Books give you the printed words, so that your self-education is thorough” (Linguaphone). Their sales pitch finds its base in convenience and accessibility for the average user who can put the increasingly available gramophone technology to a new purpose. Subscribers can choose between twenty languages, ranging from Irish and English to Esperanto and Persian, while the records give listeners the ability to learn at their own pace and repeat the lessons endlessly until they reach a satisfactory imitation.

The Key Books featured recordings by prominent members of society, authors, and intellectuals, including Shaw himself. Shaw addresses his listeners, presumably English language learners, and uses the space of his records to discuss the complexities of emphasizing the “proper” pronunciation: “Now, whether you are a foreigner or a native, the first thing I must impress on you is that there is no such thing as ideally correct English. No two British subjects speak exactly alike” (7).⁴ As a member of the BBC committee on establishing the proper pronunciation of English for the radio, Shaw makes the distinction between “perfectly correct” English and “presentable” English. For him, there is no exact, static method of speaking. Instead, he recognizes a range of registers and accents, from his own Irish speech to the accents of Newcastle in the north and Essex

⁴ The audio recording can be heard at <http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Early-spoken-word-recordings>

in the south, as valid and equally presentable in terms of communication. Each differs from the other, and speakers all hold their own idiosyncratic speech patterns within those accents. Therefore, for the language learner, clarity of communication is the goal rather than mimicking a high-toned British accent.

At the same time, Shaw portrays a hierarchy of language and pronunciation. Though there may not be one single, correct English, the word “presentable” does carry with it a degree of personal taste and discernment between kinds of English. In one of the final minutes of the recording, Shaw seems to hold both of these principles in a balance between clarity of communication and an attention to the details and nuances of language of native English speakers.

[...] there is no such thing as perfectly correct English, there is presentable English which we call “Good English”; but in London nine hundred and ninety nine out of every thousand people not only speak bad English but speak even that very badly [...] Therefore the first thing you have to do is to speak with a strong foreign accent, and speak broken English: that is English without any grammar. (11)

Even within the constraints of presentable English, Shaw claims that the majority of native English speakers can barely muster a passable English. His advice to the English language learners in his audience to speak in broken English is based in the idea that those who speak English, their own language, very poorly will take offense to someone who attempts to speak it in a manner too precise or too proper. Instead, Shaw advises that non-native speakers to expose their novice state, which will endear them to the average

English person, who with the upper linguistic hand, will then feel obliged to offer assistance.

In a letter to the phonetician Henry Sweet, Shaw clarifies his position regarding the connection between accent and social mobility. He claims that what is necessary is to write down the phonetic pronunciation in the best manner possible and have it signed by a number of high profile members of society authorizing this pronunciation. He is quick to deny, however, that even with an agreed upon standard that there is any one correct pronunciation

...or [that this pronunciation is] in any way binding on any human being or morally superior to Hackney cockney or Idaho american, but solely that if a man pronounces in that way he will be eligible as far as speech is concerned for the post of Lord Chief Justice, Chancellor of Oxford, Archbishop of Canterbury, Emperor, President, or Toast Master at the Mansion House. (qtd. in Conolly xxxix n.79)

His concern here is not that anyone necessarily needs to speak in a particular way or that speech patterns inherently imply any moral or cultural superiority, but that speech can be a barrier in reaching a higher social standing or taking advantage of all possible employment opportunities. This notion of mobility marks the intersection of his socialist leanings and his ideas of language training. The simple accident of hereditary or location should not be an impediment to acquiring a position equal to the individual's merit.

While Shaw opens the category of accent to include a diverse range of acceptable modes of speech, he recognizes that some accents and modes of speech will always mark the speaker as lower class. Altering one's speech patterns is a pragmatic solution to

circumventing the existing social structure and erasing a linguistic marker, like a cockney accent, in favor of a more palatable one. As Mugglestone notes: “the cockney, throughout the nineteenth century, is...seen not only as a kind of social pariah, but also becomes, in terms of the prevailing prescriptive ideology, a butt for all the linguistic sins of the age, the stereotype of every linguistic, and particularly phonemic, infelicity” (380). The boisterous and often imitated accent of chimney sweeps and flower girls is a marker not simply of region, but specifically of class. The harshness of its tones collides with the softer, more lyrical speech of the aristocracy. Thus, the caricature of the cockney accent is often attributed to the fool or the pub dweller, indicating a lack of education, breeding, and manners. Because the cockney accent becomes intertwined with these social notions, the speaker, like Eliza, is automatically endowed with all of these negative qualities upon speaking. Shaw addresses the attitude toward cockney in a 1906 comment that “most Englishmen and women would almost rather die than be convicted of speaking like costermongers and flower girls” (qtd. in Mugglestone 380). This comment reflects the weight of Eliza’s transformation in the play Shaw would write six years later and of the prevailing sentiment in English society that links voice and speech to “innate” social qualities. A speaker must evolve beyond the confines of social class and break loose from these associations in order to achieve social mobility.

However, in order for a person to “pass” as a speaker of a higher class, even with language training, his or her voice must match both the internal and external qualities of the speaker. The final lines of *Pygmalion*’s preface warn against a false linguistic pretension:

An honest and natural slum dialect is more tolerable than the attempt of a phonetically untaught person to imitate the vulgar dialect of the golf club; and I am sorry to say that in spite of the efforts of our Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, there is still too much sham golfing English on our stage, and too little of the noble English of Forbes Robertson. (217)⁵

Like the foreign speaker addressed in his Linguaphone recording, pretense or the imitation of a too proper accent always rings false and creates a bias toward the speaker in the listener. Care must be taken in cultivating the appropriate level of expertise within the attainable goals of the individual speaker. At least the speaker of the slum dialect speaks honestly whereas the untrained speaker who attempts to simply imitate an aristocratic dialect will sound false, an imposter, like an amateur actor who overpronounces their words. The rest of the speaker's trappings must coincide with the voice. Herein lies the additional complexity of metamorphosis in the play. To Shaw, a superficial alteration will also be discoverable, an example of artifice and chicanery rather than an earnest attempt at self-actualization and self-evolution. Higgins attempts to perfect this notion of imitation without investing in Eliza's mental or emotional attitudes toward this change, leading ultimately, to his failure.

In the play, Shaw's views on language are caricatured through Higgins, a man who believes that language and pretense are enough to, at least temporarily, cause a shift in social class. Eliza's dirty accent is an affront to the English language that, for Higgins, lowers Eliza's status not just as an Englishwoman, but also as a human. Her decreased social value correlates to her low accent as he demonstrates during their first meeting.

⁵ Johnston Forbes-Robertson produced a number of Shaw's later plays and was "famous not only as an actor but for the beauty of his speech" (Shaw, "Broken" 7)

The Note Taker [Higgins]: A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere – no right to live.

Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespear and Milton and The Bible: and dont sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.

The Flower Girl [Eliza] (quite overwhelmed, looking up at him in mingled wonder and deprecation without daring to raise her head): Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-ow-oo! (227)

Higgins debases Eliza to the point of advocating her destruction. He perceives her abuse of language as akin to animality. The inarticulate groan of this “creature,” which will repeat throughout the play as an innate part of her language, reaffirms his idea that she possesses a bestial quality in both her speech and in her very being. At the same time, Higgins holds “proper” English in such a high regard that he sees language as holding redemptive qualities. If Eliza can simply remember that she has received the divine gift of language and harness it properly, she will elevate her soul and potentially her status in the Great Chain of Being, a linguistic and metaphysical metamorphosis.

Higgins refuses to use human descriptors for Eliza in her current bedraggled state. She is “baggage,” a “creature,” “a squashed cabbage leaf,” never a full-fledged person. Laura Otis identifies this trend as Shaw’s parodying of conversion narratives like those of William Booth’s Salvation Army works also utilized in *Major Barbara* which describe miserable creatures of the lower class achieving enlightenment, salvation, and redemption back into human status. Although Shaw’s redemption results from a more secular

process, *Pygmalion* mirrors the patterns of Booth's works. As Otis describes, "these stories depict the poor as animals, creatures whose humanity can be restored through near-miraculous interventions. The first step in such a conversion was a thorough scrubbing, aimed to confer dignity by returning the poor creature's human appearance" (487). This is the first act Higgins takes against Eliza. As soon as she and Higgins have agreed on the terms of their arrangement, that Eliza will be in Higgins's care for six months while undergoing her language training and transformation to a passable duchess, the first step is cleansing her of the street. Like the Salvation Army's *Orders and Regulations* for care of wayward girls that specified that each girl admitted to a home was to be "bathed without delay" with her clothes "washed, fumigated, or destroyed as necessary" (qtd. in Jackson 112), Mrs. Pearce, Higgins's housekeeper burns all of Eliza's old clothes, sticks her hat in the oven to bake off any lingering fleas and bugs, and immediately puts her in a hot bath. While the Salvation Army was working to save "fallen" women and girls from sexual abuse and homelessness, scrubbing clean the influence of the streets and returning them to a purified state, Higgins is working to scrub Eliza's bad habits. He wants to turn her into a blank canvas on which he can inscribe his own training.

Though less dramatic than *Major Barbara* in its moralism, *Pygmalion* uses the same structure of conversion narrative to provide a basis for Eliza's transformation from poverty stricken flower seller to a duchess. In the original version of the *Pygmalion*, the scene in which Mrs. Pearce bathes the gutter out of Eliza takes place off stage, with little detail about what happens to Eliza during this scrubbing. The 1941 version that Shaw wrote after producing the screenplay for the 1938 movie includes additional details about

the cruelty of this process of scrubbing clean the “guttersnipe.” The added scene reveals that Higgins’s modern bathroom with running water and an array of soaps, perfumes, and luxurious towels, is the first of its kind for Eliza. Never before has she taken a bath, nor has she owned pajamas or slept in a warm bed. Mrs. Pearce tells Eliza she must bathe despite her fear of getting wet and therefore cold, a condition that would be hazardous in her former life. In trying to calm her Mrs. Pearce reveals the motivations for her bath: “I want to change you from a frowzy slut to a clean respectable girl fit to sit with the gentlemen in the study” (43). The idea of being unclean has resonances not only in bestiality but also in purity and morality. Despite the fact Eliza adamantly repeats that she is not that kind of woman and sells flowers, but never her body, her lack of bodily cleanliness correlates to “slut.” Her filth is a mark of impurity and corruption that needs to be washed away and sanitized before she can even attempt to make a foray into decent society.

To accomplish this task, Mrs. Pearce puts on rubber gloves, and “takes a formidable looking long handled scrubbing brush and soaps it profusely with a ball of scented soap” (43). Mrs. Pearce’s rubber gloves and menacing scrubbing brush seem the tools of a kitchen made for scrubbing pots, rather than human bodies. These implements, tinged with the threat of violence, contrast with the scented soap and the care Mrs. Pearce takes in drawing the bath for Eliza and the close of this scene brings the violence to the fore. Eliza cowers in the corner afraid of this foreign process, letting out her trademark animalistic howl. Mrs. Pearce then snatches off her dressing gown and throws Eliza down on her back. The final stage directions are “Eliza’s screams are heartrending” (44). The violence here resembles that of a sexual assault. In order to elevate this subhuman,

impure specimen to a woman capable of participating fully in society, her perceived corruption must be undone by a similar, yet “civilized” violence. Bourgeois morality is the default position for British society and Shaw’s inclusions of scenes like this one scratch the veneer of “proper” society. Shaw draws Eliza as a sympathetic figure who has the power to subvert the seemingly benign reformist platform of uplifting the lower classes by revealing it as harmful to the individual body.

This code of ethics in bourgeois morality functions as an even stronger boundary to class mobility than economics or speech. Its invisible entrenchment into the very fiber of society makes it the most difficult force to overcome. In his objective, scientific view, Higgins is acutely aware of this quandary. When forced momentarily to socialize with his mother’s well-bred friends, Mrs. Hill and her children Clara and Freddy, Higgins finds it hard to contain his true feelings:

Higgins. You see, we’re all savages, more or less. We’re supposed to be civilized and cultured – to know all about poetry and philosophy and art and science, and so on; but how many of us know the meanings of these names? (*To Miss Hill*) What do you know of poetry? (*To Mrs Hill*) What do you know of science? (*Indicating Freddy*) What does he know of art or science or anything else? What the devil do you imagine I know of philosophy? (264)

Higgins reveals his contempt for the petty small talk of the bourgeoisie. He shatters the illusion that anyone in this room has any expertise or even interesting commentary to offer on the humanist topics of philosophy, art, and science. His outburst shows his underlying assumptions about speech and manners; he views this kind of banal

conversation as learned behavior. Rather than discussing things that the participants of the conversation actually have an interest in, or knowledge of, drawing room conversations are guided by a small set of acceptable topics. While at this stage in her training Eliza can only muster a stilted conversation about the weather and her well being, she is no different than Clara or Freddy in that all three young people are conditioned to respond to these situations in coded and artificial ways – Clara and Freddy simply have had more training.

Eliza's trained speech differs from the accepted norms. Higgins instructs her to talk of the weather and her health and other safe topics, while Eliza starts from this point, her conversation quickly devolves into topics she would have discussed in the streets, like alcoholism and her aunt's suspicious death from influenza, wherein Eliza implies that someone might have "done her in" (72) a reference to her possible murder. Her speech is still peppered with slang including her infamous line "Not bloody likely" (74) in response to Freddy's offer to walk her across the park. Her use of "bloody" was scandalous for audiences and this one word was enough to get the play banned from a number of playhouses. In the context of the scene, because of her appearance and her genteel accent the disjoint between the content of her speech and her delivery gains attention in this room of middle class acquaintances. They perceive her speech as edgy and representative of the "new small talk" something that the savvy young set is now speaking This disruption to protocol makes Mrs. Hill feel that she has underprepared her own daughter who appears to be Eliza's equal and apologizes to their host Mrs. Higgins that her daughter has made such a poor showing in front of Higgins and Pickering.

Mrs Eynsford Hill (to Mrs Higgins): You mustnt mind Clara... We're so poor! and she gets so few parties, poor child! She doesnt quite know. (Mrs Higgins, seeing that her eyes are moist, takes her hand sympathetically and goes with her to the door). (269)

The humor in this scene is that Eliza has bumbled through the conversation while Clara did exactly what she was supposed to do as a well-bred young woman. In addition, we have already seen what real poverty looks like through Eliza's life as a flower girl. In this context, the notion that the Hills are poor is absurd. Though much of the Hills' inherited money runs out, and they now spend what's left keeping up appearances and hoping the children can marry into new money, Clara has certainly benefitted from far more advantages than Eliza. Not being able to attend a few parties does not warrant Mrs. Hill's tearful lament in the face of Eliza's real struggles. Yet, Clara's lack of party attendance also affirms Higgins's approach to language and trained speech. If Clara had been in contact with those in her social circle more often, she would be more familiar with the latest conventions and with current linguistic trends, making her able to identify Eliza as a fraud. Mrs. Hill's reaction confirms that everyone participates in the performance of language and culture to varying degrees.

This scene also marks the space of genteel manners and morality as a space of privilege that requires money and social influence for entry. Language alone will not allow Eliza to keep up her sham. Long-term survival in the aristocracy requires money behind the manners. Shaw uses Mr. Doolittle, Eliza's father as a foil for Eliza's passing via speech. He is a dustman by trade and, like Eliza, living on the lowest rungs of society. When he learns that Eliza has moved to Higgins's house to undergo her training,

Doolittle comes by not to check in on the welfare of his daughter or to say goodbye to her, but to see if he can get a cut of the action. He asks Higgins to pay him for the use of his daughter in their experiments. The request takes both Pickering and Higgins by surprise and when questioned as to his ethics, Doolittle's response reveals that morality is in fact a luxury: "*Pickering*: Have you no morals man? *Doolittle (unabashed)*: Cant afford them, Governor. Neither could you if you was as poor as me. Not that I mean any harm, you know. But if Liza is going to have a bit out of this, why not me too?" (251). Higgins and Pickering are taken aback by Doolittle's gall and can hardly imagine a world in which a father would ask for a price for his daughter. Conversely, Doolittle knows that survival comes at any cost. Much like Undershaft, Doolittle knows that until his basic needs are met anything else, including morality, is a luxury.

Doolittle's position aligns with Shaw's thoughts on class and morality in which there are no absolute values and morality shifts depending on the context. As Turco explains, "Shavian heroes [...] succeed not because they believe in this or that 'right' system, but because of their ability to respond resourcefully and without the prejudices that arise from a reliance upon 'systems'"(35). While Doolittle may not be a hero, per se, he is a complicating factor in the play, much like *Major Barbara's* Undershaft. Shaw contrasts Doolittle's moral pragmatism with the seemingly upstanding gentlemen whose actions are just as callous toward Eliza. While Doolittle acts out of necessity, trying to scrape any money he can from any situation in order to survive and slightly improve his condition, Pickering and Higgins wager on Eliza's life, altering her existence and trading on her abilities, not for economic necessity, but for sport. In Shaw's world, it is clear that

the two moneyed men have committed the greater offense, yet they are blind to their own transgressions.

Through *Doolittle*, Shaw breaks down the perceived moral authority of the scientist. Higgins's secular and "objective" worldview is rooted in a belief that science, and therefore reason, are the ultimate arbiters of truth. As Shaw explains in his exposition on Ibsen, "faith in reason as a prime motor is no longer the criterion of a sound mind, any more than faith in the Bible is the criterion of righteous intention" (qtd. in Turco 28). Higgins's faith in reason is simply a replication of a religiosity and carries with it the same limitations as a faith-based epistemology. *Doolittle* and Eliza live outside these moral codes, and from their position of poverty, can more clearly see the hypocrisies and contradictions inherent in this faith in reason, making each the perfect candidate for becoming the uncommon man with the potential to will an evolutionary change.

Yet, *Doolittle* too falls victim to artificial environmental pressures at the hands of Higgins. When *Doolittle* unexpectedly comes into a fortune from a benefactor in the Pre-Digested Cheese Trust, he comes directly to Higgins in order to resolve the problem of the clash between his low class accent and mannerisms, and his newfound social status.

Doolittle: ...You talk of losing Eliza. Dont you be anxious: I bet she's on my doorstep by this: she that could support herself easy by selling flowers if I wasnt respectable. And the next one to touch me will be you, Henry Higgins. I'll have to learn to speak middle class language from you, instead of speaking proper English. Thats where youll come in; and I daresay thats what you done it for. (288-9)

Doolittle aspires to pass not as a Duke or Earl, but simply as middle class, a goal that requires its own specific training and education. Doolittle feels Higgins has a responsibility to teach him because he blames Higgins for his sudden admission into the middle class – an unwelcome change for him. Addressing Mrs. Higgins, Professor Higgins's wealthy mother, Doolittle explains why this sudden fortune is such a burden for him.

Doolittle: ...But I, as one of the undeserving poor, have nothing between me and the pauper's uniform but this here blasted three thousand a year that shoves me into the middle class. [...] Theyve got you every way you turn: it's a choice between the Skilly of the workhouse and the Char Bydis of the middle class; and I havnt the nerve for the workhouse. Intimidated: that what I am. Broke. Brought up. Happier men than me will call for my dust, and touch me for their tip; and I'll look on helpless, and envy them. And thats what your son has brought me to. (289)

Forced out of his previous life through this windfall, Doolittle is left in an antithetical situation to that of his daughter. She is now class-less and without a place in society because her economic situation now does not match her cultured affectation, while Doolittle now has the financial means but lacks the social standing to match. Nor does he aspire to attain it. The artificial conditions that Higgins short-circuit the evolutionary potential of the Doolittle family. His meddling removes the internal pressures for survival that could have sparked a need for Creative Evolution in both Eliza and her father.

He feels Higgins owes him this training because Higgins still cannot foresee the consequences of his actions. As a joke, he had included Doolittle's name in a letter to an

American businessman Wannafeller, describing him as the “most original moralist at present in England” (106). The concept of a dustman as the most original moralist intrigues Wannafeller, who wants to set up Moral Reform Societies all over the world. Therefore, upon his death, he leaves Doolittle three thousand pounds a year on the condition that he lectures on morality during the year. While Higgins finds this hilarious, it has thrown Doolittle into a quandary. As the reference to Homer’s Scylla and Charybdis implies, Doolittle has two undesirable choices: to be under constant economic threat and mired in poverty, but among people he understands and enjoys; to be economically stable, yet constrained in the social hell of the middle class. While Doolittle is a bawdy character mostly present for comic relief, he provides a striking viewpoint because he has no aspirations to social mobility. Doolittle knows who he is, and knows that he is more comfortable and secure in his own surroundings. Upward mobility is not the cure-all for everyone and, from this vantage point, Higgins’s interference and experiments cause damage that Higgins has no ability to anticipate or even understand once the damage has been done.

From the heights of the class structure, Mrs. Higgins, Professor Higgins’ wealthy mother, can also foresee the potential harm in her son’s experiments, though she looks not through the lens of class, but through that of gender. She sees that in order for Higgins and Pickering to treat Eliza as a specimen, they must also look at her with a dehumanizing gaze.

Mrs Higgins: You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll.

Higgins: Playing! The hardest job I ever tackled: make no mistake about

that, mother. But you have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into quite a different human being by creating a new speech for her. It's filling up the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul for soul.

Pickering...Yes: it's enormously interesting. I assure you, Mrs Higgins, we take Eliza very seriously. Every week – every day almost – there is some new change...We keep records of every stage – dozens of gramophone disks and photographs – (271)

Mrs. Higgins identifies their mishandling of Eliza and their lack of attention to her needs as a fully functioning human. Yet, the men still cannot understand the problem. Higgins's response, gives no account of how difficult this process must be for Eliza, only a recounting of his own hard work making this transformation possible. He sees his work as a triumph for man in general and places himself in the role of master and creator, building a new self for Eliza. But she remains a generic example of a human being that could be replaced with any other, nameless and inconsequential. Even Pickering, who is the more sympathetic and insightful of the two, thinks little of Eliza the person and is focused on Eliza the project. When he says, "we take Eliza very seriously" he goes on to enumerate neither Eliza's concerns nor well being, but the records, data, and information they have gleaned from her. While the project holds their rapt attention, they cannot see Eliza as more than the accumulation of dozens of gramophone disks and photographs.

In her transformed status as a living doll, Eliza is a breath-taking figure of beauty. Her transformation reoccurs in popular culture in the play's immediate successor, the musical *My Fair Lady* and the more recent retelling, *She's All That*. Scrubbing off the

dehumanizing traces of poverty allows the “real” Eliza to shine through, yet there is no room to find value in Eliza the flower girl. In this way, Shaw’s Pygmalion reverses the role of Ovid’s sculptor. Ovid’s Pygmalion, disgusted by the vices and unsavory dispositions of mortal women, chooses to be chaste and sculpt his perfect woman from ivory. Venus recognizes his true love for this well-made woman and turns her into a woman of flesh and blood, Galatea. The sculptor and the former sculpture are consequently married and have a child (241-3). Shaw’s Pygmalion, Higgins, has no interest in the conventional marriage plot, he has not made a sculpture human – he has made a human into a doll. He has turned a functioning person already complete with thoughts and feelings into an automaton, programmed to mimic the aristocracy. Rather than easily molding herself into this new form like Galatea who turns to wax then flesh under Pygmalion’s touch, Eliza has the additional burden of retaining her own sense of consciousness during her metamorphosis. Higgins is not starting with a blank canvas and cannot simply replace or erase Eliza’s personality. In Shaw’s world there is no goddess to intervene to complete the transformation, it is a path Eliza must take on her own.

Higgins, so focused on his experiment, fails to anticipate Eliza’s own existence independent from the experiment and has given no thought to the consequences of his actions. Only after Eliza has done her duty and performed for the crowd, winning the bet for Higgins and Pickering, does this issue come to a head between them. After the garden party, Pickering and Higgins sit in the drawing room with Eliza close by and still in her finery from the evening, recounting their success and speaking of Eliza in the third person as if she was not there. When Higgins finally notices she is upset, she boils over in rage.

Liza [breathless]: Nothing wrong—with *you*. I've won your bet for you, haven't I? That's enough for you. *I* don't matter, I suppose.

Higgins: *You* won my bet! You! Presumptuous insect! *I* won it. What did you throw those slippers at me for?

Liza: Because I wanted to smash your face. I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute. Why didnt you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you? (She crimps her fingers frantically)

Higgins: (looking at her in cool wonder) The creature is nervous after all [....]

Liza: I sold flowers. I didnt sell myself. Now youve made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish youd left me where you found me.
(278-281)

As soon as Eliza has broken the façade of the experiment, Higgins immediately returns to using animalistic terms like “insect” and “creature” to refer to her. Having met his goal, he has no use for Eliza, except to perhaps fetch his slippers. He expects that she will either stay on at the house with Mrs. Pearce, or make her own way out in the world. He has not considered how difficult it would be for her to return to her old life selling flowers in the gutter. Her aristocratic affect no longer matches any physical or material existence she could build for herself outside of Higgins' laboratory. As Eliza explains: “You told me, you know, that when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours” (295). Language has

indeed transformed her, but in an unsustainable way. Her character and her presentation to the world are now out of joint with no viable solution as to how to rejoin these aspects of her being. The regression in Higgins' language use mirrors Eliza's devolution back to her former state. His attempts at advancing her beyond her station cannot be maintained.

The seemingly obvious solution here would be for Eliza to marry Higgins, the self-proclaimed bachelor, or Pickering, who is more of a father figure to Eliza than a potential lover. Eliza is interested in neither. And, in inverting the Pygmalion myth, Shaw has created conditions in which a marriage between the creator and the work of art would be out of the question. While Ovid's Pygmalion eschews the base tendencies in human experience for the purified life of art, creating very literally a living art, Higgins eschews the human for a purified science. Higgins' devotion to science in the 19th century positivist tradition means that functionality, data, and repeatable results become the highest goal, with very little attention to aesthetics. Therefore, Eliza serves as a tool for Higgins. It is through her that Higgins can test his theories, and since the experiment is the ultimate goal rather than the creation of a perfect aesthetic specimen, anything beyond the results of the experiment are uninteresting and outside of Higgins' world view.

While Higgins will never see Eliza as a sexual object or potential mate, he does soften his empirical exoskeleton when he realizes she will no longer be a part of his life.

Higgins: I can do without anybody. I have my own soul: my own spark of divine fire. But (with sudden humility) I shall miss you, Eliza...I have learnt something from your idiotic notions: I confess that humbly and gratefully. And I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance.

Liza: Well, you have both of them on your gramophone and in your book of photographs. When you feel lonely without me, you can turn the machine on. It's got no feelings to hurt.

Higgins: I cant turn your soul on. Leave me those feelings; and you can take away the voice and the face. They are not you. (300)

The saccharine didacticism of this play is clearly evident in these closing lines. Running parallel to the initial scene in Higgins' laboratory where he explains that through the phonograph Pickering can "turn her on" whenever he wants, this scene is the culmination of Higgins' education. Through the course of the play, he has at least softened his hard line faith in reason to see outside the boundaries of his experiment. He can now acknowledge that she is a living, breathing human and has gained more respect for her as she has learned to voice her opinions and stand her ground against him.

However, in many of the play's original productions the ending is changed to provide a more traditional and satisfactory ending for audiences. The original actor who plays Higgins in the 1914 production, Beerbohm Tree, changes the ending on his own. Instead of letting Eliza walk away in triumph, Tree throws flowers after her implying a love connection between the two. Rather than take this alteration, and others like it, in stride, Shaw is incensed and when he publishes the play in 1915 he adds a "sequel" that explains Eliza's life after the experiment (Alexander 21). It is important to Shaw for Eliza to have her own life defined on her own terms, and for Higgins to be cast as a scientist above the base concerns of the average mortal. A marriage would demean both of them. Instead, in the prose sequel Eliza marries Freddy, Mrs. Hill's middle-class son whom she meets while selling flowers. Pickering sets the two up with a flower shop so that they

might build a life appropriate to their social standing. From this ending, there is little mistaking Shaw's view of Higgins and Eliza's relationship.

Whereas the play ends triumphantly for Eliza, the sequel undercuts any romantic idea that she had a happy ending. Though Pickering sets up the shop for Eliza and Freddy, they are not on their way to a stable economic future. Because Eliza has no schooling at all and Freddy has only a completely impractical education while his family works hard to maintain the pretense of wealth, neither one has any idea how to run the shop. Shaw expansively details months of bookkeeping and business classes the two attend to no avail. He makes clear Eliza's shortcomings including her "deepest humiliation," her inability to write. She asks Higgins to teach her and while he contended that she was "congenitally incapable of forming a single letter," he throws himself into the project again overlooking Eliza's actual needs. "Eliza ended by acquiring an extremely uncommercial script which was a positive extension of her personal beauty, and spending three times as much on stationery as anyone else because certain qualities and shapes of paper became indispensable to her. She could not even address an envelope in the usual way because it made the margins all wrong" (138). While Eliza is a prodigy in language acquisition, Shaw reveals her as an utter failure at most any other skill necessary for survival in the middle class. Higgins has taught her to write in an ornate form inappropriate for her new life and much like her language training he has ignored her needs in order to teach his student the most elaborate method possible. The sequel reinforces the reformist notions of the play that real change must match the station and the spirit of the individual. Higgins's actions always reflect of his own concerns. The

changes he precipitates in her voice and writing are out of joint with the necessities of her life.

Interestingly in this sequel, Shaw offers up a vision of a true conversion, mirroring the language of both Pauline conversion and William Booth's Salvation Army, in Clara, a character hardly utilized in the play except as the example of a typical bourgeois young woman in contrast to Eliza's facsimile. In the sequel, Shaw gives Clara a moment of conversion. Clara's life or death imperative, her desperate internal need to achieve her own Creative Evolution comes when she realizes that from her current station, middle class but penniless, she has no hope of securing a decent marriage and therefore a stable future for herself. In turning away from her potential suitors, she finds a home with the artist class. There she is expected to be able to converse about the latest topic in the arts, including the works of H. G. Wells. She devours his work and, as Shaw explains: "The result was a conversion of a kind quite common today. A modern Acts of the Apostles would fill fifty whole Bibles if anyone were capable of writing it" (135). Referencing the Acts of the Apostles that contains Paul's conversion, Shaw marks Clara as the only character to have achieved a true Shavian conversion. Clara's moment of clarity comes when she learns that Eliza, a girl she admired and wanted to emulate after meeting her at Mrs. Higgins house, was merely a flower girl recently transformed.

It shook her so violently, that when Mr. H. G. Wells lifted her on the point of his puissant pen, and placed her at the angle of view from which the life she was leading and the society to which she clung appeared in its true relation to real human needs and worthy social structure, he effected a conversion and a conviction of sin comparable to the most sensational

feats of General Booth or Gypsy Smith. Clara's snobbery went bang. Life suddenly began to move with her. (135)

Wells, though today remembered most for his contributions to science fiction, was at the time also known for his work in support of the British labor movement. Wells and Shaw had written countless political pamphlets and essays that had a significant impact on shaping the progressive agenda in British politics (Griffith 1). Reading these texts along with the discovery that Eliza had so easily infiltrated her social class, Clara awakens to the suffocating class structures around her. Linking this event to the sensational conversions at the hands of William Booth and Gypsy Smith, one of his most treasured acolytes in the Salvation Army, Shaw renders Clara's new awareness of her existence outside of the economic system as no less extraordinary. Clara is free to be herself and embrace life as a total experience not simply what had been prescribed for her by her social position. The difference between the transformations of Clara and Eliza's is that Clara comes to this understanding and embraces it on her own. Only Eliza can make her own transformation complete.

Pygmalion examines the limits of passing from one class to the other. In attempting to train Eliza Doolittle to pass as a duchess simply through diction lessons, Professor Higgins exposes the problems in neglecting the human side of economics. Like the gramophone recordings Higgins makes of Eliza's "educational" progress, she is a mechanical reproduction of a duchess. Though Eliza dresses and sounds like a duchess by the end of the experiment, her soul and state of being remain stunted. Instead, Higgins has made a strange hybrid creature that belongs nowhere; no longer able to return to her life selling flowers in the gutter, she lacks the social or economic standing to truly belong

to the aristocracy. The presence of technology and the study of phonetics in the text implicate science as a potential cure for the ills of society, but a cure that must be applied carefully and always with the aim of helping the subject rather than exploitation or erasure of the self.

The evolutionary force involved here is not just a gradual, progressive, social evolution, but also entails a Lamarckian evolution of Shaw's leader. In order for the man of genius to exist, he must recognize the power within himself to bring about a rupture in the current status quo. His moment of recognition would occur much as it does for Undershaft and for Clara, as a refusal to be at the mercy of others and a determination to take action on one's own priorities. Not a conversion manipulated by an outside force or omnipotent God, his conversion results in a willed change from within. The key to the continuation of Shaw's ideal system is the Lamarckian ability to pass the acquired characteristics of self-actualized citizens on to future generations and thereby incrementally improve social conditions.

The first of these society-altering ruptures occurs in the development of language. According to Lamarck, language use coincides with the practice and use of speech organs. As the speech organs develop through acquired use in a lifetime, so too do the potentialities of speech. The complexity of language is directly proportional to the complexity and practice of the speech organs.

...the dominant race [humans], having had need of multiplying the signs for the rapid communication of their ideas, now become more and more numerous, and, no longer contented either with pantomimic signs or possible inflexions of their voice to represent this multitude of signs now

become necessary, would succeed by different efforts in forming articulated sounds [...] Indeed, the habitual exercise of their throat, their tongue, and their lips to make articulate sounds, will have eminently developed in them this faculty. (Qtd. in Packard 368)

In Lamarck's formulation of advancement from apes, which predates that of Darwin, developments in language not only result in an increase of vocabulary and culture over time, but also correspond to the physical evolution of man. Therefore, the increasing complexity of the physiology of man leads to a complexity in language and it is in this advancement in articulation that separates man from beast on the evolutionary chain.

To return this theory to Shaw, Eliza's transformation through language, though it does not entirely achieve its aims, has enabled her to move beyond her animalistic groan at the beginning of the play, to a new articulate state that gives her the vocabulary to explain her point of view to Higgins and to find her own inner strength. From guttersnipe to duchess, Eliza has undergone a linguistic and social evolution. The opportunities this evolution affords her also elevate her physical wellbeing and the wellbeing of her potential children. Following Shaw's logic, if Eliza's children have met their base physiological needs their brains will be free to develop in new ways, like Undershaft's utopian workforce. Eliza's transformation opens the possibility that her offspring will find a new course perhaps as arms dealers, perhaps as shop owners, scientists, or creators of a new crack in the social and economic structure.

Lamarck's linking of language to physiology has resonances with a number of alternative theories of evolution in the early 20th century for those who, like Shaw, were looking to find a teleological explanation for evolution that left room for will and

progress rather than chance and brutal survival. Theosophical ideas of evolution include a similar Lamarckian idea of inherited, willed change with the end goal of an advanced human civilization that includes both science and the ancient wisdom and knowledge of the world. Theosophists also include a notion of devolution in which evolution is not simply a tool of progress but a process that can operate in reverse. Argentine author and Theosophist Leopoldo Lugones uses this concept of theosophical evolution in combination with a physiological notion of language in his short story "Yzur." His scientist narrator claims that monkeys have willed themselves not to speak in order to avoid work at the hands of the competing human species. His hypothesis is that if he can retrain the physiology of a monkey to speak, he can then return the monkey to his full human status. The activation of the speech organs will in turn activate the metaphysical aspects of the human soul.

CHAPTER III

LUGONES AND THE HUMAN EDGE OF SOUND

Leopoldo Lugones' 1906 collection of short stories, *Las fuerzas extrañas*, is one of the first examples of the genre of the fantastic in Latin America. This text created the scaffolding for the genre that his contemporaries Horacio Quiroga and Jorge Luis Borges would later perfect. The fantastic has its origins in German Romanticism and the Gothic tradition. Lugones' protagonists spring from the same lineage as Goethe's Faust, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Edgar Allan Poe's detectives as well as the popular fiction of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne and Bram Stoker (Speck 424). This form emerges alongside of developments in science and uses the cultural authority granted to the objective and all-knowing scientist to push the boundaries of possibility, challenging the reader to discern between fact and fiction, natural and the supernatural. This form is particularly useful for Lugones, an active participant in Theosophy who believed strongly in science, but eschewed positivism and utilitarianism in favor of type of scientific research that included ancient knowledge and spiritism. The genre of the fantastic allows him to use the tenets of modern science while adding a layer of mysticism. *Las fuerzas extrañas* creates an arc of stories that ends with Lugones' cosmology, an ordering of the universe that operates in accordance with his theosophical and modernista worldview.

In this chapter I will examine two of the stories from this collection, "Yzur" and "La fuerza omega." Structurally, both texts operate in accordance with the genre of the fantastic, using the lexicon of contemporary science through their empirical scientist

narrators to present potentially supernatural findings to the reader. The indeterminacy between the logical, scientific explanation and the supernatural solution undermines the cultural authority of science. As Jorge Luis Borges explained in a 1932 essay: “Omitir la explicación entre dos hechos cuya causalidad supone una realidad distinta es una forma de postular la magia” (qtd. in Lugones 218n).⁶ If this omission can indeed be seen as a form of magic, the inverse of reason in positivist discourse, then this literary form of uncertainty and omission can be seen as an aesthetic undermining of the increasingly authoritative modern science, a theme that plays out again and again in Lugones’ work through theosophy, alchemy and alternative cosmologies.

From their position of critique these stories examine the limits of scientific investigation within the context of human morals. While “Yzur” navigates the space between human and animal through speech, “La fuerza omega” breaks the sacred human voice down into particles of energy that are then converted into a weapon. From animal to human and from human to machine, these two stories chart the boundaries of the voice and its connection to human experience. In Lugones’ epistemology, when the voice is released from its human container, the result is catastrophe, thereby reaffirming the intrinsic connection between body and mind, speaker and speech.

In examining the boundaries of the human, Lugones explores notions of evolution that exist outside of the typical Darwinian or even Lamarckian ideals to one that includes a multi-directional idea of biological change through theosophy. Before detailing the specifics of Lugones’s theories, however, the particular historical resonance of Darwinian evolution in Argentina that must be examined. Much of Darwin’s research for *The Origin*

⁶ To omit the explication between two facts whose causality supposes a distinct reality is a form of postulating magic. [All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.]

of Species took place in South America, particularly Tierra del Fuego. A European reader at the time would have received a view of Argentina as an exotic empty space filled with amazing natural resources, unique species, and an occasional cannibal. In reality, while the interior of the nation was largely rural, Argentina had undergone 300 years of Spanish settlement and colonization, a war for independence, and a civil war by the time Darwin arrived in 1830s. Buenos Aires was one of the biggest metropolises in the world.

Darwin's voyage was one that was only possible thanks to Britain's vast empire both of direct colonies and an even larger network of indirect commercial ties (Hunt 314). The exoticized, wild terrain that Darwin and other naturalists like Alexander von Humboldt report back to the metropolis of London is part of the colonial discourse that sees empty space as a place to map, civilize, and occupy or in this case extract specimens (Rodríguez 260-261).

In addition to the outward representations of the nation filtering back to Europe, an internal campaign to replicate the modernity of Europe and the United States within Argentina was underway in this same time period. In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie*, a text that follows the life of a gaucho who terrorizes the pampas. The figure is a representation of Juan Manuel de Rosas who had exiled Sarmiento to Chile and ruled Argentina with an iron fist. He and people like him, violent, uncouth and ruled by fear, are figured as the barbarians ruining Argentine civilization. In Sarmiento's version of the future, the cities and the erudite populations are the aspects of civilization that will advance the nation towards a more progressive future that will look more like Europe than the pampas. According to Peter Ahrensdoerf's analysis of Sarmiento's politics, Sarmiento defined civilization as: "the cultivation and

perfection of reason...Reason must be cultivated by schools in settled society, through conversation and discussion, through schools and through social and commercial intercourse, through political debate and deliberation about common, public affairs, and hence through political participation” (36). To meet these specifications, urbanization is necessary. Without the focus on education, reason, and debate, Sarmiento felt that any nation, any group of people, could fall into barbarism. For some, his re-entrenchment of old divisions of civilization and barbarie would make it easier to justify campaigns of extermination against the indigenous populations of the pampas in the 1870s under commander Julio Roca.

Sarmiento would go on to be Argentina’s seventh president, taking office in 1868. The tenets he set out in *Facundo* would guide his presidency, which invested heavily in education, the university system and in creating deeper intellectual ties to Europe and the United States. Though these are progressive changes for a nation barely fifty years past colonial rule, with these policies came concessions that altered the fabric of Argentine society. The liberal elites who favored Sarmiento’s support of European modernization also agreed that Argentina’s future could go either the way of barbarism, backwards toward gauchos and an agrarian lifestyle, or to civilization, a modern future. In this vision for the future, social problems are resolved through reason and positivist philosophy and the Spanish cultural heritage is left behind in favor of a cosmopolitan culture of immigration and foreign investment (Spektorowski 86). This dualist stance further advances the civilization/barbarism dichotomy into the political sphere. A citizen could not choose both positivist philosophy and the spiritual (mainly Catholic) heritage left behind by the Spanish. One had to choose one or the other, with definite values placed on

the decision. The gaucho who Sarmiento saw as at war with society and the law, the indigenous man who had survived extermination, or those living in the interior were de facto relegated to the sphere of the barbaric while the urban elites were the way forward in a unidirectional vision of progress.

This discourse is not so different from that of the modernistas in that they shared a number of affinities with this line of thinking, including that the educated urban intellectual stood on the highest rung of society. In fact, Lugones wrote *Historia de Sarmiento* in 1911 commemorating the centennial of Sarmiento's birth. The work is more of a national epic than a history, mythologizing Sarmiento and canonizing him in Argentine history. Above all the work praises the work of the author (in this case Lugones himself) as the creator and disseminator of national myth. Diana Sorensen Goodrich identifies this text as the beginning of Lugones's political turn from communism to his fascist politics of the 1930s (177-180). As Sarmiento was a great admirer of the United States and their utilitarian view of economic and social progress, Lugones's alignment with Sarmiento also marks his politics as slightly outside those of the modernistas who actively rejected American influence (Rockland 48-50). Much like Yeats's politics later in life, Lugones's prime concern was for the position of the intellectual as the arbiter of truth than a democratic or populist vision of the future.

With the increased reliance on reason and intelligence as a marker of civilization, Darwinism becomes synonymous with progress by the end of the nineteenth century. The endless forward motion and development of species created a mirror for political theories that saw progress as this same endless march along a single path. Leila Gómez explains

this connection in the introduction to her book *La piedra del escándalo: Darwin en Argentina (1845-1909)*:

...tanto el darwinismo como el positivismo de las décadas anteriores al fin de siglo argentino fueron los discursos representativos de la modernización de las instituciones sociales y políticas, la laicización del estado y el debate de la elite ilustrada. El progreso se entendía en términos de evolución y superación de los estadios “primitivos de la humanidad”, como aquellos que la nación combatiría militarmente en la campaña del desierto. (13)⁷

The forward motion of mechanization and the course toward modernity is replaced by the rhetoric of Darwinism. Beyond the competition for resources or incremental changes in the physiology of a species, Darwin’s theories take root in political and social realms. The progression of animals across geological time shifts to a conversation about man and his own development over time. Men still living in agrarian or communal societies are viewed as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development. Progress is not just the advancement of technology but also the advancement of people toward an urbanized, industrialized worker no longer dependent on an agricultural economy or on the mythologies and teachings of religion. These ideas, along with the arrival of a Spanish translation of *Origin of Species* in 1877 bring debates about evolution and science in general to the forefront in discussions within the intellectual circles of Argentina (Montserrat 31).

⁷ Much like the positivism of the decades before the end of the century in Argentina, these were representative discourse of the modernization of social and political institutions and of the illustrious elite. Progress can be understood in terms of evolution, the laicization of the state, and superceding of the “primitive states of humanity,” like those that the nation would combat on the field in the desert.

The evidence of the continued presence of evolutionary debates that are contemporary with Lugones' *Las fuerzas extrañas* can be seen in a 1903 cartoon in an edition of *Caras y Caretas*. This particular cartoon depicts a man and what appears to be a curator or professor in front of a painting of a monkey. The caption reads: "--Después de todo, ¿sabe usted lo que le falta al orangután para ser hombre? --La palabra. -- Sí señor; la palabra. Si el animalito pudiese decir 'soy orangután,' sería un hombre" (qtd. in H. Fraser).⁸ As Howard Fraser explains this cartoon is just one of many in *Caras y Caretas* that played with these distinctions between man and monkey and also between speech and the human. From cartoons to articles to photos of chimps riding bicycles, evolutionary discourse had manifested in these humorous explorations in popular culture (17). These kinds of representations reveal an anxiety about the place of man in a new modern world as well as the instability of man's domination over his environment. While these debates continue on in the public sphere, opposition is mounting against Sarmiento's version of progress that ties scientific achievement to nationalist pride, and pride to moving closer to Europe and the United States. For this literarily inclined intellectual elite, theosophy offered a vision of both evolution and the future that was a far cry from Sarmiento or Darwin.

Theosophy created the space from which intellectuals could debate and engage with modern science while retaining a human element in their vision of the future. Theosophical Societies, organizations dedicated to the study of ancient eastern epistemologies to discover new meanings of science, philosophy, and religion, offered their members new ways to imagine the world that directly countered the narratives

⁸ When all is said and done, do you know what it is that the orangutan lacks in order to be a man? --The word. --Yes sir, the word. If the little animal could say, 'I am an orangutan' he would be a man.

constructed by positivist sciences. The group's focus on learning and receptivity meshed well with the concerns of artists, writers, and thinkers looking to carve out a new space for humanist thinking. The tenets of theosophy as they are imagined in this era are based on Helena P. Blavatsky's text *The Secret Doctrine*, which she claims contains theories handed down to her from Tibetan spiritualists, ancient wisdom only known to a privileged few. Within the societies, pupils could dedicate themselves to the study of theosophical texts in earnest. By the late nineteenth century, cities all over the world, including London, New York, Madras India, and Buenos Aires, have chapters that attract a wide variety of intellectuals. The impact of the movement has heavily influenced other groups such as the Rosicrucians and Christian Scientists ("Early History"). Some of the most influential writers and artists of the time including W.B. Yeats in Ireland, T.S. Eliot in England and Jack London in the U.S. were active members in this society. Today there are still hundreds of lodges, nearly fifty in England alone.

In Argentina, the appeal of spiritualism resonates with the foundations of the modernismo movement which takes its lead from a variety of distinct influences including French Symbolism and the Parnassians, the radical transformations of the Castilian poetic tradition offered by Spanish and Latin American Romantics, as well as the American gothic tradition, chiefly Edgar Allan Poe. At the turn of the century as North American influence grows in both Latin America's economic and cultural realms, so too does resistance among the artistic community against this coming tide. In 1900, Uruguyan José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917) addressed the young urban elite in his essay "Ariel." Rodó describes Latin American artists as Ariel from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the play, Ariel is a marker for the spirit and the arts, diaphanous and light. He

is set in opposition to Caliban, a representation of all the basest concerns of nature. Rodó takes the figure of Ariel as a rallying cry for Latin American youth to reject the utilitarianism of the United States that reduces the individual to a replaceable part in the industrial machine and instead embrace a modernity that uses Athens as its model and values the unique composition and erudition of South America as its core. While the arielista movement inspired a young generation of authors, it was not an all-inclusive vision.

Rubén Darío, founder of the modernismo movement uses this same figuration of Ariel in a 1905 essay to describe the influence Edgar Allan Poe had on Latin American modernisms.

Poe, como un Ariel hecho hombre, diríase que ha pasado su vida bajo el flotante influjo de un extraño misterio. Nacido en un país de vida práctica y material, la influencia del medio obra en él al contrario. De un país de cálculo brota imaginación tan estupenda. El don mitológico parece nacer en él por lejano atavismo y vese en su poesía un claro rayo del país del sol y azul en que nacieron sus antepasados. (“Edgar Allan Poe”)⁹

Here Darío describes Poe as an Ariel, Rodó’s reconceptualizing of this figure in which he casts Ariel as the learned and erudite Latin American intellectual against Caliban, the utilitarianism of the United States. For Darío, Poe is a bright intellectual light that breaks through from the cold precision of the growing materialism in U.S. culture. His work manages to keep a sense of mystery and mythology alive in the face of hyper-rationalism.

⁹ Poe, like an Ariel made man, it would seem that he has spent his life under the floating influence of a strange mystery. Born in a country of practical and material life, the influence of his work to the contrary. From a nation of calculations springs so great an imagination. The mythological gift appears to be born in him from some far away atavism y one can see in his poetry a clear ray from a country of sun and blue in which his ancestors were born.

He is the perfect model of resistance for a new Latin American literature that seeks to retain a differentiation from the increasing presence of the United States and that resists this deification of science and reason above all else.

As a founder of modernismo, Lugones incorporated these aspects into his work and combined it with his theosophical practices in his fantastic stories. According to Rachel Haywood Ferreira, this impulse in Lugones' work functions as an attempt "to achieve a viable synthesis between an alternate belief system and orthodox science" (132). Its format is a familiar one and follows a structure much like tales of the fantastic from Edgar Allan Poe and H.G. Wells. The framing of these stories with an credible witness that retains their authority and questions the fantastic events harken back to stories like Wells' "The Crystal Egg" and many cite Poe's "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" as one of the numerous precursors to "Yzur." Poe has a significant influence on early modernista work as a figure that resists the pragmatism and positivism of North American culture. Ventura García-Calderón's 1910 work *Del romanticismo al modernismo* characterizes modernismo as "la aspiración idealista [en arte] que solidariza á la América del Sur contra las concepciones utilitarias del Norte"¹⁰ (n xvi).¹⁰ García-Calderón's observations, contemporary to the movement, mark modernismo as a Latin American form with its roots in symbolism and from the same idealistic and sentimental impulse that created naturalism and parnassianism in France, yet in Latin America, without a significant transition to naturalism, modernism finds its most direct roots in romanticism (xiii). Poe becomes a useful transitional figure in this configuration despite his death nearly sixty years prior.

¹⁰ ...the idealist aspiration [in art] that solidifies South America against the utilitarian conceptions of the North.

Las fuerzas extrañas uses theosophical and alchemical ideas of sound and voice to explore the limits of both human understanding and scientific reason. The content reaffirms a humanistic vision that requires consideration for the subject of the experiment. Both pieces use the exploitation of the human voice as their center and defend this uniquely human element as an aspect of humanity worth protecting and abusing the voice leads to the destruction of the scientist narrators. Their destruction functions as a rebuff to those who think the world can be known only through reason, hypotheses and materialist results. Therefore, Lugones' censure also re-affirms the sacred space of the human that should not be tampered with for the vain pursuit of experimentation. These stories stand as an example of the competing narratives of modernity, progress, and science, on the one hand, and spiritualism and the return to the human on the other, narratives that modernismo works to counter.

Theosophy's dual and sometimes contradictory stance that both acknowledges contemporary science and critiques it draws in many artists and thinkers of the era providing room to explore ideas of the universe while not exclusively tied to modern science. *Philadelphia*, Buenos Aires' main theosophical magazine, attracts members of the literary community including Ruben Darío, José Inegieros, and Leopoldo Lugones. The magazine gets its name from the pseudonym of its editor, Antonia Martínez Royo and it runs from 1898–1903, serving as an early platform for both Lugones' fiction and also for his broader aesthetic theories (Quereilhac 72). In 1901, Lugones published "Nuestras ideas estéticas" in *Philadelphia* in which he lays out some of his principles for aesthetic production while maintaining the main doctrines of theosophy:

... el sentimiento puro, es decir, el fenómeno en virtud del cual nos sentimos uno con la humanidad o con el Universo, no tiene manifestación objetiva, siendo en su aspecto inferior instinto, y en el superior, conciencia absoluta: lo Inexpresable. Semejante impotencia de expresar lo que se siente, ocasiona el deje de melancolía visible a poco de andar en todo esfuerzo de Arte, y más aún en la poesía. (Qtd. in Salazar 614)¹¹

Art is the result of the endless quest for expressing pure sentiment that necessarily falls short of its goal. It can only approximate the feeling of oneness with the world, yet the drive to represent or capture this sentiment is what moves aesthetic production forward. The collapse of theosophy into aesthetics has a profound effect on not only the way Lugones writes, but also the way he views the world; the theosophical is inseparable from the aesthetic in his writing. The poet, like the theosophist, has the sensitivity to feel the harmony of the universe and his poetry is an expression of this unity.

This vision of unity offers an alternative to the fractured chaos of industrialized modernity. With the human relegated to a cog in the machine and god and religion figured as relics from an uncivilized past, there is little space left for the individual mind in a search for enlightenment. Theosophy fills this void especially for the modernista writers whose form and content were often expressions of the struggle to both incorporate new discourses of the modern world, yet also to find some meaning in an increasingly disjointed society. Searching for a new kind of language, the modernistas often included spiritualist, alchemical, and cosmological references in attempts to subvert the dominant

¹¹ Pure sentiment, that is to say, the phenomenon by virtue of which we feel one with humanity or with the universe, does not have an objective manifestation, being in its inferior aspect instinct, and in the superior aspect, absolute knowledge, the Inexpressable. Such impotence of expressing what one feels, causes the end of melancholy visible just steps into the quest for Art, and even more so in poetry.

discourse. “They perceived literary language as an elastic and flexible instrument to express a spiritualist vision of the cosmos while undermining traditional scientific discourse. In this way, the modernists’ linguistic mission, if it can be viewed as such sought to infuse language with an anti-scientific imprecision to bear witness to their ‘horror por el progreso’” (H. Fraser 9). The archaic references and often erudite diction found especially in modernista poetry functions as a way to resist rapid thoughtless consumption of information. Slowing the reading and interpretive process is not simply an aesthetic choice, but a political one.

As Julio Ramos point out however, the modernismo movement was not simply this search for unity or synthesis between the two cultures of art and science. He analyzes “the antitechnological discourse elaborated by literature not as an aggregate of ‘truths’ about the world, but rather, as a strategy of legitimation for intellectuals who had become estranged from the utopia of progress and modernity” (166). The increasingly positivist world view at the turn of the century led to a new paradigm of intellectualism that valued the scientist and materialist findings over the artistic endeavor. As Rubén Darío put it: “the artist has been supplanted by the engineer” (qtd. in Ramos 165). Therefore, this use of theosophy and alternative epistemologies acted not strictly to discount science, but to paradoxically use these discourses to reaffirm the role of the humanist intellectual (typically urban and elite) in a materialist world. They are the only ones who can see the way forward to a modern future by unlocking and transforming these ancient texts for a modern audience.

Las fuerzas extrañas gives a clearer picture of Lugones’s stance against materialism and in favor of a more harmonic view of the world. The collection includes

Lugones's own cosmology as well as several stories that directly address contemporary issues in science. For instance, "Viola acherontia," is about a botanist who engineers a violet of death bred to match its exterior with its internal composition, in this case its black petals match its poisonous interior. The black violet is fed on the blood of children, weeps when it is hungry, and its perfume is a deadly toxin. Lugones undercuts the violence in the story, hiding it beneath technical jargon and scientific speech revealing the calculating, depraved indifference to suffering in the name of science.

As Beatriz Sarlo notes, in stories like these that manipulate scientific views, "the voice of 'science' frees the story from moral limits; with science comes the right to say even that which offends social convention; when it is science that speaks of a transgression, there is none" (29). The scientist narrator commands a voice of authority that speaks from a position above the reader. As the disseminator of knowledge and reason, the scientist can claim all of his or her actions as necessary for society's progress and since he or she defines the boundaries of the scientific realm, there can be no transgression beyond them, all experiments and actions are regarded equally. The utilitarian concerns of the morally exempt scientists are analogous to the concerns in Latin America over the encroaching North and their ideas of a heartless industrial capitalism. Like Rodó's Caliban, the scientist is a brute force working only toward his own ends, whereas the theosophist and artist is Ariel, who works toward a vision of progress for the greater good, advancing knowledge and protecting the humanist center of worldly experience. The literary response to this crisis is the inclusion of alternate dogmas and a vision of the sage artist who can lead the layperson toward a new future. The formal conventions of the fantastic open space for this critique by exposing the cold

calculations of the materialist scientist as abusive and harmful to society. Almost all of Lugones' stories end with the sanctioning of the scientist's transgressions of moral boundaries through madness, punishment, or death.

The story "Yzur" uses this same manipulation of the authority of science to expose the scientist's abuse while the text also promotes an alternate, theosophical version of evolution that links the human voice to the movement between evolutionary stages. The story is the culmination of a half a century of debate and a keen skepticism of an industrialized future for Argentina. The scientist narrator provides the story with an air of credibility and yet, Lugones reveals the hypocrisy beneath the narrator's claims of authority. Though he is not actually a scientist, he feels confident about the knowledge he has gleaned from reading that he believes he can prove that monkeys are really "degraded humans" who simply refuse to speak. To do so he buys a monkey named Yzur from a defunct circus and takes on the mantle of scientist from his layman's understanding of the latest scientific research. In the narrator's estimation the only difference between man and ape is speech. What ensues is three years of tortuous language training that leads only to ambiguous results and the death of Yzur at the abusive hands of the "scientist."

This self-trained scientist believes he has learned enough from articles, newspapers, and other lay reports to understand the complex physiology of monkeys. From his basic analysis of the mouth, throat, and tongue of a chimp, he believes the presence of these apparati is proof enough that he would need only to re-activate these organs in order to return the animal speech. "Sabía únicamente, con entera seguridad, *que no hay ninguna razón científica para que el mono no hable*" (200)¹². In his estimation, monkeys have simply chosen not to speak. Fraser traces this phrase back to an issue of

¹² All I knew for certain was that there was no scientific reason why monkeys shouldn't speak.

the popular magazine *Caras y Caretas* that included an article “Un mono que está aprendiendo á hablar” in which a monkey named Ham learns to speak. The article includes the scientific rationalization that a chimp’s larynx and phonic organs are identical to a human’s and therefore “no hay razón para que no hable” (Fraser 13). The similarity is striking in both phrasing and content. Lugones’ narrator replicates this same type of experiment, and perhaps this article was one of the pieces the narrator had read in preparation for his work.

Yet, Lugones takes this postulate to a new level adding an alternate theory of evolution to explain the monkey’s lack of speech despite his physiology. The basis for the scientist’s hypothesis is in an alternate conception of evolution that includes a degree of choice. According to the narrator, the monkey has opted out of evolution in a willful regression:

Los monos fueron hombres que por una u otra razón dejaron de hablar. El hecho produjo la atrofia de sus órganos de fonación y de los centros cerebrales del lenguaje; debilitó casi hasta suprimirla la relación entre unos y otros, fijando el idioma de la especie en el grito inarticulado, y el humano primitivo descendió a ser animal. (199)¹³

In this configuration, evolution is not a millennia long process of gradual change over time. Instead, it is a multidirectional process, which can move both forward and backward. All monkeys were once primitive humans who stopped speaking, and this lack of speech is the last distinction between man and animal. Once the monkey stops

¹³ Monkeys were once men who, for one reason or another, stopped speaking. This fact produced an atrophy of their phonetic organs and of the language centers in their brains, which were weakened almost to the point of ceasing to exist, leaving the sole idiom of their species an inarticulate screech, as the primitive human descended to the level of the animal. (102)

speaking the species gradually experiences an atrophy of the physical attributes of speech, their tongues become weak and the organs of phonation regress to the point where speech is no longer possible, reducing the monkey to a series of inarticulate grunts and some approximation of language. Speech becomes the singular aspect that delineates the space between human and animal. Therefore, by this logic if the scientist can “volver el mono al lenguaje” (199)¹⁴ he also can return him to human form.

The scientist also believes that the species has stopped speaking for fear that humans will put them to work. If this is true, silence becomes a space of resistance for Yzur’s species from which they can opt out of the horrors of the modern world, abdicating their powers of speech and connection to the human for a safer space of solitude. Yet, the scientist bought Yzur from a circus where humans had put him to work, performing acts of mimicry. Silence could not preserve him from participation in the economic system and purposefully opting out is an affront to a growing notion of pragmatism and efficiency in the early 20th century. Simply the potential for speech is enough to convince the scientist and the circus that the monkey should be made to participate thus proving a willful disavowal of speech might have been a smarter choice for the ancient monkeys who were able to avoid subjugation at the hands of human industry.

The idea that evolution is reversible and the element of willful regression comes from tenets of theosophy that advocate for a more complicated, cyclical version of evolution. According to theosophy, the evolution of man occurs simultaneously across

¹⁴ return the monkey to language

seven human races of seven human groups on seven different portions of our globe.¹⁵ Each stage is millions of earthly years long with different races moving through at a different pace. According to current teachings five root races have almost finished the rotation through evolution with two races yet to come (Santucci 46). A clearer idea of the meaning behind this complex cosmology can be seen in Annie Besant's autobiography. Besant was an activist, socialist, progressive in Britain and took over a number of duties in the Theosophical Society after Blavatsky's death in 1891. She recounts a conversation she had with Blavatsky after the first society meeting she had ever attended:

The powers we possess are not supernatural, they are latent in every human being, and will be evolved as the race progresses. All that we have done is to evolve them more rapidly than our neighbors, by a procedure as open to you as it was to us. Matter is everywhere, but it exists in seven modifications of which you only know four, and until lately only knew three; in those higher forms reside the causes of which you see effect in the lower, and to know these causes you must develop the capacity to take cognizance of the higher....so the "Secret Doctrine" points to living forms on higher planes of existence, each suited to its environment, till all space thrills with life, and nowhere is there death, but only change. Amid these myriads are some evolving towards humanity, some evolving away from humanity as we know it, divesting themselves of its grosser parts. (348-349)

¹⁵ Race refers not to a phenotypical idea of distinct groups of men, instead on stages of spiritual development which are constantly evolving through seven planetary rounds. For a more detailed account of race and evolution in theosophy see James A. Santucci, "The Notion of Race in Theosophy." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11.3. (2008): 43-47.

The mixture of scientific speech and mysticism creates a powerful combination of imagery. Instead of only a physical evolution, theosophy contains, perhaps more importantly, a spiritual evolution. The end point is this balanced universe in which there is no death. Evolution continues through a higher self, which is immortal, never dying, only changing in its composition. There is also a component of willful evolution in this explanation as well. If some can evolve away from humanity “divesting themselves of its grosser parts” there is some choice in the directionality of theosophical evolution. Also by learning of these evolutionary paths through theosophy it is possible to evolve more quickly than one’s contemporaries. Knowledge and indoctrination into this society can hasten one’s chances at a glorious astral future. It’s no wonder that this mystical vision of the world that ends in harmony would come as a welcome relief to those alienated from the dominant narratives of progress, mechanization and struggle for survival that marked Lugones’s era.

Although theosophists vehemently oppose materialism, sciences that depend on observations of material in the world, the scientific language in *The Secret Doctrine* is not purely oppositional. Many theosophists earnestly referred to themselves as scientists. As Alex Owen explains, “theosophists and other occultists “believe that they were engaged in the true mission of science – a thorough and open-minded investigation of the mysteries of the universe” (34). The distrust they have of science is not lodged in the discipline as a whole, but how it was practiced in the Victorian era: with an eye toward instrumentalized reason and a denial of the possibility for a spiritual life. Theosophists want to both rigorously examine the potentials of the universe, while also giving real attention to a spiritual life. These two goals are the underlying tenets that form

the basis for the complexity of *The Secret Doctrine* and other texts that would follow in the decades to come.

As these societies travel around the world and establish themselves in other countries, this message remained intact. In Argentina, the story was no different. After independence, industrialization and the importation of foreign interests had created a similar capitalist society to the nation's European counterparts. As a result, the intellectual circles of Buenos Aires and Córdoba had a similar reaction as the European bourgeoisie. Their mistrust and skepticism about the coming of the industrial age is accompanied by the arrival of Theosophical Societies to the nation. A 1901 edition of *Caras y Caretas* reveals the juxtaposition between rapid industrialization and the entrenchment of theosophy in Argentine intellectual spheres. On one page there is their semi-regular feature "Inventos útiles" in which there are a number of new inventions from both Argentina and around the world detailed for the readership. In this particular issue there is an announcement about new illuminated signs at Niagara Falls, a personal drink holder that keeps your drink cool with nickel compartments for your ice, a new type of hand held nutcracker and a new way of mounting incandescent lights (58). Aside from being a fascinating snapshot on technology in 1901, the feature illustrates Argentina's connection to the modernity and to Europe. Argentina is producing its own new inventions and participating in the innovations of the era. In addition, the readership is kept abreast of the latest developments in Europe.

In this same edition, just a few pages before the useful inventions, there is an article that announces the arrival of Colonel Olcott, a co-founder along with H.P. Blavatsky and the president of the original Theosophical Society. Olcott is a huge figure

in Theosophy, and his arrival marks a significant endorsement of the Argentine chapters. According to the article there are already “cuatro ramas de la Sociedad Teosófica, tres en Buenos Aires que trabajan con setenta y tantos miembros, y una en el Rosario” (38).¹⁶ As a special feature, though missing from the archive copy, *Caras y Caretas* had published a page of one of theosophy’s sacred texts to give the readers an idea of what the movement was about. The article uses this space to emphasize theosophy’s connections to science.

Es una alta filosofía que pretende armonizar la religión con la ciencia. Explica los misterios de que aquella se rodea, descubriendo el significado de sus símbolos y mitos, y probando cómo todas no son sino una misma con distintas apariencias, relaciona las verdades que ellos oclúan con las mismas leyes naturales á que obedecen los fenómenos físicos que investiga la ciencia, leyes de las cuales se dice estar en posesión y cuya exactitud parecen demostrar los últimos descubrimientos hechos como el aire liquido, la fabricación del argentaureum, etc. (35)¹⁷

Instead of the emphasis on the stranger aspects of theosophy like the automatic writing pursued by Yeats, or the more radical fringe religions that splintered from theosophy that are found in many modern day analyses of theosophy, here the focus is on the combination of science and religion. The claims made to contemporary science appear alongside of claims to discovering the myths and secrets of the universe. In the same

¹⁶ four branches of the Theosophical Society, three in Buenos Aires that work with more than seventy members, and one in Rosario.

¹⁷ It is a high philosophy that tries to harmonize religion with science. It explains the mysteries that surround the former (religion), discovering the significance of its symbols and myths, and proving how all of them (religions) are really one, with distinct appearances, it relates the truths that used to be occluded with the same natural laws obeyed by the physical phenomenons that science investigates, laws that one says to be in possession of, and whose exactitude seems to be demonstrated by the latest discoveries made like liquid air, the fabrication of argentaureum etc.

sentence the article refers to theosophy contributing to the recent scientific discoveries of liquid air and argentaurum. Liquid air is still a viable innovation similar to liquid nitrogen or liquid oxygen used in cryogenics. However, argentaurum is an alchemical substance that was supposed to be the intermediary stage between gold and silver discovered by Stephen Emmens. The scientific community largely denounced Emmens as a “charlatan” with “cracked brains” in 1898 upon the announcement of his discovery (Emmens). Although theosophy makes claims to science, even in this article that provides credibility to the society, the science it claims is on the fringes of the scientific community.

Not only do theosophists make claims to being scientists, but they also go so far as to put into question the very word “science.” Argentina’s theosophical magazine, *Philadelphia*, makes this assertion in one of its first editions in 1898.

La Teosofía es una ciencia, o más bien dicho, es la ciencia, toda la ciencia, la sola y única ciencia, es decir, la síntesis de la *sola, única y eterna* verdad, encerrando en su seno y poniendo de acuerdo todas las religiones, todas las filosofías y todas las ciencias. (...) siendo la Teosofía la ciencia, todo lo que ella afirma puede y debe ser demostrado. Por esto, difiere de las religiones y filosofías ordinarias. (Qtd. in Castro 195)¹⁸

Theosophy is figured as the school of thought that can unify all others. It holds the answers to the questions of the universe and, according to this article, the truths it expounds can be verifiable, therefore earning it the title of a science. Paradoxically, theosophy takes up the methodology of materialism in that it claims its ideas can be

¹⁸ Theosophy is a science, or better yet, it is the science, all science, the only and unique science, that is to say, the synthesis of the *only, unique and eternal* truth, enclosed in its breast and putting into agreement all religions, all philosophies, and all sciences. (...) being that Theosophy is a science, all that it affirms can be demonstrated. Therefore, it differs from ordinary philosophies and religions.

proven, while also claiming that positivism was detrimental to the human soul (Castro 195). With claims like these, theosophy could herald itself as both modern, in that it was a player in the new scientific arenas of the nineteenth century, and as a recuperative agent of the past, in that its text were based on exclusive ancient knowledge.

The narrator in “Yzur” has taken on this position falsely. His claims to science are not theosophical, simply those of a layman immersed in the public culture of science at the time. He is not one of Blavatsky’s few who can harness the power of a mystical world, instead an arrogant man who abuses a monkey in the name of science. Lugones positions the narrator as this false prophet with a narrative voice that mimics the trappings of a clinical report, but lacking in the rigor, logic, and knowledge that someone with more training might exhibit. The narrator’s treatment of the chimp is detached and cold. His descriptions of his findings about the anatomy of a chimp and his aptitudes for language learning reveal his detachment from Yzur as a subject: “Felizmente, el chimpancé es de todos los grande monos el que tiene labios más movibles; y en el caso particular habiendo padecido Izur de anginas, sabía abrir la boca para que se la examinaran” (203).¹⁹ Here, Yzur is a specimen, an object of study. Not only is he a chimpanzee, one of the species closest to human, but also his particular history makes him an even better subject. He was trained in mimicry during his time in the circus, and because of his need for medication, he had developed the mobility of his mouth and an ability to open it on command. Deemed a perfect specimen for the experiment, Yzur is subject to all of the tests and manipulations the narrator can think of.

¹⁹ Fortunately, of all the great apes the chimpanzee has the most mobile lips... This first inspection confirmed my suspicions at least in part. Yzur’s tongue lay at the bottom of his mouth, an inert mass, evidencing no movements except those attending to the act of swallowing. (104)

The narrator's experiments are mainly based in 18th and 19th century experiments with educating the deaf. The narrator references Samuel Heinicke, the inventor of an oral method for educating deaf mutes as one of his inspirations (203). Heinicke's strange methods included assigning a flavor to each vowel sound to associate the mouth shape and movement with a particular taste. He would use a feather to apply the flavor to the tongue of the patient and repeat these steps until the patient could replicate the desired sound through the connection to a particular liquid (Rée 164). While the oddity of Heinicke's work is useful for Lugones's portrait of a misguided scientist, the reasoning behind these experiments with flavor are at the base of the narrator's understanding of language and voice. Heinicke was working on a method to teach language, and more specifically speech, to his deaf students without recourse to gestural or tactile languages. For him, sounds are what activate mental activity and that acquiring language has to come from learning the names of things or concepts and voicing them. Without sound, he felt the words had no intellectual anchor, leaving the deaf student awash in meaningless letters without any means of mental organization (Rée 163-4).

Although Heinicke's theory may seem strange and even offensive today, it stems from a long philosophical and theological history of speech that imagines the voice as the seat of the soul. Johann Gottfried Herder was one of many philosophers who linked speech to human consciousness. In his view, the voice is simply the means for articulation, while speech is what marks reason and an entry into human existence:

By speech alone the eye and ear, nay the feelings of all the sense, are united in one, and centre in commanding thought, to which the hands and other members are only obedient instruments... The delicate organs of

speech, therefore, must be considered as the rudder of reason, and speech as the heavenly spark, that gradually kindles our thoughts and senses to a flame. (Qtd. in Rée 67)

Speech is the catalyst that unites all other senses and creates the possibility for consciousness. As a “heavenly spark,” speech takes on a divine essence in Herder’s account. This uniquely human attribute that allows humans to communicate and articulate emotion is what separates us from animals and establishes communities, nations, and traditions (Rée 67). From this vantage point, without speech the possibility for a soul or complete participation in humanity is not possible, evidenced by the term “deaf and dumb” that presupposes that one follows from the other. “Mutism, in short, [is] a state of utter spiritual dereliction, the atrophy or the death of the soul” (Rée 90). The narrator replicates this line of thinking as he puts Yzur in a category above “deaf mutes” in his conceptual hierarchy: “Poseyendo el mono la voz, es decir, llevando esto de ventaja al sordomudo, con más ciertas articulaciones rudimentarias” (204).²⁰ He sees similarities between teaching deaf mutes and chimpanzees to speak; yet the monkey has the advantage in that he can hear and repeat the sounds rather than roughly approximate them. All the narrator has to do is link these sounds to concepts and the monkey’s voice can be converted to actual speech.

The scientist finds evidence of his progress in the similarity of the monkey’s behavior to that of humans. In the text there is a gradual sense that alongside the speech lessons Yzur is incrementally adopting human behaviors. “Cada vez que lo veía avanzar en dos pies, con las manos a la espalda para conservar el equilibrio, y su aspecto de

²⁰ Monkeys hold an advantage over deaf mutes in that they not only have a voice, but have an excellent innate capacity for controlling rudimentary articulation. (106)

marinero borracho, la convicción de su humanidad detenida se vigorizaba en mí” (200).²¹

These mannerisms, the fuel for countless cartoons and comedy routines, are, in this scenario, evidence of the monkey’s innate humanness. All he needs to do is restore the functionality of the organs and receptors of language, and all other elements of sentience will be unlocked.

Beneath the discussion of the degree of humanity that a monkey could possess lies a broader discussion of what constitutes human. In the same equation in which someone who is both deaf and mute is less human than a speaking monkey, lies the idea that women, children, and indigenous populations are less fully developed than a fully articulate white man. In *Descent of Man*, Darwin begins to extrapolate the hypotheses of evolution onto human society. Problematic in a number of ways, this text includes an articulation of these levels of development. Although Darwin admits that “with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man” (311), but he does not value these characteristics labeling them the faculties “of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization” (311). In this oft-cited passage, Darwin places women and the “lower races” on a similar evolutionary trajectory that leaves them behind, languishing in the past and in a lower position on the evolutionary scale than white men. On a conceptual level, Darwin marks the human in terms of spoken language, which privileges a certain kind of language that performs this linear progression of progress. Spoken language abandons a more direct connection to emotion and feeling that can be exhibited in languages that include gestures and three dimensional expressions of thought (133). Emotions and intuition are

²¹ Every time I saw him approach on two feet, with his hands held behind his back to keep his balance, and his drunken sailor’s swagger, my conviction that he was a lapsed human grew stronger. (103)

weaknesses, holdovers from an ancient and now obsolete version of history. Ideas like these are what have justified oppression and subjugation under the banner of saving “backwards” “underdeveloped” peoples. In Argentina, the idea of progress is bound up with the separation of urban, cosmopolitan civilization from the rural and agrarian Barbary of the interior.

The scientist replicates this attitude through his attempts to return the monkey to speech, an act that would save him from his ancestral fate and bring him back on par with his human relatives. The scientist truly believes that as the monkey’s ability to speak increases, so too will his degree of humanness, reaffirming the link between speech and a sense of humanity. Despite reporting that Yzur has not yet uttered a word, the scientist feels the lessons are working and as a result, the monkey has become more human.

Por despacio que fuera, se había operado un gran cambio en su carácter. Tenía menos movilidad en las facciones, la mirada más profunda, y adoptaba posturas meditabundas. Había adquirido, por ejemplo, la costumbre de contemplar las estrellas. Su sensibilidad se desarrollaba igualmente; íbasele notando una gran facilidad de lágrimas. (205)²²

In his observations, the scientist inextricably links language to emotion and the capability to think. He attributes Yzur’s new habits of contemplating the stars to his work in developing his speech organs. In opening these channels of understanding and interpreting the world, the scientist has also opened a new world of emotion that overwhelms Yzur. There are no traces of joy in these observations, only profound

²² However slow the process, there gradually came a great change in his character. He flexed his facial features less and less, his expression grew profound and turned inward, and he struck poses which can only be described as meditative. He had acquired, for example, the habit of gazing at the stars. His sensitivity heightened in the same way; I noticed that he was easily brought to tears. (107)

sadness and isolation. Whether these are the scientist's own reflections on the state of the human that he projects onto Yzur, or if they are Yzur's own awakening into sense is unclear, yet they reveal a troubling aspect of humanity. The more human he becomes the more burden there is on his psyche. Like Adam and Eve's awareness of their own nakedness in the Garden of Eden after eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Yzur's awareness of human suffering and emotional complexity comes after eating from the tree of language.

The more Yzur begins to show these slight signs of humanity, the more obsessive the scientist becomes. The first person narration makes it impossible to discern the line between the scientist's actual observations and his obsessive theories. The mixture of plausible scientific theory and his own conjecture obscure any possibility for the reader to unravel the reliability of the narrator. The first glimpse of an outside observer is the scientist's housekeeper, who tells the narrator she has heard Yzur speaking real words in the garden. Even here, the report comes from the scientist not from the housekeeper herself, but this discovery enrages the scientist who feels betrayed when the monkey refuses, or is unable, to repeat the phrases for his master. Furious with resentment, frustration, and anger, the scientist beats Yzur nearly to death. Simply the suspicion that he is withholding his knowledge from the human, the greater of the two species, seems a deep affront to the scientist and an insult to his hard work. Beginning to speak opens Yzur to a new level of victimization. The damage he has done to Yzur proves irrevocable. He grows weaker and weaker until all of the medical remedies have failed him, leaving the scientist with the results of his experiments and cruelty — a silent tortured monkey slipping toward death.

It is unclear from this point on if the scientist himself slips into a psychosis of remorse or if the monkey does actually become more human. What is evident is that the tone and the language of the story shifts from clinical, medicalized, experimental terms to a more mystical tone sympathetic to the trials the monkey and his species must have faced:

Mas, a pesar de le mansedumbre que el progreso de la enfermedad aumentaba en él, su silencio, aquel desesperante silencio provocado por mi exasperación, no cedía. Desde un oscuro fondo de tradición petrificada en instinto, la raza imponía su milenario mutismo al animal, fortaleciéndose de voluntad atávica en las raíces mismas de su ser. Los antiguos hombres de la selva, que forzó al silencio, es decir al suicidio intelectual, quién sabe qué bárbara injusticia mantenían su secreto formado por misterios de bosque y abismos de prehistoria, en aquella decisión ya inconsciente, pero formidable con la inmensidad de su tiempo. (207-208)²³

This passage takes on a new tone of compassion for the creature. No longer a clinical description of the function of the monkey's mouth, instead a contemplation on the archaic relationships between species and speculation on the kind of brutality that would lead to a purposeful abdication of language. Like Blavatsky's seven forms of human "some evolving away from humanity as we know it," Yzur and his species had divested

²³ From some deep well of evolutionary habit, which the eons had petrified into instinct, his race imposed its millennial mutism on the animal, fortifying an atavistic will at the very roots of his being. The primal men of the jungle, subdued and forced into silence – which is to say intellectual suicide – by who knows what barbarous injustice, kept their secret; forest mysteries formed in the abysses of prehistory, and spanning measureless oceans of time, still held in the thrall of the dark unconscious of this chimpanzee. (109)

themselves from the “grosser parts” of humanity. Speech was the bond that tied the anthropoids to man and to the oppressive work that man required of them. Breaking that bond releases them back into the safety of silence and distance from humans. There is the trace of multidirectional theosophist evolution in the delusional ponderings of the scientist/narrator. The choice to remain silent and relinquish this “higher bond” is not possible in Darwinian evolution.

Lugones’s shift to this alternate discourse in the latter half of the story is in opposition to the highly rational and logical experimentation at the beginning of the text. Although the narrator seems to now feel more compassion towards Yzur and to examine the monkey’s long history of oppression, he is blind to his own propagation of violence. As soon as Yzur shows signs of returning to speech, the scientist replicates this millennia-old pattern of violence. Although the narrator laments the species’ need to break the common bond of speech that linked them to humans as a way to retain their dignity in the face of degradation and slavery at the hands of the ancient human race (209), he replicates this same pattern, beating Yzur back into silence. The secret that the scientist fears Yzur will take to the grave is that he has learned to speak, but refuses to. This suspicion is what fuels the scientist’s rage and that plagues his mind as he continues his brutal lessons with the monkey day after day.

His rage and paranoia stand on the brink of psychosis and the narrative begins to break down, becoming ever more clouded by the narrator’s imbalance. On the day of Yzur’s death the scientist wakes after a bout with fever to find the monkey in the process of dying.

El mono, con los ojos muy abiertos, se moría definitivamente aquella vez, y su expresión era tan humana, que me infundió horror; pero su mano, sus ojos, me atraían con tanta elocuencia hacia él, que hube de inclinarme inmediato a su rostro; y entonces, con su último suspiro, el último suspiro que coronaba y desvanecía a la vez me esperanza, brotaron –estoy seguro– brotaron en un murmullo (¿cómo explicar el tono de una voz que ha permanecido sin hablar diez mil siglos!) estas palabras cuya humanidad reconciliaba las especies: –AMO, AGUA, AMO, MI AMO... (209)²⁴

With his last breath, Yzur repeats a version of the words that the scientist would say at the end of all of their lessons “yo soy tu amo[...]tú eres mi mono” (207).²⁵ Broken and dying, the monkey replicates this phrase of ownership either resigning himself to his fate, or desperately asking his master for water that might alleviate his suffering. This moment of total vulnerability is the one in which the scientist sees Yzur as the most human, so human in fact that the monkey’s uncanny face is horrifying to the man and it is at this most human of moments that Yzur begins to speak.

Yet, this moment that seems to function as a vindication for the scientist is marked by a more sinister undertone. The narrator has just awoken, there are no witnesses to this event, and the words themselves are unclear as they are uttered by an untrained voice silenced for a millennia. The string of sounds that make up this sentence

²⁴ The monkey, with his eyes wide open, was definitively dying this time, and his expression was so human that it filled me with horror, but his hand, his eyes, drew me towards him with such eloquence that I immediately drew close to his face; and then, with his last breath, the last breath that rose and faded at the same time it gave me hope, they broke –I’m sure – they broke out in a murmur (how can one explain the tone of a voice that had existed without speaking for ten thousand centuries?) these words whose humanity reconciled the species: –Master, water, master, my master.

²⁵ I am your master...you are my monkey

with its open vowel sounds and lack of strong consonants, are the most basic of speech elements and could be construed as simply a dying groan without any substance or linguistic complexity (H. Fraser 17). This “sentence” is very similar to Eliza Doolittle’s groan “Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-ow-oo!” in *Pygmalion*, a marker that Bernard Shaw uses in moments when Eliza has slipped to the lowest rungs of society. Yet, the narrator in “Yzur” hears them as a fully articulated sentence, a validation of all he has worked for. These words would be the total culmination of his efforts, not just to teach the monkey to speech, but also to make him more human. The repetition of the scientist’s own words would reaffirm this hierarchy and mark the monkey’s total subjugation. Therefore, the phrase Yzur utters represents the perfect result for the scientist’s experiments, and in his deep desire for success, his report of these findings cannot be trusted.

The uncertainties about the scientist’s mental state as well as the ambiguity of the phrase itself are hallmarks of the fantastic genre. This text sits on the borderline between science fiction and the fantastic. Whereas science fiction often requires that the world is a rational one within the logic of the story even if it is an unfamiliar realm for the reader, literature of the fantastic has an element of undecidability. There are elements that cannot be explained in either the logic of the story, or in that of the reader’s world. The ambiguity is often achieved either through omissions, unreliable narrators, or elisions. In this case, Lugones undercuts the authority of the narrator at every turn and the reader becomes aware of the narrator’s myopia and brutality that denies him the ability to narrate his story without creating a sense of doubt.

If speech can elevate a monkey to human status, then language also adds complexity to the emotional and psychological capacity of the monkey. What then can

language do to advance the human, the organism already at the top of the food chain? The next advancement would be to the level of a creator, a god, one who can see outside human limits. To elevate man to the status of a god, language would need to go beyond human understanding to unlock a new level of consciousness. In “La fuerza omega,” which appears in the same collection as “Yzur,” a scientist attempts to find the perfect harmony of the human voice. His experiments that begin as mere larks or investigations, result in the creation of a powerful machine that can harness the secret chords of language into a direct stream of energy that can break down any form of matter that surrounds it. In Lugones’s formulation, the power the scientist unleashes is one that human consciousness is not yet prepared to handle and a power that has been revealed too soon.

In “La fuerza omega,” The narrator is an objective observer, placed in the story to add authenticity to the reporting of events. He shares the reader’s skepticism about the extraordinary events that are about to unfold and acts as a mediator between the seemingly impossible and the plausible, creating the tension between the known and the unknown, characteristic of the fantastic genre. When both the scientific and the fantastic solution feel equally plausible, the scientific loses some of its cultural authority and its claim to reason. The presence of the skeptic asks the questions the modern reader would want to know in his place, attempting to disprove the seemingly crazy theories of the pseudo-scientist. If even the skeptic is convinced in the narrative, then the reader has little choice but to hold out the possibility for the fantastic to be true.

With this narrator as a guide, we are introduced to the scientist who claims to have “descubierto la potencia mecánica del sonido”(100).²⁶ Sound is once again the central point, this time not only as a marker of human, but also as an innately mechanical force. The scientist is known to his friends to have often built small inventions like coffee grinders and machines to collect streetcar fares yet had never patented them or attempted to sell his inventions (97). Instead, the creative process is what drives him and occupies his mind. As a tinkerer, and lay inventor, his knowledge base is wide and pulls on information from diverse sources. This narrator is, according to Beatriz Sarlo, more in line with the ideas of the general populace than the modernista writers. She identifies a current in Argentine popular culture in this era that embraces technology as a democratizing force. Many technological innovations like the radio were inventions that could be cobbled together by the average citizen with spare parts, a few tools and a little bit of insight. As evidenced by the numerous articles and images in popular culture and mass circulated magazines like *Caras y Caretas*, there was an enormous interest in consuming information about new scientific ideas. Many thought that “technological wonders would bring about progress and a social paradise did not mean hurtling into an abyss of authoritarian scientific rationality but rather throwing the doors open to a homogeneous, well-balanced society” (Sarlo 73).

Sarlo’s account changes the image of technology from the modernista vision of repression and social order imposed on the population, to one of excitement and promise for the future. This distinction places Lugones apart from mass culture and distanced from this democratized future. Lugones speaks from a position above the general readership. He saw modernismo as harnessing a particular power to discern and

²⁶ discovered the mechanical potential of sound

disseminate culture to the masses and he would later turn to fascism as a viable political position. In his early years, Lugones was a radical Marxist in his political thinking. He rejected traditional Marxism as a continuation of the liberalism and rationalism of the West and by the time of his suicide in 1938, he had shifted his views to a form of fascism in which a national army would replace the proletariat as the seat of rebellion against imperialism and economic intrusion. As Alberto Spektorowski notes, “Lugones was representative of this new revolutionary fascist synthesis which combined industrial modernization with national integration, introducing a direct theoretical connection between economic anti-imperialism and the revolution of the right” (82-83). This distance between the populace evidenced in his aesthetics, plays out in his political life in a pattern followed by a number of modernists both in Latin America and Europe.

Lugones articulates this position in “La fuerza omega,” and writes from a place of anxiety and mistrust of this kind of democratic social order built by the masses. In the story, the objective narrator becomes acquainted with the scientist through a conversation about occult sciences, in which, though they disagree on the validity of these theories, they share a sense of scorn for the general populous who hang on to dogmatic ideas and are not open to new knowledge (98). Science, the official arbiter of knowledge for these men, carries authority and information that the general populous could not possibly understand. They believe the average citizen to be mystified by new ideas and blinded by theology that makes them cling to outdated dogmas. While the inventor in the story believes in occult theories, based in arcane mythologies and ancient epistemologies, he views these to be more informed and more powerful than even science. Therefore, he is at an even further remove from the general population than the scientist narrator.

As the inventor explains, these occult theories are at the base of his latest invention. In order to find sound waves he can manipulate he turns to the myth of Orpheus to determine the proper proportional progression of sounds that he needs:

Eran el do-fa-sol-do, que según la tradición antigua constituían la lira de Orfeo, y que contienen los intervalos más importantes de la declamación, es decir el secreto musical de la voz humana. La relación de estas ondas es matemáticamente $1, 4/3, 3/2, 2$; y arrancada de la naturaleza, sin un agregado o deformación que las altere, son también una fuerza original.

(106)²⁷

His explanation is an interesting conflation of occult knowledge and contemporary theories of ether, waves and energy. In mapping a mathematical explanation of this legendary harmony, he essentially “proves” not only the existence of this divine harmony of the human voice, but uses new scientific theories to bend it to his will. This concept comes to him all at once, as if by some divine inspiration, while he was modifying gramophone discs as way to test the harmonies of the human voice without the use of a piano, but instead with direct perception. Instead of creating a special tuning fork as was his original goal, he harnesses the harmonies of the human voice to collapse their specific energy waves so he can direct and expel the wave like an “etheric missile” (77). He has created a weapon from Orpheus’ tone.

This notion of Orphic harmony has a particular resonance for modernistas of the era. As Ricardo Gullón explains, modernismo used the conception of a universal rhythm

²⁷ There were the do, fa, sol, do, that, according to ancient tradition, constituted the lyre of Orpheus, and which contained the most important rhythmic unites of declamation, which is to say, the musical secret of the human voice. The relationship of these waves mathematically is $1, 4/3, 3/2, 2$; and, transcending nature, invulnerable to adulteration or deformity, they also, are an immanent force. (76)

and meter as a central idea in its poetics, wherein harmony and rhythm function as the key principles of beauty (15). The idea draws on a much older idea of harmony and meter with its basis in mathematics. In articulating their concept of harmony, the modernistas compounded a number of sources including Pythagoras and the Orpheus myth to construct a theory of harmony that poets were particularly adept at harnessing and hearing in the world. According to Gullón:

...la armonía es fecunda porque implica un acto de amor, un conocimiento de lo que está fuera de nosotros y de lo que no somos nosotros. Si una partícula del universo nos entrega su secreto, el universo entero empezará a hacerse inteligible. Por su receptividad, por su actitud para integrarse e identificarse con las cosas, es el poeta quien mejor puede poseerlas, dejándose poseer por ellas. El mismo Valle decía: “donde los demás hombres sólo hallan diferenciaciones, los poetas descubren enlaces luminosos de una armonía oculta”, y para describir esa operación de comprensión e identificación utiliza una imagen cuya procedencia salta a la vista; “transmigrar en el Alma del Mundo.” (23)²⁸

Embedded in this idea of universal harmony and the Soul of the World, is the notion that with enough information, the entire universe is knowable. If one listens properly and can find a way to tap into the great unconscious of the universe, there are elements of the world unseen by ordinary man, but available for those who seek it, particularly the poets

²⁸ The harmony is fecund because it implies an act of love, a knowledge of that which is outside of us and that which is not of us. If one particle of the universe reveals to us its secret, the entire universe will begin to make itself intelligible. For his receptivity, for his aptitude for integrating himself and identifying himself with things, it is the poet who is best able to possess them and allowing themselves to be possessed by them. Valle tells us the same thing when all the rest of men only find differences, poets discover luminous links of occult harmony, and in order to describe this operation of comprehension and identification he utilizes an image whose precedence jumps into view; “to transmigrate in the Soul of the World.

and the seers who are more receptive to learning and hearing the mysteries of the world. An age-old concept, it reaches from the Delphic Oracle to the music of the spheres, to Newtonian physics. In the modernista era, it was a concept facing a real challenge in the public imagination. Recent advancements in physics had begun to overturn these ideas of a deterministic, predictable world.

This sentiment of a universal harmony and a knowable universe is one that meshed with ideas of science in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1795 mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace gave a lecture that articulated scientific determinism and probability in a way that mirrors these same concepts. For him, the universe is a chain of causes and effects. In the often-cited passage from his work *Philosophical Essays on Probabilities* explains the kind of universal intellect described in theories of modernismo:

We ought then to consider the present state of the universe as the effect of its previous state and as the cause of that which is to follow. An intelligence that, at a given instant, could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situation of the beings that make it up, if moreover it were vast enough to submit these data to analysis, would encompass in the same formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atoms. For such an intelligence nothing would be uncertain, and the future, like the past, would be open to its eyes. The human mind affords, in the perfection that it has been able to give to astronomy, a feeble likeness of this intelligence.

(2)

This idea that finds its root in Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, posits that if one could understand one element of the universe completely, then through deduction and analogy one could understand all other parts of the universe. There is still space here for an intelligence greater than the human, something with the capacity to process the vast data and information that would come from this knowledge. Laplace asserts: "All these efforts in the search for truth tend to lead the mind continually towards the intelligence we have just mentioned, although it will always remain infinitely distant from this intelligence. This tendency, peculiar to the human race, is what makes it superior to the animals; and their progress in this respect distinguishes nations and ages, and constitutes real glory" (3). The pursuit of this greater intelligence is a very human activity even though this intelligence is always out of reach. For the modernistas, this human pursuit was one that was worthy of salvation in the face of increasing pressures from modern developments in science that would remove this space for contemplating the divine or the infinite.

Developments in early 20th century physics begin to undo this notion of a knowable universe that operates on general laws and that can be replicated and verified. In 1924, Werner Heisenberg complicates this notion of predictability with his "uncertainty principle." Along with realizations of knowing that one thing can encapsulate disparate features simultaneously, there are more far-reaching realizations that there are aspects of the universe that do not have solutions, things that cannot be determined absolutely, and there are concepts that can have no empirical solution. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle asserts that there is no way to ascertain both the position and the momentum of an electron. Observing things

requires being able to see. Seeing requires light to bounce off an object and be received by the eyes. Due to the microscopic size of the electron, viewing it involves using gamma ray microscope. The energy used by the microscope to view the electron disrupts it. Therefore, by attempting to observe the particle, the viewer has fundamentally changed the particle's actions (Gribbin 156). The ramifications of such a statement explode the Newtonian idea that we could "predict the entire course of the future if we knew the position and momentum of every particle in the universe" (Gribbin 157). Since man cannot know the position and momentum of even one particle it is impossible to know the course of what this particle will do in the future. In this new conception, the universe is still vast and mysterious, but in removing the space for knowability, the place of the human and the potential of human intelligence to ascertain the boundaries of such a universe become much smaller. Therefore, the poet, the seer, the antenna of the race, is no longer needed if the universe can no longer communicate a cohesive message. Modernismo acts to retain this space, reformulated for a modern existence that must acknowledge science, but safeguard the place for the human.

The voice, a uniquely human possession, functions as an arena for this battle between material science and humanist aesthetics in modernista texts. Benjamin Fraser suggests that sound, and the voice function both metaphorically and structurally in this era to reconcile a universalist sentiment with the modern:

... el sonido demuestra la preocupación del modernismo por la musicalidad como elemento estructurante formal, como símbolo o como vía reconciliadora universal – y por extraño que sea, falta algo para

completar el pensamiento que indaga en el sonido como significado, como referente, como contenido, como tema. (795)²⁹

Rhythm, meter and rhyme are all functions of sound in poetry and have historically been the foundations of a universal harmony. Extrapolating that use into prose, sound retains that possibility of unification and wholeness, as evidenced in Lugones's linking of emotion to speech in "Yzur" and his use of Orpheus' lyre as a catalyst for experimentation in "La fuerza omega."

Lugones exploits this shifting ground with his Omega Force, splicing together these older notions of physics with contemporary ones to create an unstable narrative. In order to give more credence to the possibility of a machine that can manipulate sound waves and the harmony of the human voice, Lugones's scientist extensively cites contemporary advances in physics, which, to the ordinary citizen, might seem equally plausible as this fictional machine.

Es un gran hallazgo, ciertamente, pero no superior a la onda hertziana o al rayo Roentgen. A propósito – yo he puesto también un nombre a mi fuerza. Y como ella es la última en la síntesis vibratoria cuyos componentes son el calor, la luz, y la electricidad – la he llamado la fuerza Omega. (100)³⁰

The scientist puts his own invention in line with the Roentgen ray (a precursor to the X-Ray) and the Hertzian wave. These theories are examples in advancements in wave

²⁹ Sound demonstrates modernismo's preoccupation with musicality as a formal, structural element, as a symbol, or as a universal road of reconciliation – and strange as it seems, lacks something to complete the ideas that explores sounds as signified, as a referent, as content, as a theme.

³⁰ It is a great achievement, certainly, but not superior to the Hertzian wave or the Roentgen ray. By the way, I have also given a name to my force. And as it is the ultimate in the synthesis of vibration whose components are heat, light and electricity – I have called it the Omega Force.

theory and experiments in the electromagnetic qualities of light. Lugones was well read on these subjects and well-versed in the most recent developments in these fields. His knowledge allows him to tread the careful line between the fantastic and the plausible.

In the general populous, rather than produce skepticism about prior beliefs in the same way ideas of electricity explained lightning to exclude folk tales of gods throwing lightning bolts, these experiments in physics reopened old discussions of older beliefs that now corresponded to scientific possibilities (Sarlo 130). For instance, Charles Lallemand, vice-president of the Academy of Sciences in Paris reformulated one of Jean-Marie Charcot's theories in 1925 that likened thought to a vibration. Therefore, like any other vibration, it could pass from one mind to the other "physiologically harmonized" with the first. Starting from commonly accepted ideas of vibration, Lallemand, a well-respected man of science in a position of authority, opens the possibility for thinking of ESP and telepathy as real objects of study and as possible phenomena in the world (Gasparini 182).

This logic is little different from the scientist in Lugones' story. If heat, light, and electricity are all forms of wave energy, then it stands to reason that sound waves function similarly and can be harnessed in the same way. The scientist's device is made of four tiny tuning forks with a filament stretched between them that connect to a trumpet-like microphone. When he presses a lever the machine forms a quadruple wave from the tuning forks that is expelled through the microphone in a burst of "dynamic ether" (107). As he explains to his observers, this energy is potentially lethal: "Si la onda va al centro molecular del cuerpo, éste se desintegra en partículas impalpables. Si no, lo

perfora con un agujerillo enteramente imperceptible” (107).³¹ While the scientist’s initial demonstration to show the effects of the ray’s friction on a disc fails, he manages to turn a paving stone in the doorway and bands of steel into dust.

In this utilization of sound based on the most perfect harmony of the human voice, it is notable that the machine makes no discernible noise. The narrator and the other spectator watch the demonstration with trepidation as they are surrounded by an uncanny sound:

El botón comenzó a actuar con ruidecito intermitente y seco, ante nuestra curiosidad todavía incrédula; y como el silencio era grande, percibimos apenas una aguda estridencia, análoga al zumbido de un insecto... La maciza rueda no era más que un sombra vaga, semejante al ala de un colibrí en suspensión, y el aire desplazado por ella provocaba un torbellino dentro del cuarto. (107)³²

Its force is so strong it shakes the house and sends the neighbors running in to see what the disturbance is. The sound itself is so profound it is beyond human hearing, producing a deafening silence. The presence of this all encompassing sound is also the absence of sound turning sound into pure energy. The sheer magnitude and power of this force, reaffirms the mystic power of the Orphic chord. To know the chord and unleash it on the world releases a tremendous and terrifying power, one that the human who unleashed it cannot control.

³¹ If the wave travels to the molecular nucleus of a body, it disintegrates the nucleus into impalpable particle. If not, it will perforate the body with an almost imperceptible little hole. (77)

³² The lever was engaged and the cylinder began to actuate with a dry, intermittent whirr. Our curiosity was exceeded only by incredulity an, so momentous was the silence, that we could barely discern a strident keening, resembling the buzzing of an insect... The massive noise was no more than an errant shadow, like the sound made by the wings of a hovering hummingbird, and the air it displaced provoked a whirlwind inside the room. (77)

Sound carries this same enormous power in Blavatsky's theosophical writing and figures prominently in *The Secret Doctrine* as a powerful force of both creation and destruction.

We may say that SOUND, for one thing, is a tremendous Occult power; that it is a stupendous force, of which the electricity generated by a million of Niagaras could never counteract the smallest potentiality when directed with *occult knowledge*. Sound may be produced of such a nature that the pyramid of Cheops would be raised in the air, or that a dying man, nay, one at his last breath, would be revived and filled with new energy and vigour...For Sound generates, or rather attracts together, the elements that produce an *ozone*, the fabrication of which is beyond chemistry, but within the limits of Alchemy. (Qtd in B. Fraser 796)

In Blavatsky's view sound contains untapped potential as an energy force. Moving far beyond the audible, sound has the power to move mountains and reanimate bodies. As the unifying force of all forces, it brings together other elements into a more powerful force, but only with the help of Occult knowledge. Here again there is a conflation of contemporary ideas of science with the reference to hydroelectric power from Niagara and to ozone and the occult. The use of sound as a malleable tool is very similar to Lugones' application in "La fuerza omega." Also, like Lugones' scientist who is the only one who can unlock the power of his machine, the theosophist has the knowledge to advance the comparatively paltry discoveries of modern science to new heights by combining ancient knowledge with new.

The similarity between Lugones' use of sound and Blavatsky's would seem to

indicate an allegiance and promotion of this particular world view, yet the scientist in Lugones' story meets his demise at the hands of the very machine he has built. The narrator and the other witness to the experiment come back to the scientist's house and find a grisly scene:

La autopsia confirmó su dicho, certificando una nueva maravilla del portentoso aparato. Efectivamente, la cabeza de nuestro pobre amigo estaba vacía, sin un átomo de sesos. El proyectil eterno, quien sabe por qué rareza de dirección o por qué descuido, había desintegrado el cerebro, proyectándolo en explosión atómica a través de los poros de su cráneo. (109)³³

Brain matter has ended up on the walls of the laboratory while the scientist's skull remains intact. His death supports his claims that the machine can disrupt atoms on the smallest scale, and also displays the machine's capacity as a weapon. While alive, the scientist had never wanted to test it on animals as one of his more pragmatic and materialist friends had suggested. He never wanted to use it to inflict pain, but rather to unlock the hidden potentials of sound and the harmonies of the human voice. Once this knowledge is released on the world, however, the scientist no longer has control of its uses and its deadly precision is clearly one that could be applied to a number of nefarious uses. As Luis Cano notes, this trope of the death of the semi-sane narrator is common in early works of science fiction and the fantastic as a way to contain these technologies from being replicated (110). As is the case here, the scientist is unsure as to how exactly

³³ The autopsy confirmed what he had said, verifying a new capacity for the portentous apparatus. Evidently, the head of our poor friend had emptied; not an atom of brains was left. The etheric projectile, who knows by what freak of direction or by what carelessness, had disintegrated his cerebellum, expelling it in an atomic explosion through the pores of his skull. (77)

his machine functions, and no one but him can operate it. Therefore, the machine dies with the man.

While the machine proves successful and demonstrates the validity of both the scientist's and therefore theosophy's claims about the power of sound, the scientist does not survive his experiment. Often in science fiction stories, killing off the scientist functions as a punishment or moral corrective when the scientist has crossed a limit, stepping outside the regulated bounds of experimentation (Haywood Ferreira 139). These endings condemn those who try to "play god" censuring them through the malfunctioning an invention or through the catastrophic consequences of their actions. In this case, the story resists a simple critique or condemnation of science or theosophy. The extensive scientific citations that explain the genealogy of the experiment give authority to science while the theosophical tenets work in tandem with the scientific method to produce the desired results. The aim of the text appears two fold: first, to convert the narrator's strict sense of "proper" science with a faith in materialism to include a respect for more mystical thinking; and second to censure the inventor for his arrogance at attempting to harness these mysteries and apply them for his own ends. His is not a dismissal of science out of hand, but a more complex critique of the limits and morals between science, mysticism, and the human.

In these two stories the voice is figured as a powerful and unifying force and to tamper with it results in disturbing consequences. As is true with *Pygmalion*, voice is the most powerful when linked to an appropriate body and not removed, falsified, or trained. When the connection between speaker and authentic voice is broken, a crucial element of the speaker's selfhood is lost. In "Yzur," the reverse proves true. Returning the voice to

the speaker after millennia of absence alters the monkey's relation to the outside world. The addition of the voice creates an unsettling new awareness of the sadness and weight of the world now articulated through language. Both works reaffirm speech as the seat of the soul, an attribute that defines, shapes, and molds the individual. Without acknowledging this deep-rooted connection between spirit and speech, any attempt to change this relation will lead to failure. This same anxiety is present in some of the more conservative factions of posthumanism that see the increasing influx of data as semi-sentient and mediation through technology as a breakdown of intrinsically human elements (Hayles 277). These fears are cyclical and reoccur in moments of perceived threat at the hands of leaps in technological advancement.

While "La fuerza omega" also turns on ideas of the voice, its trajectory moves in a different direction that pulls Lugones toward the future trends in literature. His incorporation of modern physics and contemporary ideas of science warns of the potential to use science as a weapon. Placing the purest harmony of the human voice at the center of this examination implicates the human in the modern project. As science advances, if there is no regard for the subject, the alteration of the human space within the discourse of science, there is the danger of turning advancements against the subject itself. Theosophy is an attempt to maintain that distance, but the rapid advancements in science and technology in the next decades would be too much to keep at bay. By the 1930s Lugones' vision had become a reality with technology completing the separation of voice from the body.

Lugones is just one example of a thinker of this era who uses the discourse of theosophy to counter the dominating narrative of materialism. Argentina's history of

public scientific debate through literature, and in publications like *Caras y Caretas* and *Philadelphia*, provide the space for this kind of dialogue to begin in South America. Though Lugones was one of the first, he was certainly not the last to mix spiritualism with modern fiction, a combination that leads to the development of literature of the fantastic and later magical realism in South America. These new forms attempt to capture the unique perspective of Latin America and offer an alternative concept of time, narration and the use of science. By the 1920s and 30s, Lugones' world in which the occult could exist alongside of modern science had eroded. Mexican author Jaime Torres Bodet writes of the dissolution of the mystical world in his novel *Proserpina rescatada*.

CHAPTER IV

AURAL REPRESENTATION AND THE MODERN SENSORIUM IN JAIME TORRES BODET'S *PROSERPINA RESCATADA* AND "PARÁLISIS"

While Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks graced American screens in the 1920s and 30s, the Mexican film industry was a booming enterprise. With the likes of Dolores del Río on camera and visionaries like Luis Buñuel behind it, the spectacle of moving images captured the imagination of the public. Within a few decades cinema had moved from photography to zoetropes to feature films. In this progression, film moves from silent to sounded, bringing together the previously isolated gramophone to the cinematograph combining sound and film dynamically. Yet in these early days, the recombination of image and sound is not an easy one, often creating a discontinuous, asynchronous effect. Sound technology in the 30s is unable to simultaneously record image and sound, leading to sound's artificial removal from the mouth of the speaker followed by its recombination after filming. This disjunction calls attention to the new nature of speech, mediated through technology and converts this aspect of the human experience to one that can be captured, saved and replayed.

The hyper-awareness of the presence of sound, and the now disembodied nature of the voice, opens new questions of representation and its changing nature in the mechanical world. This issue becomes a preoccupation not only for those looking to develop new modes of recording and playback, but also for authors and writers. The shift in the modern sensorium from a predominantly sight based configuration to one that has a heightened awareness of sound requires new modes of writing. Author Jaime Torres

Bodet writes both his novel *Proserpina rescatada* (1931) and his short story “Parálisis” (1928) in this same historical moment in the development of sounded cinema in Mexico. These two works experiment in building a more complex textual sensorium that can represent characters phonically as well as visually through auditory metaphors and through characters whose perspectives encompass three dimensions rather than the linear view that sight alone provides. These techniques are representative of a modern narrative sensibility that is forced to compete with the sights and sounds of the mechanized world. Though these texts are not *about* cinema or sound recording, they confront the problematic dislocation of body from voice, and representation from reality, that result from these technologies.

The flood of technology that opens the door for vanguard experimentation in literature begins with the rapid industrialization in Mexico under the modernization project of Porfirio Díaz at the beginning of the twentieth century (1876-1910) that ushers in a wave mechanical innovations. These inventions significantly alter the way the populace perceives and interacts with the world around it, particularly in urban centers where modernization and mechanization are most concentrated. While these innovations are effective in moving into a new economic sphere, they come at the price of repressive social policies. Writers and artists largely retreat to the aesthetic space in opposition to the regulated sphere of efficiency, modernization and instrumentalization that is associated with the Porfirato. When this regime collapses and modernization becomes a way forward rather than a conservative space, these technologies are embraced in a new way, engaging with the new vanguard in literature and art in a way that was impossible under Díaz. In this new moment, technology can take on a different resonance and the

collapse of the Porfiriato and the ensuing revolution create a new discursive space that allows for the acceptance of these devices and advances as progressive additions to the vanguard's project.

Modernista Amado Nervo is representative of this initial hesitation toward technology as it began to encroach upon the literary sphere under the Díaz regime. He fears that the combined powers of the phonograph and the cinematograph would mean the demise of novels: "no more books; the phonograph will preserve the old extinguished voices in its dark urn; the cinematograph will reproduce prestigious lives" (Qtd. in Paz-Soldán 2). In 1898, the machines take on an ominous tone for Nervo. The phonograph preserves dead voices, not in the optimism of its inventor Thomas Edison, who sees their preservation as a boon to history and posterity, but instead in terms of embalming, or entrapment, as if in a mausoleum. The voices of the dead echo forward into the future, while the cinematograph replicates the past, restoring and preserving the manufactured histories of the nation; an eventuality that is true of Díaz' use of cinema to extol the virtues of his presidency and sing the praises of his dictatorship. In this formulation there is little room for text, in a world that is now a simulacrum of human experience preserved on celluloid and wax. For Nervo, technology is a destructive force that consumes the other media around it with books falling into obsolescence.

The Contemporáneos, the literary group of which Torres Bodet was a founding member, inherit a broader sense of modern progress, one that embraces moving toward the future through technological, educational, and scientific advancements. At the same time, they also reject the most positivistic and materialist aspects of modernization that were hallmarks of the Díaz regime which had created an aesthetically, and morally,

bankrupt vision of the future in the embrace of pure capitalism like that in the United States. The Contemporáneos formed their group largely out of their connection to José Vasconcelos a major philosopher and thinker engaged with Mexican politics throughout the Revolution, and who later served as Minister of Education. Vasconcelos was also a founder of the Ateneo de Juventud, an intellectual movement that emerged in 1907. This group of intellectuals that included literary men, architects, painters, and doctors envisioned themselves as oppositional to the Porfiriato and rejected notions of positivism that were inherent in the modernizing project under Díaz in favor of a more humanistic approach (Legrás 37).

The intellectual space that the Ateneistas occupy provides the scaffolding for the ascension of Francisco Madero, the presidential candidate who takes down Díaz's government. Díaz finds an unlikely challenger in Madero. Small of stature, a vegetarian and slightly eccentric in his beliefs in spiritism, Madero provides an odd contrast to the authoritarian, military man. At the same time, he is from a landed, wealthy family that gives him credibility among Díaz's constituents. In addition, his business reputation among his workers and his eye toward reform are able to tap into portions of the population who have been disenfranchised under Díaz. The Ateneistas are an important part of that contingent helping to mobilize the young intellectuals and university students in favor of Madero (Gonzales 72). Although Madero wins the election, the triumph is short lived. In the aftermath of his overthrow just a year later, the indigenous and peasant class supporters find themselves again outside the reach of any real reform, setting the stage for the Mexican Revolution which would see the rise of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata to prominence and a rapid succession of governments through 1940.

Vasconcelos' politics of finding moral solutions to social problems and addressing the economic system that had disenfranchised large swaths of the Mexican populous are inline with the more liberal perspective of the Ateneistas (Legrás 39). Vasconcelos's essay "La raza cósmica" exemplifies his politics when it comes to Latin America's position on the world stage and in establishing a Latin American identity in opposition to the discourses of progress and evolution proffered by Anglo-Saxon rhetoric particularly as it came from the United States.

Si, pues, somos antiguos geológicamente y también en lo que respecta a la tradición, ¿cómo podremos seguir aceptando esta ficción inventada por nuestros padres europeos, de la novedad de un continente que existía desde antes de que apareciese la tierra de donde procedían descubridores y reconquistadores? (6)³⁴

The imperial narrative of a single, linear trajectory of progress that sees white Anglo-Saxon men as the endpoint of civilization does not hold up to any logical view of history, particularly on the continent that had seen the rise of such prolific civilizations long before the arrival of Europeans. Accepting the imperial narrative would mean accepting the definition of Latin America as backwards, primitive, and underdeveloped.

Vasconcelos's text aims to reverse this narrative to envision a future that is led by a more universal culture. The coming race would be more reflective of that in Latin America where races and cultures had mixed to form a new kind of peoples. In contrast to the United States' policies of segregation and racial purity, the mixed, universal race

³⁴ If we are, then, geologically ancient, as well as in respect to tradition, how can we still continue to accept this fiction invented by our European fathers, of the novelty of a continent that existed since before the appearance of the land from where they derived discoverers and reconquerors? (8)

advances civilization adding a creative and unique perspective, whereas the “purified” white race decays.

Torres Bodet is an adherent of Vasconcelos’ politics, and at just nineteen, he serves as personal secretary for the older statesman (Karsen 8). He also runs the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) with Vasconcelista principles and later serves as President Miguel Alemán’s ghostwriter in the late 1940s helping to restructure the constitution and end the socialist education implemented by President Cárdenas (Oropesa 18). His position as a diplomat, bureaucrat, and author give shape to his role with the Contemporáneos. His vision for Mexico would help build the post-revolution nation and strengthen its artistic and educational profile on the world stage. In its combination of both local and universal aims, this literary movement is a key connector in examining the network of global modernity in the historical moment of this project.

From the Ateneistas and Vasconcelos, the Contemporáneos inherit an intellectual position with a focus on education and raising Mexico’s prominence on an international scale. They form in the late 1920s as a “grupo sin grupo” (Gordon 1096) a loose association of writers and artists with a similar concern for creating a cosmopolitan vision for Mexican letters. They emerge on the literary scene along with a number of other vanguard groups including the more radical Estridentistas, a group whose hyper-masculinist rhetoric and manifestoes are akin to Marinetti’s Futurists. In contrast to other young avant-gardes, as Henrique González Casanova describes them, they belong to the upper middle class, the group most effected by the Revolution creating the desire to form an aristocracy of thought and expression “una generación precoz, ingeniosa, y curiosa, desilusionada e intelectual, afanosa y escéptica, que pone en duda todos los valores

cuando más está creyendo en ellos” (Sheridan 15).³⁵ In a tumultuous political era, these young artists were eager to engage with the changing political landscape. At the same time, this more cosmopolitan ideal carries with it an urban intellectual elite perspective that at times impedes the kind of reform most needed in the era.

In the complex political structure of Mexico, the *Ateneistas*, and the *Contemporáneos* that follow them, are concerned largely with the urban Mexican experience and look outward toward the global community rather than engage with the principle issues of the revolution, i.e. agrarian policy, land use, and widespread, crippling poverty among the lower classes of Mexican society. Although they are reform minded it is a limited reform. This position can be seen in Vasconcelos’s condemnation of Villa and Zapata’s revolutionary tactics.

After the death of Zapata, who was the disgrace of Zapatismo, there remained his best aides, the learned and the self-sacrificing; those who did not take land, or execute people with voluptuous pleasure, or participate in the excesses committed in the name of the revolution by many. (Qtd. in Parra 20)

Though Vasconcelos has sympathy for the roots of revolution and the goals of the *Zapatistas*, the violent manner in which it was carried out was unpalatable for him. Politics, for Vasconcelos, is better served when it remains in the hands of the educated and the “civilized” rather than in the rough grasp of peasants like Villa and Zapata (Parra 20). The class differential inherent in this commentary is what foregrounds the *Contemporáneos*’s outward looking stance that seeks to find new space for Mexican

³⁵ A precocious, witty, and curious, generation, intellectual and disillusioned, eager and skeptical, calling into question all values when more are believing them.

letters and to engage with artists and writers from Europe and elsewhere in Latin America rather than writing novels or discourses on the revolution itself, which was the occupying motive of many other contemporary authors. Building the Mexican and Latin American profile on the world stage and promoting a humanistic path to reform through the betterment of the individual could, in turn, offer redress to the larger political problems of the Mexican state in flux.

While he and many of the other vanguard figures were interested in the renovation of form, and participation in international ideas, the Contemporáneos were also attuned to the need for a Mexican culture on this world stage as represented by the nation's cultural output in the form of literature and film. This attitude is present in Torres Bodet's response to Ortega y Gasset's essay "La deshumanización del arte." In the essay, Ortega y Gasset expresses what he sees as the future of art in the ashes of the First World War and in the middle of years of strife on the European continent. He laments that art is progressively becoming less human, focused less on incorporating representations of life or experience and instead relying solely on the aesthetic for meaning.

Aunque sea imposible un arte puro, no hay duda alguna de que cabe una tendencia a la purificación del arte. Esta tendencia llevará a una eliminación progresiva de los elementos humanos, demasiado humanos, que dominaban en la producción romántica y naturalista. Y en este proceso se llegará a un punto en que el contenido humano de la obra sea tan escaso que casi no se le vea. Entonces tendremos un objeto que sólo puede ser percibido por quien posea ese don peculiar de la sensibilidad

artística. Sería un arte para artistas, y no para la masa de los hombres; será un arte de casta, y no demótico. (23)³⁶

The result of this dehumanized art is a rift between average citizens and those with a particular artistic sense as well as a bifurcation between art for the general populous and art made for those who have the capacity to understand it. In order to purify art into its most pristine, purely aesthetic form, art would have to be divorced from anything that might link it to the masses, to a base audience. This kind of art would move away from representations of the real or recognizable scenes of everyday life. The transition to this type of non-representational art can already be seen in the cubist and dada movements in art. Both movements distance themselves from connecting with the viewer and distort and reject traditional notions of art. This new “inhuman” art has within it a necessarily ironic turn which recognizes itself as only art, a work created for the sake of art and not for any transcendent meaning or inspiration (14). Ortega sees this trend as developing among the younger artists of the day, and though not endorsing it, he sees these characteristics emerging in music, the visual arts and in literature. Removing art from the vernacular leaves its demystification in the hands of artist/clerics who would possess an exclusive ability to understand, and comprehend the aesthetic value of art.

While these may have been the conditions in modern European art, it was not an analysis that fit Latin America at the time. Torres Bodet’s counter to this article reveals the foundational ideals of the Contemporáneos movement. Its cosmopolitan influences

³⁶ Even though pure art may be impossible there doubtless can prevail a tendency toward a purification of art. Such a tendency would effect a progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production. And in this process a point can be reached in which the human content has grown so thin that it is negligible. We then have an art which can be comprehended only by people possessed of the peculiar gift of artistic sensibility—an art for artists and not for the masses, for “quality” and not for hoi polloi. (“The Dehumanization of Art,” Trans. Helene Weyl 12)

are clear, yet the movement articulates a vision for Latin American art apart from that of Europe, and specific to its historical position in relation to its former colonizer.

...los apuntes que Ortega ha ido obtenido como resultado de las observaciones emprendidas, con rara atención inteligente, a través de los diversos modos y temperaturas que el arte moderno ha instaurado en Europa. Y es así como en esta definición de los propósitos de la obra, encontramos la limitación de su espíritu. *La Deshumanización del Arte* es un libro europeo, con datos europeos, escrito para europeos. Podrá esta circunstancia ser un mérito más para el que la escribe, pero, de fijo, es un peligro para los jóvenes de América que no se atrevan a soñar aún un arte propio, libre de herencias sentimentales y de esclavitudes biológicas.

(125)³⁷

Though Ortega's analysis might fit well with European modes of artistic expression, Torres Bodet does not accept this vision as a universal one, especially not for young artists in Latin America only just beginning to conceptualize an independent art. For these artists, dehumanization is not on their horizon. They are trying to discern and create a new mode that can encompass their own reality rather than distancing themselves from the real or from the history of art. He agrees with Ortega's notion that art has slipped in cultural relevancy and no longer holds the same prominence as it once did, but "no

³⁷ The notes that Ortega has obtained as a result of observations taken with rare intelligent attention through various modes and temperatures that modern art has established in Europe. And so, as in this definition of the propositions in the work, we find limitation of its spirit. The Dehumanization of Art is a European book, with European data, written for Europeans. It could be that this circumstance is a merit more for the one who writes it, but, assuredly, it is a danger to the youth of America who have not even dared to dream of an itself, free of sentimental heirlooms and biological slavery.

aceptar[á] nunca la existencia de un arte invertido, sin raíces, sin ramas—sólo flor y aroma” (128-9).³⁸

From this position, Torres Bodet and the Contemporáneos aim to renovate Mexican literature in a way that would connect it to other vanguard movements while still differentiating it from Spain and from other Latin American literary endeavors. For Torres Bodet, this meant not a nationalist poetry like that of Argentina that he describes as filled with “ombú” trees and peasants sipping maté. “El esfuerzo más paciente no logrará, por cierto, en materia de color local, el resultado de una sola intuición desinteresada” (Torres Bodet *C* 119)³⁹. Local color alone was not enough. Instead, poets and authors felt they needed to use their poetic eye to represent the world around them and their experiences as Mexicans. Likewise, it is not enough to resort to the same old fonts of literary inspirations like classicism and decadence as had Rubén Darío’s modernistas who dominated the preceding generation of authors. While the modernistas were also invested in placing Latin American literature on the global stage, their renovations were centered on philology and recreating a metaphorical content that could compete with European, particularly French literature in terms of density and complexity (González 21). In Torres Bodet’s view, these methods sacrifice reality to the symbolic: “las flores, en realidad gardenias, lirios o margaritas silvestres, aparecieron disfrazadas de rosas o de violetas, según se tratara de significar la hermosura o la modestia que son, como se sabe y es natural, aptitudes opuestas” (*C* 116).⁴⁰ Rather than simply restructuring

³⁸ He will never accept the existence of an inverted art, without roots, without branches—only flower and aroma.

³⁹ Local color material will not achieve the most patient force; the result of a disinterested feeling.

⁴⁰ The flowers, in reality, gardenias, lilies, or daisies, appeared disguised as roses or as violets, trying to signify beauty or modesty that are, as one knows and is natural, opposing aptitudes.

old metaphors into a regional context, his generation needs to find a new path that did not retreat into the symbols, rhythms, and structures of old, but that could resonate with the new realities of Mexican society and increase the visibility for Mexican letters.

In his commitment to expanding Mexican letters on the world stage, Torres Bodet is a frequent contributor to Ortega y Gasset's magazine. In 1929 he publishes "Parálisis" in *Revista de occidente*. The journal brought together the most prominent writers and thinkers not only from Spain, but also from nations across Europe and Latin America. In its pages, essays by Albert Einstein, James Jeans and Arthur Schrodinger sit beside works by Waldo Frank, Wyndham Lewis, and Torres Bodet. It is a hub for the cosmopolitan exchange of ideas and circulation of materials in Spanish and a contact point for many of the intellectuals of the era. Torres Bodet is a frequent contributor and writes both "Parálisis" and "La muerte de Proserpina," while living in Madrid and in contact with the most prominent figures on the Spanish scene.

"Parálisis" is an exploration of new modes of representation in an era where traditional notions of sense have been disrupted, Torres Bodet uses the trope of paralysis to isolate sound from sight and explore a narrative form that relies more heavily on metaphors of the ear than of the eye. In the story, the narrator has become paralyzed after an illness. He is bedridden and can no longer speak. All that remains in his world is the presence of his wife, Luisa. As he cannot turn his head to look at her, or leave his sick room on his own accord, the sound of her voice and of her movements become his only mode of perception. He longs for her to play the piano as she used to or spare him a few extra kind words, his ears straining on her every footfall building his entire mental world out of his domestic soundscape. Each of these familiar sounds from the noise of a spoon

in a teacup to how many steps Luisa takes to get to the garden deepen his imprisonment as he aches to reach out to her and break his tortured silence.

De esa acumulación de los ruidos se hace, más profundo, nuestro completo silencio. ¡Cómo quisiera, para romperlo, poder decir algo en voz alta; mover la silla en que los demás suponen mi descanso; vaciar, del golpe de una mano sana, el contenido de las fracasos de tinturas y de cápsulas que la luz diagonal de la veladora dibuja en la pared! (148-9)⁴¹

In his broken body, sound is the crucial element that connects him to the world and is the last remaining thread that links him to the living world. Yet, his inability to participate in it depends his isolation. His “único laboratorio vivo es la conciencia de Luisa” (151)⁴² and without her he is completely alone.

In his limited sensory world he compares his state to that of a child who is supposed to be sleeping listening to his parents hosting a party below, listening to the clatter of dishes and the laughter of the invited guests. “Con el pulso alterado, evoca el sabor de cada uno de los manjares que no prueba, reconstruye cada uno de los misterios de ese rito de que la enfermedad le priva, y goza, en el abandono de su pasajera orfandad, con las delicias que sólo le representa la imaginación” (147).⁴³ While this rhetorical child presumably will rejoin the world downstairs, the narrator will not. As his proximity and

⁴¹ In that accumulation of sound, our complete silence becomes more profound. How I wish I could break it, to say something out loud, to move the chair in which others suppose I rest, to empty, with a strike from a healthy hand, the contents of the failed tinctures and capsules that the diagonal candlelight draws on the wall.

⁴² Only living laboratory is Luisa’s consciousness.

⁴³ With an altered pulse, he evokes the flavor of each of the delicacies that he can’t try, reconstructing each of the mysteries of that ritual that illness keeps from him, and enjoys, in the abandonment of his passing orphanhood, with the delights that only his imagination can represent.

participation in life's events dwindles, his imagination must compensate, yet by now his memories seem fleeting and without depth, like the constantly shifting images of "los personajes de una película se continúan, se persiguen a si mismos, y desaparecen" (151).⁴⁴ Flickering before him, these images are all his imagination can muster and like the images on film, they are a mere representation of the real. In this analogy there is a diaphanous quality to film, something ethereal and untethered to reality. The longer he exists without physical input, the more his own connection to reality erodes.

As his separation from language and expression grows over time, the connection to the living world deteriorates. The narrator theorizes this loss citing William James' theory of emotion. The theory reverses typical notions of response. According to James, the physiological reaction causes emotion, rather than the other way around (e.g. running from a bear triggers the emotional response of fear, rather than fear causing someone to run). If the physiological reaction shapes the emotional response, then it follows that someone without the ability to experience physical pain or pleasure will have only a limited ability to experience emotion. The narrator feels his emotional capacity slipping away beneath his immobile body.

¡Si siquiera, muerta dentro de mis músculos la alegría de los movimientos perdidos, hubiese conservado la voz! Frente a la sombra, ensayo—con la garganta inmóvil, con la lengua perezosa y amarga—algún sonido, y es como si, colocado ante un espejo, quisiera reconocirme dentro del óvalo de mi semblante paralizada. Sí, esos son los ojos míos, como el timbre de esa queja es mi voz; pero ¿qué fué de la inteligencia de la mirada que los iluminaba? Y de la otra inteligencia mayor de la voz, satisfecha de

⁴⁴ ...the characters of a film continue, pursue each other and disappear.

modelar las palabras con la arcilla de cada sonido suyo, hermoso y blando,
¿qué ha quedado en esta informe sonoridad? (149-50)⁴⁵

Though his face is his own and his features remain unchanged, without the animation of the voice to bring forth expression, he sees only an emptiness and an unfamiliar self. For him, these elements cannot be replaced in silence. Without the physical capability to fully feel or embody his emotions; a part of his intellect is lost. The names and works of once loved authors float through his head in Luisa's voice, as echoes and shadows of their former prominence in his mind. Without lips to smile or tears to cry his ability to feel, emotionally and physically he is eroding. His paralysis is "no sólo una enfermedad, una ineptitud física, sino también un límite de mi espíritu y un vicio de mi imaginación" (155).⁴⁶

The atrophy of language denies a critical aspect of expression and here the narrator imagines a different form of art that would better capture his new mode of thinking and interpreting the world. For Torres Bodet the trope of paralysis isolates hearing in a way that highlights art's dependence on vision. With vision removed, it is conceivable that a new art could be made specifically for the ear. As the narrator describes:

Si pudiera hacerse el retrato de una persona para los oídos y no para los ojos, y alguien hiciera el de Luisa, este fondo sería el que más habría de convenirle. El

⁴⁵ If only, dead in the joy of my muscles' lost movements, my voice had been saved! Facing the shadows I attempt, with an immobile throat, with a lazy and bitter tongue, some sound, and it is as if, placed before a mirror, I would like to recognize myself in the oval of my paralyzed likeness. Yes, those are my eyes, like the timbre of that complaint is my voice, but what was of the understanding that they illuminated? And the other greater intelligence of the voice, satisfied with modeling words with the clay of its own sound, beautiful and soft, what had remained in this informed sound?

⁴⁶ Not only an illness, a physical ineptitude, but also a limit of my spirit and a defect of my imagination.

músico que aprovechara, así, la presencia de estos rumores para rodearla en el tiempo, superaría la inteligencia del pintor que, para situarla en el espacio, se sirviera sólo de la forma de los objetos que los producen. O ¿será que acostumbrado, por la inmovilidad, a adivinar, escuchándolos, el movimiento de los seres que me circundan, he llegado a preferir al calor y la realidad de sus acciones, el lenguaje en que el oído las traduce? (156)⁴⁷

Though Torres Bodet presents a complex art form that is difficult to imagine, the narrator has already become accustomed to it in his current physiological state. The inversion of sight for sound changes the nature of art and forces a new kind of perception. This new perception situates its object in both time and space rather than simply in space, as is the function of the painter thereby shifting the very nature of a portrait. The “musician” creating a portrait of sounds would be able to capture an additional level of representation. More than a symphony and not quite a film, a sound portrait would depend on conveying the sense of the object in three dimensions without the aid of the visual. In this new art, the reliance on the ear creates a soundscape that acts as scaffolding and support for all of the other senses. According to Michel Chion, “the presence of a human voice structures the sonic space that contains it” (5). That is to say, the human ear separates out the human voice from all other sounds in its acoustic space and orders all the rest as subordinate to the voice. For the narrator, his wife’s voice is the ordering principle in his immobile world. He can imagine what his wife might be doing in the

⁴⁷ If one could make a portrait of a person for the ears rather than for the eyes, and someone made one of Luisa, this would be the form that suits her best. The musician that takes advantage of the presence of the sounds that surround her in time, would surpass the intelligence of the painter who, in order to situate her in space, serves only the form of the objects he produces. Or will it be that I, the one who has become accustomed through immobility, to divine the movement of the beings that surround me by listening to them, that I have come to prefer to the heat and the reality of her actions, the language into which sound translates them?

house and how she might look by filling in the visual detail from the sound cues in his environment with her voice as the most crucial for establishing his orientation. The sounds of movement color his world and fill the void left by her visual inaccessibility.

The story, however, holds open the possibility of accessing this kind of sensorium for those still equipped with sight and feeling, which in turn opens new possibilities for writing, particularly the novel. According to Ulrika Maude, literature has a long history of investment in sight ranging back to Aristotle and Plato's linking of sight to reason. She asserts that scientific advancements and experiments in the nineteenth century further solidified this connection. Photography, x-rays and studies of motion like Etienne-Jules Marey's experiments in stop motion photography, emphasize the visual while at the same time pointing out the limitations of the human eye without the aid of prosthetic technologies. Art then, aestheticizes the visual adding to the bodily experience of taking in the visual. "This can be evidenced, for instance, in the various movements in the visual arts that modernity has experience—impressionism, postimpressionism, expressionism—that emphasize the manner in which human vision is tinged with emotion, memory and imagination" (Maude 122). Similarly, in the beginning of the twentieth century the advent of sound technologies like the telephone and the gramophone introduce technology for the ear creating a mediated presence of the voice artificially preserved. "[S]ound technologies function in a similar manner to visual technologies in that they can operate as a form of prosthetic memory; can reproduce various individuating and embodied qualities, but, as in the case of visual technologies, they also somewhat problematically suggest the body's reconfiguration" (Maude 124). Prosthetic technologies augment the capability of the human body but also call attention to its

deficits and limitations. “Parálisis” dramatizes this reconfiguration calling attention to the failures of the body and the dependence of art and expression on vision is exaggerated through paralysis.

In this narrative mode, the narrator’s memory, distanced from the actual presence of Luisa or the current state of the house, is the conduit for any visual description in the text. As he has no way to recover or record his memories, he must strain to absorb all of these acoustic details and Luisa is perpetually slipping out of his grasp. At the same time, she is in full control of the aural data he receives. By simply removing her shoes as she walks across the carpeted stairs, or closing the door to her husband’s sick room, she has the power to erase her presence, to render herself inaudible, and therefore invisible.

Without the dominance of the male gaze, he has lost the ability to re-create Luisa in text and she remains elusive and represented only in fragments of sound. Even when she comes into view at the end of the text, he cannot narrate his experience. “¡Ay!, pero la palabra tierna que va a decirme, que todavía la indiferencia de su actitud me roba de antemano, ¿cómo hacer para que no la pronuncie ahora, para que no la pronuncie jamás?” (156).⁴⁸ Luisa looks past him now with a sadness for their life that once was. Without language, his existence is entirely corporeal for Luisa and he has lost the vocabulary for his emotions. He cannot reassure her, comfort her, or deceive her into thinking things will one day return to as they were. She is left to tend only to his bodily needs rather than his emotional ones without an access point to this part of his existence.

Although the story does not offer any real engagement with the politics of disability, it does provide a platform for an examination of dominant tropes of the senses

⁴⁸ Ah, but the tender word that she was going to say to me, that the indifference of her attitude robbed from me in advance, how can I do that which I cannot pronounce to her now, that which I will never pronounce?

in literature. The trope of paralysis affords the space to isolate sound from sight and, in doing so Torres Bodet exposes the reliance of literature on imagery, and figurative language that privileges sight. In reconfiguring this space toward the aural, a sense equally difficult to represent in text, he creates a literature with an additional complexity. This possibility is one he further explores in his later novel *Proserpina rescatada* as a way to capture the modern world full of urban noises, sounded film, and machinery.

Proserpina rescatada is, according to many critics, the most representative of the Contemporáneos's prose style. Its engagement with technology, modernity and modernization, are indicative of the struggle of the arts to come to terms with a new mechanized world, while the structure of the novel, fragments connected via memory, is representative of experimental fiction in a post-revolution Mexico (D'Lugo 1). In the novel, Doctor Delfino Castro Valdes, receives a phone call from his old friend and lover Dolores "Proserpina" Jimenez asking him to help her end her life in the last stages of diabetes complications. The novel takes place in the span of just twelve hours between the phone call and the moment he administers a fatal dose of morphine to Proserpina. The remainder of the novel is told in a series of Delfino's memories as he reminisces about their time together from medical school on through their sporadic encounters in the ensuing years. Similar to "Parálisis" in which the narrator's memory reconstructs his wife's image from the memory of her presence, Delfino tries to imagine the present day Proserpina through pieces of memory. Delfino, despite being one of the few people in her life she is close to, has a difficult time piecing together the incongruencies and complexities of this woman.

The focus on memory stems from Torres Bodet's belief that, "la mejor cualidad del novelista moderna estará pues, en su escrupulosa fidelidad a la memoria" ("Reflexiones" 14).⁴⁹ He cites Proust and Kipling as examples of authors who intensify moments of plot or the tensions of the text not through straight description, but through memory and *Proserpina rescatada* draws the readers' attention directly toward the mechanisms of memory. The novel's structure relies on spontaneous flashbacks sparked by memory that connect the main characters, illuminate their relationship, and bring the past into contact with the present (Karsen *JTB* 73). The space between memory and reality is the constant tension in the novel as Delfino tries to connect the woman he once knew with the woman she has become. Through Delfino's inability to conceptualize her, Torres Bodet shows the limitations of a purely positivistic, technologically mediated epistemology.

This concept of memory is the aspect most commented on by scholars of this book. Edelmira Ramírez Leyva, for instance, includes *Proserpina* in a survey of Torres Bodet's narrative techniques in relation to memory in which she cites the author and the Contemporáneos as making possible a new mode of perceiving the world particularly by structuring description and narrative memory through contact with other forms of art (sculpture, photography, cinema etc) (67-73). Fernando Burgos cites the dissolution of memory in *Proserpina* as a symptom of the modern experience of fragmented time and that the reclamation of memory in its totality is an impossibility (143-4). Sonja Karsen draws further attention to Torres Bodet's conceptions of time as they relate to memory, in that the flashbacks spawned by involuntary memory "fuse the past and the present which then become a moment possessing qualities common to both an earlier day and the

⁴⁹ The best quality of the modern novelist will be in his scrupulous fidelity to memory.

present” (76) creating a structural duality in the text. In Torres Bodet’s literary world, most critics agree memory is not solely an exercise in interiority or psychology, but is also a structural element that ties memory to time. This project adds the dimension of the voice to these notions of memory. In *Proserpina*, the voice activates the progression of the plot, and even when mediated through artificial modes of memory and recording including the gramophone, film, and spiritist contacts through mediums, the voice connects them all. The frustratingly ephemeral spoken word gives shape to memory in this text and Proserpina’s voice, like her entire being, is fleeting, not to be captured or contained.

Proserpina is a woman out of sync with the world. She is representative of an age gone by, a mystic and a medium. At the same time, she is a physician attempting to exist in the modern world. At the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, this hybrid position was a sustainable one. However, by the 1930s, it is no longer possible to maintain her dual position. She must choose one or the other, or risk falling into obscurity. Through her, Torres Bodet examines the effects of replacing a metaphysical means of knowing the world with a positivist materiality. As Proserpina fades into illness and death as a manifestation of her obsolescence, so too do the machines around her. The gramophone disk breaks, the photograph crumbles, and neither technology can preserve Proserpina’s image or her memory forever. They are inarticulate and frozen moments in time. The phonograph and the photograph have failed to preserve her, yet the text, the very story in which she exists, has in fact fixed her in time and preserved her existence for the reader. In this formulation, Proserpina and her outmoded technologies, cannot

exist in Delfino's modern world. They have fallen into decay, leaving only text and Delfino, the linguistic architect, as survivors.

Text as the ultimate arbiter of representation is consistent with Torres Bodet's views on new media. While film is better able to confront the themes and topics of the modern world, the structure of the novel is a more flexible form. Finding inspiration in the likes of James Joyce and Marcel Proust, Torres Bodet sees modern literature as capable of breaking old paradigms of time. There is no longer a requirement for the author to disclose five, ten or twenty-five years of a character's life to the reader. The expectations, in light of works like *Ulysses*, have changed and the present moment, a single instant, or a matter of hours is sufficient for exploration in its own right.

El asunto que el novelista de ayer veía al revés de sus anteojos de teatro, alejándolo, reduciéndolo, el novelista de hoy lo contempla con una lente de aumento. De tanto exagerar la realidad, la impresión que resulta es esa extrañeza en que se reconoce la presencia de todo arte sano, nuevo, incapaz de resignarse a aprovechar los modelos de la tradición-que amaestra a los mediocres. ("Reflexiones" 19)⁵⁰

The linear trajectories from birth to death, or story arc from exposition, to conflict, to resolution, are no longer the only tools available to the modern author. Now an entire novel could be set using the present as the scaffolding for the entire narrative structure.

This technique, dependent much more on the intense development of the characters' psychology, is much more difficult for film to embrace. The necessity to advance a story

⁵⁰ The issue is that the novelist of yesterday saw through the reverse lens of the theater, distancing it, reducing it, the novelist of today contemplates it with a lens of augmentation. From so much exaggerating reality, the impression that results is that of surprise in that one recognizes the presence of all art, healthy, new, incapable of resigning itself to making the most of traditional models-which train the mediocre.

through pictures and sound, particularly in the early years of cinema, requires a more linear approach. It is only in recent decades that non-linear multi-stranded film narratives have become the norm, and even still, a technique that is reserved for the art house, rather than mainstream cinema.

The influx of technologies of recording and the experience of modernity shifts and expands the possibilities for text and creates the space for the polyphonic, polyvalent, multiplicity of Proserpina. While still utilizing classical imagery like the modernista tradition in the use of Persephone as a guiding motif, Torres Bodet uses her in a manner akin to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, using the mythic mode to interrogate the modern Mexican world. In the mythological version, Persephone lives a cursed life, divided between two worlds. As a child, Hades abducts her from her family, rapes her, and takes her to live as the queen of the underworld. Her mother Demeter, aggrieved by the loss, asks for Persephone's father, Zeus', help in returning her. He dispatches Hermes to find her, but just as she is about to leave Hades makes her eat six pomegranate seeds which curse her to have to return to the underworld for one third of the year. Her departure marks the death of crops and the coming of winter and her return marks the coming of spring and abundance. The image of the dualistic woman representing both barrenness and fertility is an image that survives through the ages and makes a major resurgence in modernist art after Sir James Frazer brings her story as well the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* back into popular imagination in *The Golden Bough* in 1922. References to Persephone, or Kora, her alternate name in mythology, permeate modernist texts including Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, William Carlos Williams' *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, and H.D's prose work

Kora and Ka (Davenport 177). She is often used to signal change in a larger cycle of time or the promise of rebirth.

Torres Bodet's use of Proserpina takes on a darker tone. Rather than the promise of return to the living world and the return of spring, he connects her to death and to the return to the underworld. In his 1930 poem, "Proserpina," she is cast as a frightful and tragic figure.

Llama de mármol en la antorcha fría
de la estatua de un ángel funerario,
no proyectabas sombra pasada ni futura
sobre el presente universal del sueño. ("Proserpina")⁵¹

While for many authors, Persephone is the ultimate figure of eternal return, here Torres Bodet speaks of her in the past tense, as if she has died, leaving no possibility for rebirth. Represented as a marble statue like that of a funeral angel she is frozen in time and unable to project her shadow into the future nor to the past. In part, this statue is a reference to Kore statues in Greek art, often associated with Persephone as the maiden. They are usually marble, and depict a young woman with braided hair and a robe folded under her left arm. In the poem, this statue marks Proserpina's entrapment in the eternal present, forever in this form.

In this reconfiguration of Proserpina, Torres Bodet also invokes a less common part of her mythology. In some versions of her story, her power as the queen of the underworld is so strong that many are fearful to speak her name allowed. Persephone is the name Kora acquires after her rape at the hands of Pluto. No longer a maiden and now

⁵¹ Marble flame in the frigid torch/ Of the statue of a funereal angel,/You did not cast a shadow into the past nor the future/Over the universal dream of the present.

a queen by force, the name change marks this transition and her new role. Here, Torres Bodet puts a heavy focus on the sound of her name, but does not include this sense of terror, instead one of fragility.

Tenías
en la memoria de los silencios interrumpidos
un nombre tan sonoro,
de vocales tan duras y tan densas
--Atalanta, Ifigenia, Proserpina--,
un nombre todo de mármol,
que daba miedo pronunciar de prisa
por temor de romper,
al dejarlo caer sobre las frases,
los secretos de las palabras... (“Proserpina”)⁵²

Pronouncing her name is like speaking the name of god, or casting a spell. There is a secret power behind these syllables that must be handled with care. Though the name is like marble, dense and hard, it can be shattered, letting all of its power fall loose. The sounding of this name also occurs in the “memory of interrupted silences,” slicing through the silence and echoing out with its full weight. The contrast between the spoken, mystical word and silence creates the space for this power to coalesce. The utterance and the possession of this name work hand in hand. Far from the feared Queen of the Underworld, this Proserpina is locked away in marble, frozen and breakable in a sympathetic vision of a complex figure. Maintaining this connection to both sound and death, Torres Bodet draws on this re-imagined Proserpina for his novel *Proserpina rescatada*. The original version’s title, “La muerte de Proserpina,” and the novel’s

⁵² You had/In the memory of silences interrupted/A name so sonorous,/Of vowels so hard and so dense/--Atalanta, Ifigenia, Proserpina--,/a name all of marble,/that scares one to pronounce quickly/for fear of breaking it,/to let fall the phrases,/the secrets of the words...

ending, invoke death leaving no chance for rebirth or renewal. “The Death of Proserpina” ends any discussion of a returning spring. In addition, to rescue Proserpina would, according to mythology, mean to save her from the curse of the underworld and allowed to live in the light, above ground, with her mother Demeter, while in the novel, rescuing Proserpina means releasing her to the hands death. Death becomes the only way to break her curse in Torres Bodet’s creation.

In the literary version, Proserpina, like her mythical counterpart, lives in two worlds, but not the underworld and earth. Instead, she lives as both a modern and a mystic. She exists in the modern positivist world in her role as medical student and doctor, and in the world of the spirits as a spiritual medium for séances. In her duality she is a symptom of a rapidly shifting modern world ready to embrace science and technology but still clinging to the remnants of superstition. For Proserpina these two sides are distinct and incommensurable, while Delfino her friend, colleague, and lover struggles to connect these two sides into a single cohesive narrative. Delfino is a man of science and his first person narration relies on modern technology as the mediation between him and Proserpina. In doing so, Torres Bodet also places the positivist, Delfino, in opposition to Proserpina who exists in the realms of both the positivism and spiritism, with Delfino the victor. Her death then, and the conclusion of a cycle of rebirth, signals a kind of modern decay without a Persephone to re-enchant its cruel realities.

The technologies of the voice operate as conduits in the novel, connecting Delfino’s modern world with Proserpina’s sphere. Telephones and telegraph lines crisscross through the text creating both interruptions and connections. Delfino is a man of science and his first person narration relies on modern technology as the mediation

between him and Proserpina. Delfino is comfortable in his modern environs and at ease with the mechanical world and its steady hum of electricity and machines, in the opening scene; however, he finds solace in the quiet, occasional moments of silence and reflection between technological interruptions.

Por fortuna, nadie viene. Nada suena. Nada se interrumpe. Los cables depositados en Europa a las siete a la mañana siguen llegando a México a las doce de la noche, siete horas antes de haber sido escritos. La catarata del Niágara continúa arrastrando un millón de litros de encaje por segundo. Me consuelo. El mundo empieza, por lo visto, a cansarse de las guerras, de las revoluciones, de las teorías de la relatividad. Los días en que una familia entera de astrónomos amanecía sin empleo, porque el señor Einstein había alejado todas las estrellas de un centésimo de milímetro en el plano de la esfera celeste, parecen definitivamente acabados. Satisfecho, el silencio de la antesala cuenta las rosas de las alfombras, mide el resorte de los asientos, esmerila maliciosamente mi voz. Afuera, el invierno sigue llenando de un vino azul profundo la copa amarilla, de aire, de los árboles deshojados...(20)⁵³

In the quiet of the winter, the world seems to be at peace, taking a respite from the revolutions of politics as well as those in modern science. Delfino takes his comfort from his faith in the forward march of progress and time. Steady and slow, the water of

⁵³ Fortunately nobody comes. Nothing rings. Nothing interrupts. The cables deposited in Europe at seven in the morning continue arriving in Mexico at twelve at night, seven hours before having been written. Niagara Falls continues pulling a million liters of flow per second. It consoles me. The world begins, apparently, to rest from war, from revolutions, from the theories of relativity. The days in which an entire family of astronomers woke without employment, because Mr. Einstein had moved all of the stars a hundredth of a millimeter in the celestial plane, seem definitively finished. Satisfied, the silence of the waiting room count the roses in the rugs, measure the springs of the chairs, maliciously frosts/grinds my voice. Outside, the winter continues filling the yellow cup with a deep blue wine, of air, of leafless trees....

Niagara will keep flowing, the cables will arrive on time, and the winter will eventually turn to spring. While there he finds solace in these certainties, he takes on a mocking tone in his discussion of Einstein. Einstein's tiniest of adjustments to calculations of the universe do not simply lead to the unemployment of a generation of astronomers, but also lead to the reshaping of the scientific landscape and create a new understanding of the world, a change that seems disproportionate to its effect. Rather than these dramatic moments of discovery, revolution and upheaval, Delfino prefers the quiet steady pace of gradual progress.

What cuts through this moment of calm is Proserpina's voice stretching across time and space to reach Delfino. The unexpected phone call disrupts not only this solace, but also sets the novel in motion. Much like Einstein's recalculation, Proserpina's phone call has a disproportionate and chaotic effect on Delfino's quiet life. She short-circuits the steady flow of the universe. Proserpina need not introduce herself. Her old friend needs no context for voice on the other end of the line as he describes: "Me dice simplemente: 'Te necesito'. Todo desaparece de mi memoria. Todo" (*PR* 21).⁵⁴ Proserpina's voice is a touchstone that ignites the narrative while drawing Delfino out of his own world and back into hers. The duality of the previous scene with the scientific coexisting with natural elements loses its balance as her voice cuts through. Her voice also stops time and halts the forward flow of the universe in the previous passage. Two words from Proserpina are enough to erase all other thoughts from his mind. No longer is he worried the winter outside or the waters of Niagara; this voice transports him. In erasing memory, he is drawn into her world and is completely at her mercy.

⁵⁴ She simply says, "I need you." Everything disappears from my memory. Everything.

Although Delfino claims that everything disappears from his memory, what follows for nearly the entirety of the book is Delfino's recollections of Proserpina in the present moment from the phone call on. There are no further details of Proserpina's end of the conversation on the telephone, only what Delfino extracts from the exchange:

Está enferma. Lo adivino en la forma de sus frases. En la calidad de su voz. ¿Por qué esta costumbre suya de aparecer por sorpresas, a través del teléfono, del telégrafo, del espiritismo, en el secreto de una clausura distante, cercada por las compensaciones comerciales de un cuarto de hotel? (21)⁵⁵

Proserpina's voice is the stand in for her physical body. A few words are all that the receiver has access to. Delfino must piece the rest together from his intimate knowledge of Proserpina and translate her message into a complete communication. As Gustavo Pérez Firmat explains, "Sound has replaced vision...Proserpina projects a phonic, and not a visual image of herself... As a purveyor of words, of text, Delfino must endeavor to transform his acoustic perceptions into verbal images" (96-97). Delfino enacts this shift from auditory to the visual after Proserpina hangs up the phone. "Del otro lado de la línea, el silencio se estira, cruje, se rompe hasta dejar pasar, como el tambor rasgado de una orquesta, la cara severa, invisible, inolvidable, de Proserpina, que me saluda (*PR* 20-21).⁵⁶ Her voice and the silence that follow conjure up the visual image of her face bridging the space between the visual and the aural. Michel Chion theorizes the impact

⁵⁵ She's sick. I predict it from the form of her sentences. In the quality of her voice. Why is it her custom to appear by surprise, across the telephone, the telegraph, spiritism, in the secret of a distant cloister, surrounded by the commercial compensations of a hotel room?

⁵⁶ On the other end of the line, silence stretches, crosses, breaks until it passes like the drum roll of an orchestra. The severe, invisible, unforgettable face of Proserpina greets me.

that technologies of the voice in forcing the receiver into reconstructing a whole. He argues that “isolating the voice as they do, telephone and radio posit the voice as representative of the whole person...So in explicitly depriving us of one element, both radio and silent cinema cause us to dream of the harmony of the whole” (125). Without access to input from the other senses, the mind must create, or re-create, the missing pieces. In dreaming or imagining a wholeness, nuance and detail are inevitably lost in this act of mental translation. While Proserpina’s voice sparks, and simultaneously erases memory, the momentary vision cannot be maintained. As quickly as Proserpina’s presence emerges through memory, it recedes perpetually slipping out of hand.

The technologies referenced in the novel represent this desire to halt time and hold on to memory. With newly available devices, recording and preserving both sound and image become a real possibility. These tools promise to deliver a new kind of world where communication is faster and swifter, reducing the distance between people. As Thomas Edison described in an 1888 article detailing the potentials of the phonograph:

The phonograph, in one sense, knows more than we do ourselves. For it will retain a perfect mechanical memory of many things which we may forget, even though we have said them...it will teach us to be careful what we say...exerting thus a decidedly moral influence by making men brief, businesslike and straightforward, cultivating improved manners, and uniting distant friends and associates by direct vocal communication.

(“Phonograph” 649-650)

While the recorded voice can be played over and over again and can capture the small details that might be missed in the course of a normal conversation, Torres Bodet, fifty

years past this celebratory announcement, finds this mechanical memory faulty. It does not retain all, and the direct communication between people over long distances stretches sound and voice, disassociating it from the present and the speaker. Human intervention is still necessary to interpret the data and piece it back together into a cohesive message.

In addition, the moral component that Edison indicates belies a concern for brevity, politeness and speaking for an audience rather than for a concern, necessarily, for authenticity or complete accuracy. The machine acts as a regulation on the human body. There is an editing already applied and a need to present a moral or appropriate self for future generations. Thereby, the recording, though an efficient and world changing advancement in technology and communication is already edited, cleaned and sanitized. Even in the early years of recording technology, there was a feeling that these recordings were made for posterity. An 1888 Mexican newspaper article features an interview with a member of Edison's staff that discusses the tests they were performing on "phonograms," a form of audible correspondence. This format was to change the mail system and connect the furthest reaches of the world. The discussion also furthers this idea of sound technology as preserving the voice for the future.

El "registro hablado" de más importancia hecho hasta ahora es, por supuesto, el famoso "primer fonógrafo" de Edison, recibido por mí el 26 del mes pasado, y que será el número 1 del "Álbum fonográfico" de las voces de los grandes de todas las naciones en el cual se encontrarán algún día las voces de los vivos y de los muertos. ("Maravillas")⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The most important "spoken record" made until now is, of course, Edison's famous "first phonogram," that I received on the 26th of last month and that will be the number 1 of the "Phonographic Album" of the voices of the greatest of all the nation on which they will some day find the voices of the living and the dead.

The phonographic album was the result of a test run of the phonogram mail system. Discs were sent all around the world from New Zealand, to India, to Ecuador to test the viability of the discs in all weather and climate conditions. It was an exercise in global communication on a scale that was unmatched even by the fledgling telegraph industry. At the time the technologies held enormous potential and opened possibilities that seemed more fantastic than real. The voice, the most personal aspect of communication, could now be preserved, shipped, and saved with the recording operating as a form of mechanical memory.

This mechanical memory, though astounding in its era, can never quite hold the entirety of the physical voice, its immediacy, or the tone in a larger continuum of the speaker's patterns of speech, as is the case with Proserpina, whose mediated presence begins in childhood. As Delfino tells it, her father was an administrator of a phonograph agency in Ciudad Victoria (34) and instead of handing out love notes or photos to her friends; she gives them audio recordings as a gift. Delfino has kept his copy into adulthood and it contains the confessions of the young Proserpina he had first met in medical school. The recording holds details of her innermost thoughts about her youth, her petty cruelties, her relationship with her parents, and her desires. Yet, "el disco se ha roto en el minuto en que las confesiones de Proserpina empezaban a interesar[lo]" (43).⁵⁸ This machine made to retain and record the voice, proves insufficient in containing the elusive Proserpina. The most important details of her words are missing, broken or lost. While Delfino has listened to the record countless times before, this piece is now broken and, importantly, not available for the reader. In this moment the narrative puts Proserpina at a double remove. Delfino refuses to fill in the gap that the broken record

⁵⁸ the disc broke in the minute that Proserpina's confessions began to interest him.

leaves. He knows the content but the reader is left out of this bit of knowledge represented by “a spatial break and the narrator’s words beginning the next fragment stating that the record has stopped” (D’Lugo 39). Both the form and the content erase Proserpina. In projecting a sonic presence of herself, the gramophone is key in disseminating this form and preserving her most complex essence to her friends including Delfino, but this static format can only provide a shadow of Proserpina.

When configured in this manner, Proserpina suffers the same fate as Benjamin’s work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In his essay, Benjamin describes the effects of mechanical reproduction on the original piece of art. What is lost is the original’s “aura” or specificity in space and time. “The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. The presence of multiple reproductions substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced” (Benjamin 5). With each reproduction, and each time Proserpina’s presence is mediated through technology, whether that is through the telephone, telegraph or gramophone, Delfino reactivates her presence, yet this presence is lacking the unique presence of Proserpina herself. The authentic, original version is absent. Her history, the changes that have occurred to her physical body and her emotional growth over time can never be captured in the reproduction, leaving only traces of her presence for Delfino. Accordingly, Delfino shares the desire of Benjamin’s modern masses to “bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as [his] bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (Benjamin 6). His technological stand-ins for Proserpina’s realities allow

him to reconstruct the missing pieces of her history in his own way, assuming and creating her motives from his knowledge of the original.

Even when Proserpina's physicality is present in the text, she has a diaphanous quality to her. She is light and energy rather than a human body. In the course of her relationship with Delfino, she appears and disappears from his life, often without warning. When Delfino first sees her at a conference in New York after several years apart he sees her as markedly different from the other travelers around them.

Por contraste con las actitudes pausadas de las otras viajeras, sus movimientos irradiaban, en cambio, una nerviosidad eléctrica de radio, que la devoraba por dentro. Inmediatamente empezó a consumirme. Sin guantes, sus manos delgadas derramaban un fluido magnético, perceptible al tacto y a la mirada, que la hacía envejecer a simple vista rompiéndole el barniz de las uñas, enmoheciéndole el oro de las pulseras, el iris de las pupilas, la sonoridad de la voz. (72)⁵⁹

The elements that are missing from her mechanical reproductions, her physicality, her energy and the touch of time are evident when Delfino sees her again. These additional elements seem to spill out of her in excess, consuming her. Her innate energy devours her physical body as if she were simply a host for this force outside of herself. The metaphors of magnetic fluid and radio electricity connect Proserpina as an elemental part of the modern world. Whereas the energy of machinery can be put to productive use, hers

⁵⁹ In contrast to the paused attitudes of the other travelers, her movements irradiated, however, a nervous radio electricity, that devoured her from the inside. Immediately it began to consume me. Without gloves, her slender hands poured out a magnetic fluid, perceptible by touch and by sight, that made her age with a glance, breaking the varnish of her nails, dulling the gold of her bracelets, the iris of her pupils, the tone of her voice.

radiates outward as a destructive force to both herself and to those around her and cannot be harnessed, contained, or copied despite Delfino's best efforts.

The modern forms of scientific energy in the above passage parallel the psychical forms of energy that flow through her as a medium. During this same trip to New York Delfino learns of her career change and attends a séance with her. Her new role as a spiritist seems at odds with her previous career in the hard sciences. To dabble in the occult would for many doctors or scientists be heretical. In Proserpina's case, the transference of energy unites this incongruity.

Entretanto, la voz demasiado joven iba envejeciendo, segundo a segundo, junto a nosotros. Llegó a endurecerse. Sus frases no obedecieron ya exactamente al temblor de labios de Proserpina. ¿Por qué existirá siempre este desacuerdo entre la voz de una médium y su alma, entre la sonoridad y la fotografía de una película parlante? Se retrasan. Se anticipan. La sincronización no es perfecta. Los ventrílocuos de antaño operaban con mayor nitidez. (144)⁶⁰

Proserpina becomes a conduit for the voices of the dead, with her body acting as host to these other energies. While Delfino is clearly not a believer in contact with spirits or otherworldly souls, his thoughts linger on the disjunction between voice and body. As is the case with Proserpina, her image and her sound do not quite match up with her physical being. Delfino is always a quarter second behind, always filling the space between utterance and the present. Pérez Firmat characterizes this phenomenon as

⁶⁰ In the meantime, the voice that was too young grew older second by second in front of us. He arrived and hardened himself. His phrases did not yet obey the tremble of Proserpina's lips. Why is there always this disagreement between the voice of the medium and the soul, between the sound and the picture of a talking film? They are delayed. Anticipated. The synchronization is not perfect. The ventriloquists of the past operated with more clarity.

Proserpina's oscillation "between a disembodied voice (on the recording) and a voiceless body (in her capacity as a medium). Or rather, between a disembodied voice and a multivocal or polyphonic body, since the problem is not lack but abundance" (98). The separation between these two elements wrenches her apart and denies her the ability to ever form as a cohesive or completely rounded character. No matter which mode, or which side of the equator, or which persona Proserpina inhabits, the voice, either lack or presence, tears her in half again, much like her mythical counterpart. As a medium, she at least has the freedom to connect her thoughts to the voices of others, ventriloquizing wholeness.

Proserpina's erratic and disconnected presence stands in contrast to Delfino's current love interest, Hortensia. She is a nurse in his practice and functions in the text as a representative of 'order and progress.' Delfino describes her as someone who is predictable, reliable, and does not believe in superstitions: "¡Tan rectilínea, tan pura, tan exigente de los trabajos bien hechos, de la ropa muy limpia, de los mandiles acabados de planchar!" (15).⁶¹ Unlike Proserpina the "Princesa de los Paralelogramos," (31) Hortensia exists squarely in the modern world. She is competent and cohesive while Proserpina is askew and unpredictable. In alignment with her modern positioning in the text, Hortensia is introduced in relation to cinema, a more modern technology than Proserpina's gramophones and telegraph lines.

No comprendo, de pronto, qué significan este rostro excesivo, radiante, en
"primer plano" de actriz cinematográfica, estas pupilas azules – en que la

⁶¹ Philosophic Hortensia! So rectilinear, so pure, so exacting of jobs well done, of very clean clothes, of just ironed aprons! The idea that someday I could someday show herself docile to the whims of a person that I don't know penetrates my temples, without noise, like a shot through a superimposed photo, through a certain cinematic trick, through to the undamaged person, in my real photograph.

sombra rubia de las pestañas acaricia el recuerdo de un campo de trigo –,
estos duros, jugosos labios que el beso no podría tocar sin exprimir. Es
Hortensia.⁶²

Like the image of a film actress, her face rises up in its resplendent glory in front of him defamiliarized from its quotidian existence. He sees her in pieces detached from her work as she assists in the surgery he is performing. Blue-eyed and blonde haired she looks like the quintessential American movie star and for a moment he forgets who she is, captivated. It is this woman who, as Proserpina fades out of existence, immediately fills her place in Delfino's thoughts. She is the one who will exist in Delfino's modern world, the film star, rather than the eccentric mystical woman of the gramophone.

The connection between film and Hortensia's well-ordered personality is one that is rooted in the origins of cinema in Mexico. Its arrival marks a marvelous advancement in technology, one that perfectly aligns with Porfirio Díaz's campaign of "orden y progreso" in his attempts to modernize the nation. Díaz quickly recognizes the medium's potential and its ability to reach larger audiences and harnesses it for his regime. Early Mexican film is not the cinema of attractions as it is in the U.S., but rather images and staged scenes of Díaz (López 61). These images help to present a more homogenous version of Mexico than exist under the gloss of Porfirian progress. As Carol D'Lugo explains, "Although to outsiders the Díaz regime may have given the impression of Mexico as a controlled society undergoing massive productive growth in the form of industrialization and economic development, there remained a fixed class system that deeply divided the rich and the poor" (1). The use of cinema for political ends and

⁶² I didn't understand, all of a sudden, what this excessive, radiant face in the "first plane" of a cinematic actress, signified with these blue pupils that the shadow of her blonde eyelashes caressed like a field of wheat, these hard, playful lips that a kiss could not touch without using up. It is Hortensia.

propaganda is an asset to advancing technology and developing its possibilities, but it also creates a skeptical viewing audience aware of the disjoint between the proud nationalistic images on screen and the realities of violence and poverty outside the theater (López 59-60).

As tides shift for Díaz, the cinema turns to recording the Mexican Revolution. Similar to its uses in Russia, Mexican filmmakers put political struggle on the big screen for matinee audiences. For the first time, images of conflict, armed resistance, and governmental collapse are available for public consumption. Francisco Madero's armies become the stars of this new era. Audiences' desire for information and news on the fighting drives production with the Alva Brothers' 1911 *Insurrección de México*, meeting with a wide success (López 66). Film serves not simply a diversion, or aesthetic purpose, but a political one, disseminating information, propaganda and visual imagery of the Revolution to mass audiences (Rocca 24). Somewhat ironically, the technology developed and adapted under Porfirio Díaz' regime is turned against him and plays a significant role in his loss of power.

By the time Torres Bodet wrote *Proserpina* in 1931, Mexican cinema had already developed into a formidable production system with major movie studios in the 1910s and 1920s, entrenching the public in these new modes of perception. The increasing presence of this new media forced a reflection on the state of writing in this moment. Torres Bodet identifies this shift in his linkage of the demise of naturalist literature with the arrival of the cinematograph.

[La novela naturalista] ha caído en desuso porque no era una forma literaria pura y porque, no siéndolo, no pudo competir con el

cinematógrafo, más inteligente en recursos industriales, alimento sólido para ese hambre de imaginación sin esfuerzos que caracteriza a los hombres cuando integran un público. (C 10)⁶³

Competing with new technologies of representation opens new challenges for the vanguard. Novels must carve out a new space for text in the increasingly crowded field. Cinema can reach the masses, particularly the working class most often represented in naturalist fiction with much more ease and with more efficiency than a novel, whose readership requires literacy. Because in the 1920's nearly half of the Mexican population is unable to read (Gallo 126), cinema is better equipped to navigate the space of the industrial world and to have the widest reach in the public sphere. If naturalism is passé, then a new form is required to better compete with this new reality. Although vanguard literature still requires a literate population, a vanguard literature is a "purer" form that embraces the facets of literature that will withstand this new test to text. Experiments in form like Torres Bodet's use of interiority and memory in text are elements that preserve the specificity of literature as an artistic medium.

In 1930, Fernando Vela, a contemporary of Torres Bodet in Madrid, discussed this challenge to text and explained the impact that cinema and the gramophone had on representation in this era in his essay "Literatura fonográfica" published in the Mexican magazine *La voz nueva* in 1929.

Cine y gramófono crean, no reproducen, una nueva expresión, imágenes y sonidos para uno solo. Para el espectador del cine aislado en la sombra son como figuraciones de su retina ilusa, cosas que se ven en un

⁶³ The naturalist novel has fallen into disuse because it is not a pure literary form and because, not being one, it could not compete with the cinematograph, more intelligent in its industrial resources, solid food for this hunger of imagination without force that characterizes men when they make up an audience.

fosforescencia, desfiles en el tablado del ensueño; para el oyente en su cuarto, lejos del mitin de los conciertos, la voz lejana y grave que tiene la inflexión de voix chères qui se sont tues. (Vela)⁶⁴

In Vela's view, the cinema and the gramophone do not simply represent or recast expression; they have the power to create an entirely new form. The illusory images of the cinema are dreamlike, and the recorded voice takes on a distant quality as if floating on the wind or a remembered voice of a dear friend. Their uncanny nature and their dislocation from a human body render image and sound ghostlike and ephemeral. In doing so, they break open traditional notions of sense and apprehension.

In this atmosphere, writing takes on a new capacity in representing the realities of mechanized production of sound and image. Text must shift and work to capture these enhanced and altered realities.

E[s]te es el lirismo moderno, que crea irrealidades a máquina y hace íntimos y expresivos, hasta lo más humano, los productos del maquinismo. Se apodera de ellos y marca allí su impronta de dolor, ese contraste que impone a presión con su carne hasta hacerse daño. Una imagen de cine es más nuestra e interior que una escena de teatro; una voz de gramófono, más nuestra e interior que un aria en la Opera. (Vela)⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cinema and the gramophone, create, not reproduce, a new expression, images and sound "para uno solo" For the spectator of the cinema isolated in the darkness they are like figurations of his naïve retina, things that one sees in a phosphorescence, parades on the stage of dreams; for the listener in his room, far from the concert meetings, the voice, distant and grave, has the inflection of "voix chères qui se sont tues." (French is a quote from Verlaine's poem "My Familiar Dream").

⁶⁵ This is the modern lyricism, which creates irrealities to machines and makes the products of mechanism, intimate and expressive up to the most human. It takes hold of them and marks its stamp of pain, this contrast that imposes pressure to its flesh to the point of injury. A cinematic image is more ours and more interior than a theater scene; a gramophone voice, more ours and more interior than an aria in the Opera.

Vela sees these irrealities produced with the aid of technology as the most human of expression. Rather than creating distance, the relation to technology makes these representations even more human, more unique than any other possible creation. Playback and recording allow for images and sound to be preserved and experienced in isolation, the public performance can be simultaneously private and isolated, giving the audience a sense of proximity to the production. Vela marks this contrast between lyricism and mechanical production with physical pain, a flesh that can be injured. Modern lyricism leaves an indelible mark on these most human of productions and has the ability to mirror this closeness, to represent this new way of interpreting the world.

It is evident from Torres Bodet's inclusion of references to film in both "Parálisis" and *Proserpina rescatada* that neither he nor the Contemporáneos are completely opposed to film, instead they see it as an innovative technology that can produce a new kind of art with the imaging techniques unique to film. The possibilities are exciting and the group begins to write film criticism, essays, and to organize a film club. They also begin including these imagistic techniques into their writing utilizing quick short cuts of image and scene and approximating the effect of montage in the text (De los Reyes 150). Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian experimental filmmaker and authority on these new techniques travelled to México and had established a presence there in the artistic community from 1928 to 1932 (De los Reyes 164). His visit energizes the vanguard community and created excitement about cinema as an emerging art form. Evidence of this surge in interest lies in issue 36 of *Contemporáneos* (May 1931), an issue devoted almost entirely to film. It includes a translation of part of Eisenstein's *Film Form* as well as the founding statement of the Cineclub. The club was similar to other

international cinema clubs of the era in adopting film as a legitimate, modern artistic category. Their goals were to obtain and exhibit the best in vanguard films from Europe, the Americas, and Asia and discuss the aesthetic, scientific and social importance of cinematographic productions (Aragón Leyva “Cineclub” 189). In this issue, Aragón Leyva describes Eisenstein’s impact on the cultural community as well as the artist’s position in this mechanized world:

Uno de los privilegios de esta generación, que basta por sí solo para compensar la incomodidad de haber venido a la duda en esta era de mecanizada brutalidad, consisten en poder abarcar con una mirada de veinticinco años el nacimiento, desarrollo, madurez y purificación de un arte nuevo en su técnica y nuevo en su concepción....La obra mexicana de Eisenstein, en la que lo secunden Edouardo Tissé y Grischa Alexandrov, será un género nuevo de la cinematografía. (185)⁶⁶

As witnesses to the advent of this new, revolutionizing art, artists in this moment have a unique vantage point to see the limitless possibilities of this new form. Eisenstein’s arrival energizes the Mexican vanguard to participate in the cultural explosion of film, with the Contemporáneos leading the charge.

The arrival of sound technology interrupts this initial enthusiasm for film, however. By 1931, the same year that Torres Bodet writes *Proserpina rescatada* and the tail end of Eisenstein’s stay, sound has definitively come to Mexican cinema (García 178). The age of the silent film is coming to a close, and rather than embrace this

⁶⁶ One of the privileges of this generation, if it were enough to compensate the inconvenience of having come without a doubt in this era of mechanized brutality, consists in being able to contemplate with a view of 25 years the birth, development, maturity and purification of an new art in its technique and new in its conceptions. Eisenstein’s Mexican work, backed by Eduoard Tissé and Grischa Alexandrov, will be a new cinematic genre.

remarkable addition to cinema as they did film itself, many members of the Contemporáneos and filmmakers including Eisenstein and Chaplin were vociferously against the addition of sound to film. The initial attempts at adding sound were not entirely effective. The recordings captured all sorts of ambient noise and sounds not just from the actors, but also capturing the background noise from the crew on set. The failure was such that early filmmakers saw this technology as retrograde, defiling the aesthetic of the film itself and distracting audiences from the work of the camera and the visual techniques on screen. It was seen as such a distraction that Chaplin, Eisenstein, and D.W. Griffith all signed a manifesto condemning the use of sound in film (García 160). They “argued against using sounds as flat literal illustrations of images, and in favor of audiovisual counterpoint, wherein sounds declare their independence and act metaphorically, symbolically” (Chion 11). In their view, sound would erase the visual specificity of the medium of film and become a detriment to its aesthetic possibilities if used simply applied to voice the actors’ speech.

Torres Bodet joined them in this critique calling silent film “el único que tiene validez relativa para el espíritu,” while spoken film was for him a “pesadilla de un teatro para neurasténicas, a medias entre la realidad de la opereta y las ridículas abstracciones del método Berlitz” (qtd. in García 161).⁶⁷ The addition of sound paradoxically makes film more ordinary. The overwhelming sensation of noise and image has, by this point, become more aligned with the reality of an urban life, a world already inundated by machines and noise. In placing sounded film between an operetta and the Berlitz method, a mode of immersive language instruction, he sees film’s strange use of sound as akin to

⁶⁷ ...a nightmare of a theater for neurasthenics, a cross between the reality of the operetta and the ridiculous abstraction of the Berlitz method.

the imitative methods required in speaking an unknown language and the illusion of reality in a stage play; there is a forced and somewhat false feeling about it. In this formulation, the promise of new technologies of sound is not enough to counter-balance the aesthetic loss of the specific art created by moving image.

The reference to neurasthenia, a disease of the nerves produced by the chaotic atmosphere of the machine age, reveals Torres Bodet's resistance to placating the masses with an entertainment that simply mirrors their daily existence and does not challenge the viewer to actively engage with the film and instead encourages a passive absorption. This critique is similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of "shock effect" in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Shock effect is the result of the constant motion of film that leaves the audience unable to contemplate the work of art as he would a painting or a sculpture. With film, the cuts are too quick and just as one scene is absorbed, it changes, and the audience cannot rest or think, they are kept in a constant state of distraction. The conditions of film as an aesthetic object change notions of perception, and encourage a passive, absent-minded absorption of art rather than a contemplation of a specific piece of art rooted in tradition and cultural value. (Benjamin 22-23). As modern art continues on this trajectory toward distraction, the public loses their ability to act as critic. For Torres Bodet, this shift to sound reduces film to the ordinary, a tool to placate the masses, more susceptible for co-optation for political purposes and reducing the aesthetic possibilities to realist representation.

Despite these lamentations, the addition of sound to film is a natural progression in keeping with André Bazin's concept of "total cinema." According to Bazin, it was the goal and guiding myth of the earliest film technicians to one day achieve a total cinema

or an “integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artists or the irreversibility of time” (236). In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the limitations of film technologies hinder this goal. The addition of sound is simply the next step in creating a filmic representation that inched every closer to the unburdened image. While this trajectory seems now an organic one as evidenced by the rise in 3-D effects and CGI technologies today, in this moment, the addition of sound removes the specificity of the visual as a means of relaying aesthetic meaning through the silent moving image. The potential of this aesthetic on its own appears in the recently developed concepts in Russian film theory including montage and the Kuleshov effect. Therefore, the addition of sound creates a regressive art for the masses rather than a progressive art that could advance aesthetics through technology. Sound then becomes a dominant preoccupation in this era. The attempts at synchronization with film call attention to the disjunction between sound and image, as well as to the artificial recombination of the two. Because the recombination could not be a seamless one given the limitations of the technology of the era and the nature of recorded sound, the recorded voice finds itself at a double remove, removed from the body of the speaker, and again removed from the associated image mouthing the silent words.

Proserpina’s move toward spiritism mirrors the complex reaction to technology in the era. Unlike Hortensia’s association with medicine and the modern marvel of the cinema, Proserpina’s position as divided between the spirit world and the scientific is increasingly untenable. The novel parallels the development of the city and its technology with Proserpina. Both Mexico City and New York serve as markers for rapid

industrialization in the text. In these locations, new technologies emerge while others recede into the past; the telegraph station begins to crumble (*PR* 160) and the most elegant hotel from the time of Roosevelt is now a talcum powder factory (*PR* 94). Set against these cityscapes, Proserpina begins to lose her relevance and her duality becomes untenable. Delfino sees her fading through the eyes of Mr. Lehar, an American businessman he meets at Proserpina's séance. He has built his fortune making player pianos (another technology that mediates sound and imitates the presence of a human agent), and finds the séances to be an interesting distraction, but as a man of the capitalist, industrialized world, Lehar will soon tire of these kinds of parlor games. In this context Delfino describes Proserpina as a product, and perhaps a symptom, of the era of the 1920s.

La fatalidad, el deber, la fe en los proverbios, la melancolía —las condiciones profundas de aquella época-, ¿no eran también las condiciones profundas de Proserpina? Sentí una gran lástima de su fuerza presente, de su orgullo, de su reloj de pulsera, de su seguridad de sibila. Sobre el rostro entusiasta del Mr. Lehar en 1924, que parecía decir al oírla: “¡Qué mujer tan maravillosa!”; mi imaginación trazaba rápidamente el rostro entusiasta del Mr. Lehar de 1934, que diría, sin duda: “¿Proserpina Jiménez?...No me hable usted de ella. La conozco. Cierta pobre muchacha mexicana que se creyó la Pitonisa de Delfos...” (95-96)⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The fatality, the duty, the faith in proverbs, the melancholy—the profound conditions of that era—were they not also the profound conditions of Proserpina? I felt sorry for her present force, her pride, for her wristwatch, for the safety of sibyl. On the enthusiastic face of Mr. Lehar in 1924, that appeared to say upon hearing her “What a marvelous woman!”, my imagination rapidly traced the enthusiastic face of Mr. Lehar in 1934, that would say, without a doubt: “Proserpina Jiménez?...Don't talk to me about her. I know her. A certain poor Mexican girl who believed in the Oracle of Delphi...”

While her skill as a medium is something that leaves her audience in awe, it is a bit of a bourgeois novelty. Delfino recognizes the limited shelf life of this line of work. For the moment she captures the zeitgeist of her world, and she can float between science and the occult, embracing both. By the 1930s, however, this position cannot be sustained. Reason and science have already overtaken the role of the supernatural in the public sphere and to cling to Proserpina's duality is to cling to the past, and to be left behind in the onward march of progress.

The novel's preoccupation with memory and erasure reflects this dismantling of the supernatural in favor of progress and science. Delfino's contemplation of the nature of time, and therefore memory, is a linear one:

Vivir...es un asunto de tráfico. Los resolvemos casi siempre por medio de calles en una sola dirección. Detrás de nosotros, mientras caminamos, parece que una mano invisible va cerrando las puertas, las ventanas, los ojos, las avenidas, convirtiendo a las personas en maniqués, a la ciudad en teatro, al recuerdo en representación. (165)⁶⁹

As life continues on, the past drifts away from the seeing eye and the listening ear. The forward progress of time closes off access to these moments, decisions, and memories. Once these doors of perception are shut, the mind can only recreate them as a poor imitation of the original. Memories are facsimiles of the real, therefore Delfino's reminiscences of Proserpina fall victim to this same fate, reconstructed, dramatized and pieced together. The impossibility of return shadows the possibilities for the future.

⁶⁹ Living...is a matter of movement. We solve it almost always by streets that go in a single direction. Behind us, while we walk, it seems as if an invisible hand were closing doors, windows, eyes, avenues, transforming people into puppets, the city into a theater and memory into representation. (trans. Karsen p. 87)

As the clock reaches four in the afternoon, the time he is supposed to meet Proserpina, his thoughts return to the initial phone call that started him on this journey through memory. Memory redoubles on itself and the phone call has become a new layer in his history with Proserpina. The meta-memory of the text pushes Proserpina even further into the recesses of abstraction. After the phone call, he recreates her image and their history, and then with this discussion he revisits the memory of her memory. Like a game of telephone, as the number of mechanical reproductions increases, the message becomes more and more obscured the further away the transmission from the original speaker, the further she moves away from solidification the more unreachable and incomprehensible she becomes for Delfino.

If forward motion is equivalent to living in Delfino's configuration of this solidification of memory, the lack of motion, would mean death. Delfino's quest to totalize Proserpina, to locate and define her in a static representation, would necessarily end in her destruction. Delfino struggles constantly with his representation of Proserpina, his memories of her, and her actual presence.

El recuerdo de Proserpina servía de red a los contrincantes. ¡Un límite!
Siempre el papel de mi amiga había de consistir en trazar un límite entre dos atmósferas. Una frontera entre el verano—al que pertenecían sus mejillas, sus cabellos rizados, la sonoridad de su voz y el invierno en el que se precisaban sus ojos, sus dientes, la fragilidad de su risa, la solidez de sus uñas, su modo inimitable de decir que no a los recuerdos. (136)⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The memory of Proserpina served as a net to her opponents. A limit! Her role as my friend had always consisted of drawing a limit between two atmospheres. A border between the summer-to which belonged her cheeks, her curly hair, the sonority of her voice and the winter in which she fixed her eyes, her teeth, the fragility of her laugh, the strength of her nails, her inimitable way of saying no to memories.

Memory is tied here to Proserpina's bifurcation as it relates to the classical myth. A memory of her as she was, blocks access to connecting to her in the moment, a connection that shifts depending on which half of her life she is living. The broken phonograph record and Proserpina's aging photograph function as the conduits for memory that holds Delfino partially in the past. These frozen records of history can only preserve her momentarily and their steady decay throughout the novel shows their dissolution into the irretrievable past. Even these items meant to preserve the past, are not immune from the passage of time. Technology can stave off the march of time, temporarily, but cannot sustain this halt on its own. In the novel, memory functions as both a preserver and an obstacle to insight. She shifts, moves, and escapes from one world to the other and any attempt to immortalize or contain her proves impossible.

Like her mythological counterpart, Proserpina can only exist in each world (here coded as winter and spring, northern and southern, as well as reason and spirit) for a limited time. Every time she disappears from Delfino's grasp she leaves him a note. The last one he received reads: "De Proserpina, a Delfino, antes de regresar a sus Infiernos" (157).⁷¹ The note is the last he hears from Proserpina until she calls his office years later. The content recalls her mythical counterpart in that she leaves the note as Delfino is leaving New York to travel back to Mexico to return to his work. The mythical Proserpina cyclically travels from the underworld to the world of the living, from winter to spring, and life to death. Here the novel's Proserpina is slipping away from Delfino as he traverses the borderline between north and south, leaving Proserpina's spiritual world for his scientific one. Cloaked in secrecy and distance, her notes are always mediated through either technology (the telephone and telegraph) or through her role as a medium,

⁷¹ From Proserpina, to Delfino, before returning to your Hell.

conjuring spirits, and speaking through the voices of the dead. Proserpina is a memory, a recording, a note recorded and retold in Delfino's words.

She only speaks in the present moment of the text in the final pages of the novel where she is slipping into unconsciousness and death. Delfino finds her on waiting for him in a hotel, surrounded by the impersonal trappings of an anonymous room. She is already hovering near death and for the first time in the novel, Delfino comes face to face with the woman he remembers. His mental image of her does not match this reality.

Lo reconozco. Es el semblante de Proserpina. Como en su fotografía mutilada de pronto, para la despedida misteriosa de Nueva York, distingo inmediatamente, bajo las cejas, la ausencia de las pupilas oscuras. ¿Será posible que el presente de este rostro de momia corresponde a las facciones de la Proserpina que amé? (168)⁷²

None of Delfino's memories match her present image. Already decaying, Proserpina is wasting away before his eyes like the crumpled photo he has held onto for years. He can barely recognize her as the woman she was and this meeting comes as a shock to him. He has not left room in his thoughts or ruminations about Proserpina to account for change. He has held onto a static image that cannot be fixed.

Proserpina's presence short-circuits whatever assumptions Delfino has about her, up to and including the cause of her illness. Delfino believes she is dying of complications from diabetes, a diagnosis she herself had given him. Yet in these final moments she claims she is dying of "impatience" (174), a body exhausted by living in

⁷² I recognize her. She is the semblance of Proserpina. As in her now mutilated photo, from the mysterious departure in New York, I distinguish immediately, under her brows, the absence of her dark pupils. Can it be possible that this present face of a mummy corresponds to the parts of Proserpina that I loved?

pieces. Her final plea, her final interruption is not a phone call or a broken recording or the voices of the dead, but her own voice.

Proserpina me interrumpe:

-No me rejuvenezcas. Adivino todo lo que estás pensando. No quiero ser un recuerdo. ¿Entiendes?...No quiero ser nunca un recuerdo de mí. (170)⁷³

Here on the brink of collapse, she refuses to be immortalized. Specifically, she refuses to become a fixed memory, flattened and unrecognizable. Her desire for disappearance is consistent with her elusive presence in the novel. She has run from Delfino's attempts to get closer to her, disappearing for years at a time leaving only cryptic messages behind. Her final wishes are to disappear into nothingness, to erase the copies of herself once the original version, her actual presence, is gone.

With all of her erasures, and uncertainties, the only technology she cannot escape is writing. Delfino finally fixes her presence in text, immortalizing her through the novel itself and recreating her life through his own perspective. She has called Delfino to help her die. She knows that he will administer the dose she needs to be at peace. This scene is the first time in Proserpina has been physically present in the novel, and it is the first time she speaks for herself, not as Delfino's memory, but in her own voice. Yet, Delfino is the narrator here and even in this final moment, Proserpina is at the mercy of his text. As she fades out of existence, Delfino himself can no longer differentiate between her voice and his own. In a horrible moment of egoism, Delfino's mind drifts from the task of giving Proserpina a fatal dose of morphine. He hears the clock strike outside and wonders whether or not he will have time to stop by the jeweler's to buy Hortensia a Christmas

⁷³ Proserpina interrupts me: Don't rejuvenate me. I know what you're thinking. I don't want to be a memory. Do you understand? I don't ever want to be a memory of myself.

present. As he is staring out the window the text includes the reassuring comment, “No te inquietes. Los sábados, los almacenes cierran más tarde. Si te apresuras...” (176).⁷⁴ Yet the Torres Bodet does not clarify whether this comment was in Delfino’s mind or if it was a plea from Proserpina to hasten his administration of the morphine. The banality of the comment given the circumstances is unnerving as is Delfino’s uncertainty as to its origin. He asks: “¿Es a mi amiga a quien ha despertado esta frase? ¿Es a mí? No podría decirlo con certidumbre” (176).⁷⁵ Delfino has claimed even Proserpina’s voice has his own, completing her disappearance. It is as if when Proserpina dies, the only voice left is Delfino’s. The line between them completely collapses. In this one moment in which the reader has an opportunity to approach Proserpina, Torres Bodet denies any direct contact. Instead, Delfino entirely mediates her presence through his own consciousness.

Proserpina offers a unique challenge in that her bifurcated personality exists as both the modern girl of the early twentieth century with her wild abandon and spiritism, and as a modern girl as a professional, educated doctor. To be both of these things is already paradoxical, particularly in the 1930s, and in the presence of Delfino it is a double challenge to the male gaze to comprehend the complexities of either side of this persona. Both “Parálisis” and *Proserpina* conceptualize the link between memory and voice and its simultaneous separation of voice from body. Delfino’s condition, though able bodied, may not be as far from this paralyzed existence as it appears. His inability to hold onto Proserpina in any sense of permanence mirrors that of the husband whose wife is completely inaccessible to him and whose powers of perception are slowing falling away. As a paralytic he cannot reach out and embrace his wife nor can he react to her in

⁷⁴ Don’t worry. On Saturdays, the stores close later. If you hurry...

⁷⁵ Is it my friend who has raised this phrase? Is it me? I could not tell with certainty.

any significant way. She must intuit from his silence his desires and his needs that are both invisible and inaudible to her. Similarly, Proserpina is always just out of Delfino's reach. At best she is his for just part of the year as true to her mythological counterpart. She slips out of his grasp at every turn and when she does circle back into his life it is as a changed creature less accessible than the first.

Both texts show a failing in perception that is gendered. The shift of the dominant sensorium from the visual to the aural alters the dominance of the male gaze, a totalizing vision of women based on their all-consuming spectatorship. Sight and clarity are the signifiers of reason, and therefore masculinity, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Men are imagined to possess a clearer sense of vision that penetrates the dark recesses of science and philosophy. In a patriarchal society, men are in control of the social structures with women playing a subordinate role. As Laura Mulvey famously explains, men's power to drive narrative structures manifests in the ability to look with women as the object of that gaze. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (837). The pleasure of looking, particularly at the female form, drives cinematic construction and voyeuristic images of women pervade narrative cinema, normalizing a heterosexual, misogynistic vision.

This vision is similarly present in literature, particularly in the heavily male dominated modernist movements. Women are often figured as mere images or easily extrapolated as metaphors. Their presence as characters in literary works is often incidental and they function as objects for conquest or jealous contention between the

male characters rather than fully formed beings on their own. When vision is the dominant trope, these women are easily explained, consumed, and dominated by male narrators. Modernist texts often further this gendered sensibility. Sara Danius uses James Joyce's *Ulysses* as a model to explain that "male characters...often perceive the world 'cinematically'...while major female protagonists...tend to perceive the world in what seems a more 'organic' manner" (176). There is a gendered division in the hierarchy of senses that reaches from Ancient Greece through to modernity that defines the masculine and the feminine in terms of their modes of interpreting the world. When the script is flipped, dethroning vision for sound, the male gaze is rendered impotent. Removing male vision from the ultimate method of understanding the world means this vision can no longer fully interpret or assume mastery of women, or of the universe that surrounds her.

In Torres Bodet's experimental inversion of the senses, the gendered nature of perception is still present, perpetuating the notion that women are more perceptive, or sensitive. Proserpina's role as a medium emphasizes this characterization of women. She is a conduit for the voices of others. While still a passive role, simply ventriloquizing the speech of others, it is a realm that is cordoned off from men. According to Jeffrey Sconce, "the majority of mediums were women, and mediumship itself was thought to be a function of the unique 'electrical' constitution of women (12). Similarly, W.B. Yeats' wife Georgie is the conduit for his automatic writing, acting as scribe for their "communications." Her role is an indispensable one in the production of Yeats' work, though Yeats downplays her participation as her writings are attributed to spirits. In these cases women are the vehicle, or the vessel that can contain communication or relay it, leaving little space for women to create or articulate information in their own right.

Torres Bodet further complicates this binary, however, by emphasizing the limitations of his male protagonists. In Proserpina's case, she is fully capable of participating in Delfino's world of reason in her capacity as a doctor and opts out of his world, a decision that is entirely illogical to Delfino. Her choice to exist in the world of spirits rather than science is baffling to him and pushes her even further out of his reach. In "Parálisis," Luisa is the last connection the narrator has to the living world. Straining to hear all of these tiny details, her memory and, therefore, her image, are always fleeting. By simply closing the door to her husband's sick room, she has the power to erase her presence to render herself inaudible/invisible. Despite their seemingly passive positioning, the aural, intuitive women escape the grasp of their narrators. They cannot be narrated or represented fully by these men who are limited, broken, and lacking in their sensory capabilities. While these women do not exactly have agency of their own, they do avoid capture. At the same time, the agency of the men is reduced in this modern sensorium. Reason alone seems insufficient as an antidote or organizing force in a chaotic mechanized world. The impulse to order the world still exists, yet in the face of prosthetic technologies that highlight the profound limitations of human perception; reason seems small and desperately inadequate.

The destabilization of masculine power in these stories and other works from the Contemporáneos does not go unnoticed. The disruption of masculine power forms part of the defamatory accusations launched against the Contemporáneos by the nationalist factions of the vanguard. The disrupted male gaze is directly contradictory to the hyper-masculinist discourse of the Estridentistas and their "virile" vision for the avant-garde, similar to the Italian Futurist cries to make a clean break from the decadent past and find

a love for speed, cars, and mechanism. Manuel Maples Arce's 1923 "Manifiesto Estridentista" affirms as one of its key principles: "La exaltación del tematismo sugerente de las máquinas las explosiones obreriles que estrellan los espejos de los días subvertidos. Vivir emocionalmente. Palpitar con la hélice del tiempo. Ponerse en marcha hacia el futuro" (Maples Arce).⁷⁶ This cutting manifesto also calls on Estridentistas to "shit on" popular idols, including Charlie Chaplin, and in the concluding section he directly asserts that "ser estridentista es ser hombre. Sólo los eunucos no estarán con nosotros" (Maples Arce).⁷⁷ The Estridentistas arrive on the art scene alongside of the Contemporáneos. More radical and more experimental in their work than the Contemporáneos, the Estridentistas are also more aligned with the creation of a new Mexican nationalism. Like the futurists, nationalism becomes tied to a reassertion of hyper-masculinity in politics, art and in a vision for the future.

The differences between the Contemporáneos and the Estridentistas carry resonances beyond a division between competing artistic movements. In 1934 Maples Arce, from his position as a parliament member during the Cárdenas administration openly attacked the Contemporáneos in a session in the House of Representatives calling to end, "la comedia de los maricones y el cinismo de los pederastas que se amparan bajo la naciente publicidad de Proust y Gide" (qtd. in Sheridan 132)⁷⁸. His attempts to cleanse the Mexican literary scene of what he sees as "effeminate" artists whose bourgeois international ties dilute the potency of Mexican culture, is part of what Salvador Oropesa

⁷⁶ The exaltation of the suggestive theme-atism of machines, the labor explosions that smash the mirrors of these subverted days. To live emotionally. To palpitate with time's propeller. To put oneself in step with the future.

⁷⁷ To be an estridentista is to be a man. Only eunuchs will not be with us.

⁷⁸ The comedy of these fags and the cynicism of the pederasts that bolster themselves under the nascent publicity of Proust and Gide.

calls a “centuries-long tradition” (105) reaching back to the colonial era during which the Indian was stigmatized as a “sodomite.” Coding any “other” as effeminate or morally perverse reaffirms the “correct” moral stance of the dominant powers and acts as a division delineating those with power and those without.

The nationalists of the Mexican Revolution adopt this same stance. The popular heroes of the Revolution like Villa and Zapata represent the outlaw, the hero, and embody the most masculine ideals of bravery and gumption. They mirror this masculinist speech as evidenced in Villa’s epithet for Obregón, leader of oppositional forces and later president, “El Perfumado” or sissy. The name questions both Obregón’s manhood and his military skill (Gonzales 148). This kind of rhetoric becomes the standard for the project of nation building. As these figures rise to prominence, nationalists, though representing two extremes of politics, fascists on one side and communists on the other, attacked the avant-garde, including the Contemporáneos, for their moral decadence and their affiliations with non-Mexican artists (Oropesa 11). These accusations ultimately result in the loss of bureaucratic positions in government for many Contemporáneos, as well as the dissolution of the group itself. Though this “grupo sin grupo” had its own internal problems and the tenuous links between the members were beginning to erode, the political pressures and the wider public turn toward a Estridentista/nationalist vision of Mexico are too much for the group to overcome.

The accusations against the Contemporáneos were not made on the members’ personal lives alone, but their texts were also used as evidence of their corruption of the artistic landscape through decadence. Pérez Firmat offers a detailed account of the critical reception of vanguard prose that marked it as degenerate or denaturalized. These novels

are described in contemporaneous reviews as not novels “but rather poems barely structured by feeble plots,” fragmentary, plotless, and as a “group of pearly snails, drooling metaphors” (36). In describing vanguard novels with adjectives of decay and failure, these critical assessments transfer the same descriptors to the authors themselves, questioning their virility. Pérez Firmat summarizes this inclination as stemming from the notion that “the true novelist fathers; he begets a world; his creations are his children. But vanguard novelists are sissies, fags, or simply impotent. Their puny and ambiguous offspring bear witness to their enfeeblement” (37). Rather than viewing vanguard work as experimental and pushing the edges of genre and canon, these works are seen as regressive and even without a genre at all, falling somewhere between novel and poem. The broken male figure and the shift in the sensorium to a less masculine focused understanding of the world are threatening to the nationalist conception of Mexican literature and when the existing power structures are threatened their instinct is to re-trench established beliefs and virulently defend them.

The possibilities for the future were wide open in this historical moment. Sound recording, cinema and similar technologies opened the space for groups like the Contemporáneos to experiment and test new forms of expression. Yet, while the opportunities for a mechanized, globalized future can hold out an optimistic future with new epistemologies, they also destabilize the foundations of old epistemologies. These movements can be successful when they align with power structures as was true of the Italian Futurists, for example, whose hyper-masculine rhetoric fed into Mussolini’s fascist politics. Where they fail, as with the Contemporáneos is when they stray too far from the dominant cultural message. In the tumultuous political history of Mexico, the

nationalist factions found a sympathetic ear, closing the space for this type of sensory shift.

The move toward fascism by groups like the Estridentistas and the Futurists is one that Benjamin predicts. For him fascism is the result of providing a means through technology for the masses to express themselves without access to a change in property rights. “Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life” (Benjamin 23). While Benjamin was writing from Germany during the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, this same process can be seen in Mexico from the filming of Díaz’ regime, to Maples Arce and his political stand against the Contemporáneos and their “feminine writing.” According to Benjamin, the revelry in the future and in technology evidenced in the Estridentista and Futurist manifestoes only leads to war and destruction as the abundance of technological advancement and production outpaces their utilization. “The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society” (Benjamin 24). Not yet ready for the powerful forces of the machine age, society renders useless the human potential. People like Proserpina have no home in this world while those like Delfino march forward with science as their god and reason their light, losing sight of the value of full human potential in favor of a technologically mediated world.

This mediation increases with the proliferation of technologies. *Proserpina rescatada* functions as an example of this reciprocal relationship between the new configuration of the body through technology and the necessity for new modes of representation in text. While Delfino may be secure in his worldview, the darker side of a

technologically mediated become manifest in the modern security state. When technology, particularly that of surveillance, is used against the citizen there is little escape from the state's monitoring, regulation and confinement of the body. Writing under these conditions in post-independence Ireland, Flann O'Brien reveals the horrors of listening and juridical manipulation in his satirical novel *The Third Policeman*.

CHAPTER V

“I DO NOT CARE FOR CELERY”: SOUND, REPETITION, AND SURVEILLANCE IN *THE THIRD POLICEMAN*

By 1939 in Ireland, the voice has taken on new resonances not from the technological advancements or aesthetic inventions, but instead from innovations in policing. The recorded voice becomes part of a state apparatus that turns voice against its own people. During the Civil War of the 1920s using informants, eavesdropping, and wiretapping are common practices in the military tactics of the war, the scars of which are still fresh in the 30s. Ireland’s declaration of neutrality in the initial moments of World War II also make the island a strategic location for espionage and spying activities for both Germany and England. In this space of listening, language, particularly the use of Irish, becomes a political issue. The Free State and Eamon de Valera’s government utilize these same tactics of interrogation and repression that were used by the British during occupation and by the Irish during the Civil War, against the IRA and other paramilitary groups who refuse to recognize Ireland as a partitioned state and are dedicated to the cause of reunification. The subversion of these groups is seen as a threat to the fragile peace won after the Civil War and the new government passed legislation such as the “Offences Against the State Act” in order to contain them. In this atmosphere, speech is a dangerous liability. Government efforts to contain and to modernize come at the price of silencing Ireland’s citizenship, making speech a powerful form of dissent.

Under the pressures of modernity, a return to Ireland's deep connection with orality opens up new possibilities of resistance. David Lloyd marks this space of resistance in the power of the "Irish orifice" a metonym for Irish culture and all that is associated with it, from famine to storytelling, to alcoholism. As both a site of degradation and of pride, the orifice has a long tradition in Irish culture, and one that has had the power to resist, react, and restore the Irish people. According to Lloyd, "an oral space is the resistance of certain forms of cultural and physiological practices of pleasure, desire, affect, and even need and grief, to the rationality of the modern state. The space of the 'Irish orifice' is...a counter-space of modernity" (15). The threat of the oral is visible in the Irish government's repressive censorship regulations and unprecedented national system of policing (Lloyd 11), while its power in creating identity is evidenced in the new nation's push for an Irish speaking state to differentiate it culturally from the English. From the "poor mouth" of the Famine, to the use of the Irish language as a political weapon, the Irish mouth has survived despite the traumas of colonization, civil war, and the threat of incarceration for dissidents.

As a bilingual writer coming up in this tumultuous era, Brian O'Nolan⁷⁹ exploits his deep linguistic knowledge to write satire that embraces this mode of resistance, exposing the holes, contradictions, and failures of the Irish government in the postcolonial state through ingenious language play and complex patterns of concordance between Irish and English. His novel *The Third Policeman*, written in 1939-40 and published posthumously in 1967, works together with a set of articles "The Cruiskeen Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction" and "The District Court" from 1942 to satirize the Irish

⁷⁹ Although he is most widely recognized as Flann O'Brien, I will be referring to the author as Brian O'Nolan for clarity as this project deals with works written under two separate pseudonyms.

penal system and its obfuscation of language. His consistent and interconnected critique across these pieces shows a deep concern for the pressures of the modern state on language use. He exposes the legal dangers of restricting language use while also demonstrating the depth and possibilities of the Irish language when fully utilized, rather than as a nominal feature of a nationalist schema.

O’Nolan’s work sits on the margins of most discussions of modern Irish literature. Though gaining importance, his work is notoriously difficult to classify. He uses a mythic mode and elements of pastiche like Joyce, and bends universes and realities like Beckett, yet he is often taken as a lesser version of them both. Much of the criticism surrounding his work begins and ends with a discussion of where to place him in the canon and where he falls in the spectrum of modernists and postmodernists. No cosmopolitan exile like these two greats, O’Nolan is an entrenched Dubliner, living, breathing, and working in the city. Therefore, analyzing his writing requires a broader knowledge of Ireland, its history, and its language, than even necessary for Joyce’s work. This cultural specificity is perhaps one reason why his work has not received a wider international audience. Adding to the complexity, O’Nolan’s work spans genres and shifts tone and style across each. He is the author of several novels, including *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), *An Béal Bocht [The Poor Mouth]* (1941), and *The Third Policeman*, as well as short stories, plays, television scripts, and over 3000 newspaper articles under his column “Cruiskeen Lawn” in *The Irish Times*, that ran from 1940 until he died in 1966 (Young, 112). His output is enormous, but because much of this work appeared in newspapers, it has only just begun to receive serious critical attention. This volume of work is reflective of just the work

written under his most familiar pseudonyms, Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen. Each of these pseudonyms has its own personality, voice and style.

The criticism of his work often focuses on his Irish language novel *An Béal Bocht* as it relates to ideas of nationalism and responses to the Irish revival, or on his first novel *At Swim Two Birds* that draws heavily on Irish mythologies and history for its humor. Scholars of *The Third Policeman* are primarily concerned with the novel's use of philosophy and epistemologies. Others see it as emblematic of the stagnant malaise of 1930s Ireland with its cyclical plot and futile philosophies. My reading of O'Nolan's work, brings together several of these threads. Rather than a postmodern exercise in futility as some critics claim, or a Derridian nightmare of non-ontology, O'Nolan's linguistic network builds on these alternate philosophies to create a sprawling literary universe that opens out beyond the pages of the book rather than collapsing inward. *The Third Policeman*, while concerned with failing epistemologies, is not apolitical or an exhaustion of meaning, but rather a complexly layered satire on the limitations of language, and the pressures on that linguistic system in a security state, particularly a nominally bilingual state like Ireland. O'Nolan roots his satire in the gaps between the Irish and English languages and in the inconsistent policies of nationalism that this language division creates. O'Nolan's levels of reference to his other texts, specifically his more clearly politically charged newspaper column, illustrate a continuity across his work that extends my reading of *The Third Policeman* outside of the bounds of the novel and into the political world of the young Irish Republic.

As a member of the Irish Civil Service, O'Nolan works in the heart of Ireland's political system, which, for many, failed to live up to the promise of revolution.

Independence came with the high price of deep economic recession worsened by an economic war with England that blocked Irish trade from the British markets (Rubenstein 102). “Along with these historical obstacles came the social-psychological trauma of years of revolution and civil war, the exhaustion of revolutionary energies, and the return to the often sordid pragmatics of survival and everyday life” (Rubenstein 102). For O’Nolan, the best way to counter this malaise is through humor and absurdity.

Satire has a long history as a political form. From Dryden and Pope to Swift and Cervantes, in times of political upheaval, satire often becomes a way to reveal the political violence that the state conceals (Connery 7). In addition, satirical works are often a blending of other forms and genres where the humor comes from joining disparate parts. This position is particularly useful for a postcolonial subject like O’Nolan, who inhabits a hybrid space of both his native Ireland and a transformed Ireland after British rule. From his vantage point, O’Nolan can see the incongruencies of these systems from the inside and from an outsider position using satire as mode of resistance to the political force of the new state. According to Clement Ball, “when satire blends languages, styles, or discourses in its parodic mode or as a form of humorous incongruity, satire theories are inclined to set up linguistic gaps as hierarchical determinants of evaluation” (23). The multilingual postcolonial environment magnifies the opportunity for collisions of language when the official language clashes with the local languages.

In Ireland the definitions of local and official languages are further complicated. In an effort to cast off England’s cultural dominance over Ireland, the new nation reclaims Irish as the official language of the state despite the fact that after hundreds of years of linguistic dominance, English was in fact the local language for the vast majority

of Irish citizens. O’Nolan was in a position to take full advantage of the collisions of language. His work is layered with linguistic play between these two languages, often capitalizing on the gaps in translatability and creating puns based in elaborate points of philology. As an Irish speaker “at a time when it was neither profitable nor popular” (Myles 203), he is acutely aware of the politics of language. British rule had instituted all-English classrooms and severely limited the teaching of Irish, even for those students for whom Irish was their first language, and issued fines for using Irish in the public sphere (Ó Buachalla 79). The independence movement and the Irish revival claimed the language as a marker of patriotism and defiance. In the Free State, it maintained this cultural significance and speaking Irish and regaining ancient traditions played a key part in nation building and in creating a new national identity apart from England.

O’Nolan’s most complex uses of Irish as a site of linguistic resistance appear in his weekly newspaper column *Cruiskeen Lawn*. The column appears in the *Irish Times* from 1940-1966 under the name Myles na Gopaleen. His column is polylingual with some posts written in Irish, many in English and several with heavy passages of Latin and French. Satirical and often hilarious, the columns show a particular fascination with the specificity of language and O’Nolan is a master of the pun. Regardless of which vocabulary he uses, O’Nolan, writing as Myles, continually calls attention to the gaps between languages and takes advantage of his linguistic fluidity to pun through both languages and invoke Irish syntax and connotations in English writing. From this position, he exposes the holes in the nationalist dedication to Irish language policies in a country where the majority of the citizenry spoke only English. To this end, the columns often lampooned infrastructure, legislation, and de Valera himself. His political satires

are most notable in his creation of fictional courtrooms in the series of articles collected as “The Cruiskeen Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction” and “The District Court.”

The political atmosphere of the 1930s is one that is increasingly repressive, particularly to writers and dissenters. De Valera’s Fianna Fáil Party takes over in 1932 and as they begin to solidify power and build a government structure, their policies become more conservative, favoring hardline Catholic mores and are increasingly intractable against those who deviated from these regulations. Writers and intellectuals chaff under these policies as well as the restrictive censorship laws. O’Nolan and other writers of his generation see de Valera as a target for their venom, often baiting the censors or lampooning de Valera (Dewsnap 28). As governmental restrictions grow, so too do the antagonisms and resentment from the populace. Although de Valera did much to separate the new nation from England politically, his government relied on harsh containment policies that tightened civil liberties and security in Ireland.

When it comes to social policy, de Valera takes his cues from the Roman Catholic Church and reaffirms policies such as the harsh censorship legislation of 1929 that demonized writers “as dubious, presumably subversive characters” (qtd. in Fordonsk 70). Inciting writers already marginalized politically, the continuation of the Censorship regulations was a blow to this group. O’Nolan finds satire an appropriate weapon against these policies that render writing subversive and potentially seditious. The Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 ban any materials (book, periodical or advertisement) deemed “indecent or obscene or advocates the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage or the use of any method, treatment or appliance for the purpose of such prevention or such procurement” (2.6). For the purposes of the

bill, the word “indecent” includes any materials “suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or unnatural vice or likely in any other similar way to corrupt or deprave” (1.1). The terms of this act are interpreted broadly with the Censorship Board deciding individual cases. The punishments for being found guilty of these crimes of obscenity include a fine of up to fifty pounds and/or imprisonment for up to six months (2.10.2). These punishments extended not just to the author, but also to anyone who prints, publishes, sell, or mails offending documents; because the liability extended this far, publishers and editors become increasingly reluctant to take a chance on anything that might be construed as “indecent.”

As Myles, O’Nolan used the “Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction” to expose the idiocy and ineffectiveness of de Valera’s cultural policies. In one column, a shopkeeper is named a defendant in a case regarding the selling of a book “while not indecent, was in its general tendency indecent” (141). The lawyers, Faix on the defense and Lax on the prosecution, argue for the judge to rule on the book, which Lax admits he has never read. The judge quickly agrees to read this “nefarious trash” so as not to sully the lawyers. Upon his return, he concludes that the cover is from Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and that this image “while tending to immodesty according to the severer standards of the present age, could not reasonably be held to be indecent” (142). In *Madame Bovary*’s obscenity trial in France in 1857, the prosecutor, Ernest Pinard thought it impossible to read the entirety of the novel to the jury due to its length and settled for summarizing it and reading only the offending portions aloud in the courtroom (Karolidis 383). The irony is of course, that in order to protect the people from these horribly offensive sections, they have to be read allowed in open court. In this original case, which generated an immense

amount of media attention, Flaubert and his publishers were eventually acquitted. Although, the French courts saw the text as offensive enough to bring to trial, only the particularly offensive scenes were deemed worthy of scrutiny. Part of O’Nolan’s critique is directed at this blind assessment of literature. The censors themselves are rarely evaluating the whole of any text, simply the passages flagged and underlined by the offended party (Adams 73).

O’Nolan’s satire extends to an additional level in this article, as the text under review is not Flaubert at all. The judge declares that, “the tone throughout is elevated, urbane, even technical. It appears to be ‘An Outline of Irish Grammar’ and is the work of the Irish Christian Brothers. This work bears no obvious relation to the illustration I have mentioned” (142). While the cover is from *Bovary*, the contents are an Irish grammar book. The case is dismissed on these grounds, which leaves at issue why the contents would be so different from the cover. O’Nolan reverses the traditional notion of banned material. Typically, when one buys a smutty magazine or a banned book, he or she might replace the dust jacket with another, or hide the magazine inside a mundane one. Here, a mundane grammar book is hidden inside a book that had famously been banned.

This reversal operates on at least two levels. First, it makes Irish grammar something shameful, as someone looking to buy *Madame Bovary* undoubtedly would be very disappointed to find this incongruence. Keith Booker also proposes that the judge has kept *Bovary* for himself and replaced the contents with a grammar book, secretly more tempted than he should be in his position as arbiter of the censorship laws (29-30). Second, it ties issues of Irish language policy back into an accusation of an offense against the morality of the state. In this case, the defendant is characterized as a “member

of the Gaelic League, a fluent speaker of Irish and a graduate of Cardinal Newman's university" in other words a good and loyal citizen of the new state upholding all of its cultural tenets. In the court's eyes, he would seem beyond reproach and hardly a candidate for prosecution. His cultural affiliations are provided as a defense for the charge of immorality.

Finally, it satirizes the blind fury in prosecuting censorship. Mr. Lax refuses to even look at the accused text, much less read it. Censorship boards are rarely noted for their artful interpretations of texts and act in response to public outcry without much of their own analysis. The reactionary politics of censorship are evident in the case of the *Ulysses*, a persecution that O'Nolan laments. Though he often has sharp words for Joyce and his obliteration of comprehensible language, O'Nolan understands the monumental place Joyce's book holds in literary history and though not surprised, is dismayed that it too falls victim to the whims of the censorship boards (Clissman 223). The choice to use *Madame Bovary* as the example of indecent literature and censorship at first seems strange. *Ulysses*'s obscenity trial or even Oscar Wilde's might be a more Irish referent in this scenario. The use of *Madame Bovary*, however, distances O'Nolan from directly critiquing the Irish censors providing a safer position for satire. Although the courtroom is still clearly Irish, adding a banned Irish text as a marker would bring O'Nolan's criticism into too sharp a relief. It would lose the humor of the incongruence and risk slipping simply into a direct critique of government policy. At the same time, the images of *Madame Bovary* on the cover more clearly create a visual link between pornography and literature. This connection, and the court's inability to differentiate between the two,

is the object of O’Nolan’s ire. The court appears absurd and non-functional in this column exposing censorship as the ridiculous sham that it is.

The series of articles that comprise the “Cruiskeen Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction” are primarily concerned the power of language to offer an escape from the restrictive legal policies, including censorship, through wit and double speech. The series as a whole is an extended pun on the word jurisdiction, to speak or say law. In the courtroom there is a fixation on legal jargon and the hazards of obscurantism in the legal system. The first column in the sequence describes the fictional origins of this alternative court:

Owing to (pressure) (of work) in the courts of justice, withdrawal of judges, electric heaters, bicycle-crime and other matters, the public spirited Myles na gCopaleen Central Research Bureau has persuaded several impatient litigants to bring their differences before the Cruiskeen Court of Voluntary Jurisdiction. This institution conducts its proceedings in English and ‘recognizes’ only those statutes which are ‘recognisable for the purposes of the court’. Since nobody knows what this means, the ‘lawyers’ do not like to spend too much time rehearsing jargon and citing ‘cases’, fearing that the whole spiel will be ruled out as ‘inadmissable’. (na gCopaleen 137)

Judge Twinfeet, who presides over this courtroom, polices language more than any law, refusing the use of “Latinities” in his presence. His name alone already calls attention to an idea of doubling, and standing on both sides of the law. By setting the rules of language, dictating what can and cannot be said, the Judge alters the code of law at whim.

The lawyers cannot fully explain their case when the Judge perpetually corrects, strikes and redefines words in the middle of the proceedings. Only those statutes deemed recognizable can be utilized and then those statutes are rendered useless when the language they are written in cannot be used in full. The use of gratuitous parentheses and quotation marks in the above passage enacts this undercutting of language, putting these seemingly innocuous words under suspicion with parentheses and quotation marks. Furthermore, the judge decrees that, “every word uttered in this court is legal” (Myles 138). In deeming every utterance in court legal, he grants all words equal power in the space of the courtroom. At the same time, his rules deny the possibility for illegality of speech. Without boundaries or delineations, law becomes both omnipotent and useless. In a space where language is already exacting and performative, the arbitrary policing of these terms breaks down the contract between speaker and listener. In very few spaces does the speech act have more of an impact than in court where testimony is evidence and speech is the key weapon in either denying or obtaining liberty; when this contract is broken, justice becomes impossible.

O’Nolan enacts this critique most clearly in “The District Court” articles in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Here, the defendant is a man who gives his name as Myles na gCopaleen charged with “begging, disorderly conduct, using bad language and with being in possession of an arm-chair. He was also charged with failing to register as an alien” (149). He “gives his name” as Myles, the same name as the author, but is also described as elderly creating distance between the author and the subject of the article and complicating notions of identity. From the first encounter “Myles” has with the police his identity is unclear and he is immediately under suspicion. He identifies himself

as a republican soldier who “had as much right to obstruct the thoroughfare as the ‘Fianna Fáil crowd’” (149). The defendant invokes the name of de Valera’s party that had control of the government at the time this piece was written, separating himself politically from this party claiming the same rights as those in power. In identifying himself as a republican soldier, one who would have fought against the Fianna Fáil government in favor of a unified Ireland, he creates even more distance, marking himself as a dissident and an outsider. The police read him as such explaining to the judge that: “this type of person gives the police a lot of trouble” (149). By the time he walks in the courtroom, the police and the judge have already made decisions about him and his role in Irish society.

Raising the suspicions of the police even more, he enters the courtroom speaking Latin rather than English. The court officers do not understand him and assume he is speaking Irish. The inability of the police to understand him calls into question the charge against the man for the use of bad language. The term bad is never qualified and could mean an incorrect usage of English, offensive language, or simply incomprehensible language. In front of the judge the Detective Sergeant later proclaims: “This man had no difficulty in speaking English when he was lying in the street. This sort of thing makes a farce of the language movement” (149). The farce of it all lies in the symbolic declaration of Irish as the official language of the state. While official representatives of that state, including legal professionals and the Gardá who were required to know the language for entry into service (Ranelagh 220), here they cannot even distinguish the national language from Latin, much less speak it or conduct the affairs of the nation in this language. The Irish orifice in this case uses the Irish language as a tool for evasion, manipulating language to avoid detection.

The Latin Myles uses is not simply conversational Latin, instead he intersperses quotes from Horace and Cicero into his conversation. The quotations are not randomly placed in the text and, when translated, fit into the English discussion. They also carry a political charge. For instance, when the police first confront the suspect he responds with the opening line from Horace's Epode 6 "Quid immerentes hospites vexas, canis, Ignavus adversum lupos?" (149).⁸⁰ This erudite invective marks the policeman as a cowardly aggressor and the defendant as simply a harmless passerby. While Horace's work rails against misuses of iambs and poor poets, here the phrase takes on a more menacing tone establishing a power struggle between the police and the republican. The article can be read without the Latin gloss and it still holds power as a critique, but the additional understanding of the quotations gives the article a much darker tone. For Catholics, these passages from Horace and Cicero might have been familiar from Latin lesson books and translation exercises. In the 1930s, Catholic mass is still said in Latin and the echoes of this language are far more familiar to that audience, learned or not. In the text, O'Nolan also includes stage directions, of sorts, with "(Laughter)" following each of the defendant's speeches, indicating at least the courtroom audience has caught on to the humor. Irish speaking Catholics have the benefit of all three languages and are in on Myles' joke. For those who do not have linguistic access, much of the political thrust of this set of articles is lost.

The article also contains two passages from the *Pro Sestio*, Cicero's address to the Senate in defense of Sestius against charges of "public violence" (Kaster 18). Cicero defends Sestius' character and also paints them both as good patriots of Rome. In

⁸⁰ Why do you harass unoffending strangers, dog, but flee at the sight of wolves? (Watson 256)

O’Nolan’s piece “Myles,” is defending himself against charges from the state and has already positioned himself as a republican, one who would have seen himself as a champion of the state of Ireland as a unified nation. “Myles” cites section 47 of this work in his response to the Justice:

Justice: . . . Are you married?

Defendant: Are you?

Justice: Impertinence won’t help you.

Defendant: It won’t help anybody. The questions you put is apparently equally offensive to both of us. I am a victim of circumstances. *Maioribus praesidiis et copiis oppugnatur res publica quam defenditur, propterea quod audaces homines et perditu nutu impelluntur et ipsi etiam sponte sua contra rem publicam incitantur.* (149)⁸¹

While the question itself is banal, the response with its use of Cicero reveals a much larger critique. Rather than simply a vagrant or public nuisance as the court would like to see him, the defendant articulates his position as a political one, a victim of the circumstances of civil war that find him on the losing side. Yet, with this reference, “Myles” also sees himself as a necessary guard of the republic, a defender of the nation. While in the Roman context, Sestio would be acquitted of all charges, soon after Cicero would be exiled from Rome and under threat of death if he returned.

This element of exile is present in this set of articles as well. When “Myles” is arrested, the Detective Sergeant mentions that the defendant had been previously

⁸¹ The wicked would have been beaten. Yes, but they were fellow-citizens who would have been beaten, by resort to arms, by a person without public standing who even as consul had preserved the commonwealth without a resort to arms. (Kaster 61)

“convicted for loitering at Swansea in 1933” (149). While this detail provides evidence of a prior prison record, it also carries further resonances. Swansea is a town and a prison in Wales, not in Ireland, making this defendant more than a mere local ruffian and presumably arrested in the United Kingdom and not on Irish soil. In addition, O’Nolan marks the year of the conviction as 1933, which is the year Fianna Fail begins to consolidate its power. In July of 1933, de Valera dismisses Eoin O’Duffy, former head of the IRA and an active militant in the war for independence, as head of the Garda Siochána. O’Duffy forms the fascist Blueshirts as the “National Guard” and shortly thereafter the Fine Gael party with right leaning opposition to Fianna Fail. The resulting clashes between the IRA and the Blueshirts lead to a major crackdown from the government and both groups are outlawed in 1936 (Ranelagh 227-8). Much like Cicero heading into his own exile, 1933 is a moment in which dissidents like “Myles” would find their support dwindling and their influence over the functions of government eroding.

“Myles” comments directly on his political position in the second installment of this series. After his arrest, “Myles” is let out on bail, but instead of heading home, he breaks back *into* the prison having “filed through certain iron bars [...] He was found in an intoxicated condition when found and used bad language. He demanded cocoa and used certain threats” (152). The charge of bad language is again levied against the defendant after again lambasting the Sergeant with Latin citations, leaving no doubt now that the reference to bad language is in using not foul language, but the wrong language. In addition, the reason he breaks back into Mountjoy, Dublin’s main prison, is purely political:

Defendant, in the course of a long address, said that he was ‘a Southern Irishman,’ and as such could not accept with equanimity the suggestion that he should (by mere reason of being out on bail) reside in Belfast, ‘a stern iron town of aspect unendearing of populace contumacious.’ (152)

Pitting himself as the republican Southern Irishman, calling attention to the partition, the defendant would rather stay in jail than stay one night in Belfast, a city that for him is occupied territory. Yet here, where the political claim might be the strongest in the article, O’Nolan obfuscates the narrative. Whereas much of this article and the others that comprise “The District Court” selection are told as if we are reading a transcript of court proceedings, in this passage, the narrator/court reporter denies the details of the defendant’s impassioned plea. The “course of the long address” is not rendered in the article and his additional reasons based on “principles that far transcended expediency” (152) remain unheard. While the use of Latin by the Defendant exposes the hypocrisy of the Irish legal system, the silencing of the Defendant works as the final arbiter. Removing and erasing his words from the narrative gives more power to the narrator/court reporter. For all of his articulate citations and well-reasoned defense, “Myles” leaves the courtroom in exactly the same position in which he came in. He is cleared of all charges, but will likely be right back in the same courtroom, a nameless, powerless defendant.

In addition to the necessity for a straight translation or gloss of the Latin texts in order to grasp the full implications of the text, O’Nolan also plays with the space between languages, particularly Irish, English, and Latin. While sound, particularly human sound and speech are critical elements of O’Nolan’s work, these sounds are also rendered into text shifting their medium and therefore, their impact on the reader/listener. As is true in

Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, at times you must be able to both read and hear O'Nolan's words to have access to their meaning. According to Brooker, "to think of Flann O'Brien's work as a matter of sound and breath is not to say that speech should be elevated above writing, or that the path between them is always straight" (18). Often with O'Nolan the phonetic play is only legible in text. Anne Clissman points to a moment in O'Nolan's writings where he laments the limitations of verbal expression in that it cannot convey the visual elements of language.

At dinner some nights ago, I said with great bitterness "Do have some Carrageen mBás." No one laughed at this shiny sarah (or brilliant sally). I decided immediately that this oral mechanism is a very poor affair. It cannot communicate an essentially visual joke. (22 Feb 1943) (qtd. in Clissman 198)

The element of print aids in the construction of any good pun. Here, he replaces the English word moss for the Irish word mBás, a homophone that translates to the word death in English. As is the classic case of Derrida's difference and differ^{ance}, being able to both see and hear the word in play opens up the dimensions of language in a way that is lost to homophones. The dinner guests miss the joke without the visual representation of the word.

In "The District Court" O'Nolan forces the reader to phonetically pronounce words in English in order to "hear" the Irish or Latin root behind it. For instance, when the defendant becomes increasingly agitated that he is not understood in Latin he declares, "Begob if I used the word ownshuck you might take my meaning!" (152). O'Nolan spells the Irish word "óinseach" phonetically as if it were in English with the

word “ownshuck.” The insult, óinseach means fool or idiot, is called into being through English. With O’Nolan, the reader has to *hear* the text and be able to recognize the resonances of the other language and then back translate the words in order to make sense of them. In an English speaking court, serving a bilingual population, the necessity for understanding across languages is crucial and na gCopaleen exposes the limits and the problems of miscommunication in such a legal setting. While the Irish subject is at the center of the witticism, the hero of this episode, his body is the mercy of the court and his freedom depends on the judge’s ruling.

Once O’Nolan has set up this pun, he reuses the strategy later in the article, but this time in Latin. The court has decided to let the defendant go free. “The Sergeant, having consulted with the Justice, said that he was prepared, on behalf of the State, to enter a *nolly prossy coy*. That would withdraw all charges” (153). The Latin phrase would be “*nolle prosequi*”- “we shall no longer prosecute.” Here the meaning is clear through the context of the sentence without a translation and the phrase is italicized in the text to call attention to it, in a way that the Irish was not. Latin, the root language of the judicial system in English becomes intertwined with English and Irish as the punning strategy implicates them all at once. When the defendant speaks Latin, it is also in italics, but is not spelled phonetically. The only time this italicized, phonetic form occurs is when the court officials attempt to use Latin. *Nolle presequi* is actually a judicial phrase, but it is corrupted here in a distortion of language. These kinds of dexterous language maneuvers reaffirm the deep connection between the aural, the oral, and the written in O’Nolan’s work. Although O’Nolan uses printed writing, a primarily visual medium, as his tool, the

aural is pivotal in gaining access to his works, whether that be through visual/oral puns like these, cadence, or double entendre, the ear is just as vital as the eye.

Although O’Nolan wrote these columns under the Myles na gCopaleen pseudonym, these pieces contain elements that provide a continuity across pseudonyms and that connect the works to each other. The most obvious connection between the column and the novel is the name Cruiskeen, an anglicized version of the Irish word “cruiscín,” often translated as little jug. It is also a reference to a measurement of whiskey; one might have a pint of beer or a cruiscín of whiskey. The word also carries with it the resonances of the folksong “Cruiscin Lan” that sings the praises of whiskey and jovial debauchery.⁸² Therefore, *The Third Policeman*’s Sergeant MacCruiskeen is “son of the full jug” a son of debauchery, or created from drunkenness. The last name also gives the Sergeant a hereditary link to the columns, born out of the experiments in the press. More significantly, O’Nolan has also used cruiskeen as a word for jail, similar to the English expression “in the clink.”⁸³

The name Myles na gCopaleen is itself a reclaiming of Irish stereotypes as the name comes from an 1860 Dion Boucicault play *The Colleen Bawn* (a title that coincidentally rhymes with Cruiskeen Lawn). Myles is a blundering and occasionally witty main character who represents the worst of Irish stereotypes for British audiences at

⁸² In the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*, Joyce uses this term with the same anglicized spelling as O’Nolan in his description of the citizen: “There he is, says I, in his gloryhole, with his cruiskeen lawn and his load of papers, working for the cause” (12.122). The citizen is coded in the Linati schema as the representation of a Fenian nationalist and perhaps a parodic inspiration for this Irish language column.

⁸³ In *Myles na Gaeilge* Brendan Ó Conaire cites some of the expurgated passages from *An Béal Bocht*...[in which] the old grey fellow tells Bónapárt that his father is ‘sa chrúiscín (in the jug) Bónapárt peers into the jug, hoping for a glimpse of the man who sired him. This is a prime example of the multi-dimensional, linguistic power of a bilingual writer. The ‘jug’ is an English slang word for prison, but the same does not hold true in Irish.” (Farnon 96)

a time when the Irish are in the midst of famine and real suffering at home (Kiberd 497). In reclaiming this name that had been co-opted for foreign consumption, O’Nolan defends the image and representation of the Irish through his satire of these misappropriations. His parody is a take down of some of these stereotypes written in Irish for an Irish audience. The word “cruiscín” connects Myles na gCopaleen the column writer, with Myles na gCopaleen the Irish speaking author of *An Béal Bocht* and Flann O’Brien the writer of novels including *The Third Policeman*. Sergeant MacCruiskeen takes on the same linguistic trickery as the court officials of the District Court and oversees the jails of the Parish. These similarities expose a continuity across O’Nolan’s pseudonyms and works to reveal a more cohesive literary universe than typically ascribed to O’Nolan’s expansive career.

The Third Policeman though not utilizing Irish in the same way as the texts written under the Myles na gCopaleen pseudonym, enacts the same obfuscation of language as a satirical critique of de Valera’s nation building policies. Here, O’Nolan takes the Irish orifice to its furthest extremes, testing the boundaries of language and the powers of speech. In the surreal space of the novel, he turns language into a weapon that can both be used as evidence in the judicial system and as a physical source of energy in supply of the state through mystical machinery. In doing so, O’Nolan ties speech to the power of the security state. When speech can very literally be held against you, and when the policemen of this surreal world are always listening, recorded speech becomes a weapon of the state and makes the citizen a target of constant surveillance.

Though the novel has dark undercurrents and an unnerving tone, *The Third Policeman* is first and foremost a work of humor. As Keith Booker explains, this text is

an example of a Menippean satire that “employs fantastic imagery and situations in order to create extraordinary situations for the testing of philosophical ideas” (46). O’Nolan creates the space for fantastic situations by placing his narrator in a surreal afterlife. The unnamed narrator is an inept scholar who spends his life working on a definitive codex for the work of de Selby, an eccentric philosopher. In his concentration, he shirks the duties of his own life and falls victim to a con man, Divney, who convinces him to rob and murder his neighbor, Old Mathers, for the money to publish the Codex. Divney double crosses him and booby-traps the cashbox to explode, killing the narrator. Although neither the narrator, nor the reader, will realize he has died until the end of the novel, the book is told posthumously as he wanders a hellscape referred to as “the Parish” guarded by three strange policemen. In this dream space, neither social nor physical laws hold and the narrator must shift his modes of thinking to accommodate the twisted laws and logic of this place. While Booker contends that O’Nolan’s satire is aimed at the failures of modern epistemologies, I argue that it also satirizes the ineptitudes of the Irish government in this era, drawing the satire out from an enclosed search for philosophical Truth and into contemporary political contentions. In a world where the laws of physics and creation are mutable, speech becomes both a powerful weapon and a serious liability.

Throughout his surreal journey through the afterlife, the narrator’s ability to speak keeps him grounded and provides him with a sense of security in his own existence. When the narrator awakes in the Parish everything seems familiar yet the change is “indescribably subtle, yet momentous, ineffable” (23); the colors appear too saturated and the air feels more rarified. In this world, the man the narrator murdered is sitting before

him, alive, and nothing quite makes sense. He only recovers the facility of his senses once he begins to speak and to hear the sound of his own voice.

Suddenly I began to talk. Words spilled out of me as if they were produced by machinery. My voice, tremulous at first, grew loud and filled the whole room. I do not remember what I said at the beginning. I am sure that most of it was meaningless but I was too pleased and reassured at the natural healthy noise of my tongue to be concerned about the words. (26)

His speech begins mechanically as if produced automatically. It is only when he begins to regain control of his own voice and his words, that he recovers his sense of self and of reality. The words themselves are less important than hearing himself utter human sounds; the more human the sound, the more at ease he feels. Here the Irish orifice gives him confidence and the self-assurance to navigate this new world. This initial moment in the Parish marks an emerging pattern in the novel, in which speaking is not only key to maintaining a sense of orientation, but also to regulating the boundaries of this world.

The power of the voice to function as a reminder of the narrator's humanity returns in moments when the surreal rules of this hellscape stretch beyond simple human understanding. The laws of physics do not function as they do in the reader's world. Here they are bent and twisted beyond human logic, yet familiar in their base analyses. The narrator feels compelled to find the police station as a sort of safe haven. He hopes the police will help him recover what he has lost. While in his addled, newly dead brain, he thinks he has lost his watch, what he actually needs help finding is his home and his identity. Yet, the police are no solace. At the station, he discovers they have nothing to offer but insane machinery and nonsensical explanations in the face of which he needs to

search deeply for his own humanity in order to stay focused and centered. The sound of his own voice singing is all that keeps him sane.

The officer who shares his name with Myles' column, Policeman MacCruiskeen, is a tinkerer. He has created a number of inventions that demonstrate the strange capacities of this world, one of which is a series of carved chests that stack like Russian dolls, each one holds a slightly smaller version of itself. Instead of stopping at just five or six, there are twenty-nine of MacCruiskeen's chests the smallest of which is so small it cannot be seen by the human eye. Confronted with this dizzying logic after observing the chests, the narrator finds solace in singing an old familiar song. "I gave him back the glass instrument and took to the chair without a word. In order to reassure myself and make a loud human noise I whistled the Corncrake Plays the Bagpipes" (74). Though no such song exists, its title recalls a children's song or an old ballad, something nostalgic that would bring thoughts of home. At this point, any loud sound will do, the more human the better. As reality becomes stranger and stranger, the narrator must retreat to the depths of language to find his center.

The narrator's refuge into song reflects a deep connection to language as the most human as expression, that links him to a history of humans beyond his own immediate condition. This sentiment has roots in the Enlightenment philosophies of Condillac and Rousseau who mark song as the most originary of all human language. According to Rousseau, song reaches back beyond human speech to its origins in emotive, passionate cries.

With the first voices came the first articulations or sounds formed
according to the respective passions that dictated them... Thus rhythm and

sounds are born with syllables: all voices speak under the influence of passion, which adorns them with all their éclat. Thus verse, singing, and speech have a common origin...the first discourses were the first songs.

(50)

Rousseau's speculative origin of man dictates that the first human words are formed from impassioned pleas of pain, desire, or need. Song differentiates these sounds from those of inarticulate animals who cannot turn these sounds into the larger framework of formal language. In the narrator's journey through the afterlife, he returns to the beginning of the history of speech to find meaning. If no other laws of nature hold true, travelling back to the origins of man is one of his few recourses. For him, this is an instinctual act. Talking to himself does not work, and in light of even more perplexing details of this world he moves even further back in time to access a more direct root emotion.

Yet, O'Nolan removes even this bit of solace for the narrator when song itself is no longer accessible to him. Slowly torturing the narrator through his logical conundrums and mystical machines, MacCruiskeen shows the narrator his device that looks like a tiny piano that plays notes outside the realm of human hearing. Only MacCruiskeen can hear its music and in this scenario, the absence of human sound becomes extremely unsettling to the narrator:

[MacCruiskeen] got up and went to the dresser and took out his patent music-box which made sounds too esoterically rarefied to be audible to anybody but himself...What he was playing could be roughly inferred from his face...The silence in the room was so unusually quiet that the

beginning of it seemed rather loud when the utter stillness of the end of it had been encountered. (105)

The image of a gargantuan policeman tapping his feet to what the narrator imagines as “obstreperous barn-songs and gusty shanties of the sea and burly roaring marching-songs” (105) without any sound is an eerie one. The silence becomes nearly audible in the absence of any other noise and creates an unsettling atmosphere in which the narrator’s typical retreat to voice or song is rendered useless. In his role as a policeman, MacCruiskeen has access to classified information of sorts. He knows the limits of what is possible in the Parish and has a better command of the rules and regulations than the narrator. In his musical performance, he has taken this last refuge of sound out of the hands of the narrator. Song can no longer be reassuring if those notes are sung or played in a range beyond hearing.

In *The Third Policeman*, the reliance on the ear when all other elements of logic fail reinforces the archaic nature of speech. Yet, in this world of storytelling, everyone lies. O’Nolan’s world is full of conmen, criminals, and policemen. Strangely, the only other voice that the narrator can rely on is that of his own soul. This soul takes the form of a disembodied voice that acts as a guide for the narrator, urging him to listen to the clues around him and warning him of potential dangers. This voice, one he has never heard before, comes from nowhere and is dislocated from a physical being.

Never before had I believed or suspected I had a soul, but just then I knew I had. I knew that my soul was friendly, was my senior in years and was solely concerned for my own welfare. For convenience I called him Joe. I

felt a little reassured to know that I was not altogether alone. Joe was helping me. (25)

Joe knows more about what is happening than the narrator and is more “senior in years.” Joe is a source of comfort who provides the narrator with a sense of place and connection across time. His voice rings clearly through the chaos and although Joe has no physical presence, through his voice he feels more “real” to the narrator than any of the other elements in this world. As the narrator attempts his first conversation in the Parish, Joe leads him through it, telling him to “listen very carefully” and “ask him to continue” (*TP* 29). He helps the narrator determine the boundaries of the world and to adjust his thinking, prodding him to “use his imagination” when logic fails him.

As the narrator becomes more at home in the hellscape, he begins to question the nature of this world including the Joe’s possible physical composition. Now that he has a basic conception of how this universe operates, he can begin to look critically at its components. The narrator ponders what his existence would be if Joe had a physical presence of his own.

What if he *had* a body? A body with another body inside of it in turn thousands of such bodies within each other like skins of an onion receding to some unimaginable ultimatum? Was I in turn merely a link in a vast sequence of imponderable beings, the world I know merely the interior of the being whose inner voice I myself was? Who or what was at the core colossus? God? Nothing? (*TP* 118)

Each “soul” can only directly interact with the next closest in the chain. The thought is at once terrifying to the narrator and awesome. He experiences simultaneously a feeling of

interconnectedness and a sense of vertigo as he strains to grasp the enormity of his newfound postulate. For the reader, Joe's voice is the first clue that the narrator is actually dead at this point of the novel. In death the narrator has been granted access to information about the imponderables of the universe and gains a much vaster perspective than afforded him in life, and Joe is his conduit for this information.

The implication of these multiple voices is that they belong to a longer unending chain of voices. The voice is a guide that keeps the narrator focused on his own being and establishes a sense of reality. In this dependence on hearing his own voice for reassurance, the text re-establishes the importance of the individual voice and presence that is missing in the wake of recording technologies and modern surveillance. The ability to maintain the cohesion between body and voice is not guaranteed in this world, a place where the voice can be recorded, kept and used against the speaker. In the Parish, the precious nature of the unique utterance, the ability to maintain the connection between the speaker and the utterance, warrants protection. In order to alleviate the possibility of words being used against the speaker, he must take care in the words he uses and in whose company they are uttered. The interplay between the police who guard the surreal world and the accused narrator navigates the space between personal identity and state identity through the security state's instrumentalization of the voice.

The chain of narrative voices/souls mirrors the themes of serialism at the core of the novel is based on the actual Anglo-Irish philosopher J.W. Dunne's slightly eccentric theories of infinite regress and serialism published in his 1934 work *The Serial Universe*. According to Victoria Stewart, Dunne's ideas come at a crucial point in history between the two wars when memories of the recent atrocities and unprecedented death tolls of

World War I combine with an anxiety about what the future would bring; Dunne's philosophy functions as a welcome respite from these anxieties (62). Though Dunne is little studied today, Stewart contends that he was widely read in his era and had a major influence on the literary circles of the time, evident in the work of writers as different as H.G. Wells, O'Brien and even Jorge Luis Borges. To the literary community at the time what Dunne's importance is not necessarily in the accuracy, or philosophical truth of his theories, but instead in their imaginative possibilities (Stewart 76). Dunne's theories have a strange and beautiful optimism. In Dunne's universe, the future is no longer a place where people simply live and die erased from the world in "an indifferently gilded execution chamber, replenished continually with new victims" (Dunne 33). His theories absolve his audience from the horror of a finite world in which everything is meaningless and insignificant. A universe of layered consciousnesses and multiple relative times re-establishes these "victims" as vital parts of an infinite web of existence.

The literary implications of this freedom from a linear time that ends in death reach much further than the British Isles. Borges writes of Dunne's play with infinity in his essay "Time and J.W. Dunne," which acknowledges the logical faults of Dunne's ideas, but is attracted to his notions of time coalescing after death:

Theologians define eternity as the lucid and simultaneous possession of all instants of time, and declare it a divine attribute...Dunne assures us that in death we shall finally learn how to handle eternity. We shall recover all the moments of our lives and combine them how we please...So splendid a thesis, makes any fallacy committed by the author insignificant. (219)

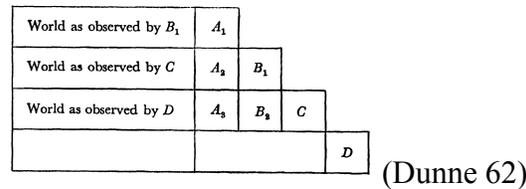
In Borges's view, Dunne offers a conception of the universe that can be known to us in death, when all images become clear, ordered, and at our fingertips. Time becomes unified and we can combine the elements as we like. It would be hard to deny the appeal of a thesis that allows for the glorious power to rearrange the events of one's whole life as one sees fit, and as Borges notes, this appeal more than makes up for any logical errors that might form the basis of this theory. With Dunne's theory in mind, we recognize that in *The Third Policeman* the narrator creates the Parish from the pieces of his own life, ordered by de Selbian notions of time and space. He has recreated the world in the image of his idol.

Dunne thinks of time and space as matters of perspective and believes that in order to conceptualize self, one must also be able to conceptualize a being outside of self:

We are self-conscious creatures aware of something which we are able to regard as other than ourselves. That is a condition of affairs which it is impossible to treat as rational (i.e., systematic) except by exhibiting it in the form of an infinite regress...The notion of absolute time is a pure regress. Its employment results in exhibiting us as self-conscious observers. It introduces the notion of 'change' allotting to us the ability to initiate changes in a change-resisting 'not-self'. It treats the self-conscious observer as regressive, and it describes the external world as it would appear to such a regressive individual. (34-35)

This complicated system requires a self and a simultaneous recognition of a 'not self'. If for instance person A is aware of person B, person B is then necessarily aware of C. Then

from A's perspective both B and C exist, while B does not know of A. Dunne uses the following diagram to represent this phenomenon:



There is an endless chain of observers that expands backwards and forwards infinitely from a single being. In turn, his structure implies not just infinite observers, but infinite levels of consciousness. Like MacCruiskeen's boxes in *The Third Policeman*, the possibility for existence stretches out presupposing that for every box there is a larger one and one even smaller. Taking this theory to its end point requires stretching this timeline both forward and backward infinitely. At the furthest reaches of this spectrum, the objects or selves are beyond the finite understanding of the human senses.

O'Nolan parodies Dunne in *The Third Policeman* through the narrator's sustained analysis of de Selby, a fictional philosopher whose Codex the narrator tries to publish. It is evident from the narrator's comments about de Selby that his philosophies exist on the fringe of accepted modes of thinking, and challenge beliefs in both science and philosophy. De Selby's theory of motion is a strange refutation of Dunne's theories of serialism and an extreme representation of Xeno's paradox. After seeing a motion picture, and by seeing he means looking at the physical film reel frame by frame, de Selby comes to believe that motion itself is an illusion. Instead he sees motion as "resting for infinitely brief intervals in innumerable intermediate places" (*TP* 50) and attributes the illusion of progression to "the inability of the human brain – as it is present developed—to appreciate the reality of these separate 'rests', preferring to group many

millions of them together and calling the result motion” (*TP* 51). De Selby has the unique ability to rely solely on his own observations of the world as sources of truth while denying any other interpretation of events. Even the narrator, one of De Selby’s most avid followers, finds “it a curious enigma that so great a mind would question the most obvious realities and object even to things scientifically demonstrated (such as the sequence of day and night) while believing absolutely in his own fantastic explanations of the same phenomena” (52). Although in these moments, the narrator is skeptical of de Selby’s findings, he is so obsessively devoted to researching de Selby’s philosophies that these very theories give structure to the narrator’s hell where de Selby’s odd theories hold true.

Given Dunne’s view of the afterlife as a space accessible to us in dreams, and that we reconstruct the moments of our lives in the manner of our choosing, the narrator’s life has been filled with violence, criminality and correctional facilities. In the narrator’s description of the world of de Selbian scholarship, it becomes clear that following de Selby’s theories and epistemologies has a tendency to lead to prison time. O’Nolan represents this blind obedience to failed doctrines through a series of de Selby scholars. Like a scholarly work of criticism, the narrator cites the work of other de Selby scholars weaving together their threads of analysis with this own. Their thoughts are incorporated into lengthy footnotes that span pages of the book creating, at times, a separate storyline that runs concurrent to the main one in the narrator’s hellscape. Also, like the narrator, these de Selby critics find themselves in complicated situations as a result of their scholarship. One scholar, Hatchjaw, is arrested in a hotel after a scandal in which he accused another critic, Kraus, of forgery (118). Hatchjaw later goes on a crusade to

apprehend the false critic and heads abroad heavily armed and prepared for a cataclysmic erasure of this corruption from the literary world. Some reports suggest that Hatchjaw is unsuccessful in this quest, but is arrested for “impersonating himself” on the continent (171). Philosophy is what sends Hatchjaw, and the narrator, to prison. Those who buy into this alternate epistemology based on hearsay, shoddy observations, and the denial of truths affront the structures of the modern state that finds its strength in reason and logic. The power of de Selby’s writing and his speech are enough to create action, and these actions always result in incarceration. In the modern security state, prison is the only method for handling these rogues.

The threat of incarceration was not an imagined one in the context of Ireland’s politics at the time. On the brink of World War II, the IRA seizes the opportunity to put pressure on an already distracted British government. In an effort to contain these forces and preserve the power of new Irish Constitution enacted in 1937, Eamon de Valera pushes the “Offences Against the State Bill” through the Dáil in 1939 (Dickson 29). This bill severely restricts the civil liberties of defendants and provides wide-reaching powers to the Gardá, the Irish police, particularly against those who refused to recognize the government as legitimate and those identified as belonging to paramilitary forces. Refusal to speak, refusing to recognize the authority of the government and providing false information to police are key tenets in the bill’s 52 sections. It grants the Gardá the right under a search warrant to “(a) demand the name and address of any person found in the building or other place named in such warrant, and (b) arrest without warrant any such person who refuses to give his name and address, or gives a false name or a false address” (Oireachtas 1939 3a-3b). After an arrest of this sort, anyone who should “fail or

refuse to give his name and address or shall give, in response to any such demand, a name or an address which is false or misleading shall be guilty of an offence under this section and shall be liable on summary conviction thereof to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months” (Oireachtas 1939 6). The bill receives harsh criticism both at home and abroad as a repressive measure and just a year after its enactment, parts of the bill were ruled unconstitutional for violating the separation of powers granted in the constitution (Dickson 30). The rest of the bill and subsequent versions of it were not officially repealed until 2004 (Oireachtas 2004). O’Nolan is writing during this era of political turmoil in which speech has taken on serious political consequences. In this atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia, the figure of larger than life, all-knowing police officers is not simply an exercise in the absurd, but a heavy satire of Ireland’s restrictive web of political and criminal justice.

In order to evade the state, many of the inhabitants of the Parish have developed odd habits of speech that allow them to get as much information out of others as possible without revealing anything themselves. As Hugh Kenner notes, “The only social relationships that obtain are defraudment and persecution; those suffice, it seems, to propel a plausible cosmos.” (“Fourth” 100). As such, MacCruiskeen has a set of rules for wisdom and two of them focus on speaking. As he explains to the narrator: “Always ask any questions that are to be asked and never answer any. Turn everything you hear to your own advantage” (60). While his other rules apply to proper bicycle safety, these two mark the importance of listening and the dangers of speaking. In this world, philology is king. Whatever is spoken here can be used and turned against the speaker. As Joe, the narrator’s disembodied soul warns, “Apparently there is no limit...Anything can be said

in this place and it will be true and will have to be believed” (86). The creative force of speech perpetually builds and shapes the limits of this world; with each new utterance, the world expands.

In the Parish, all utterances are what J.L. Austin calls speech acts. In Austin’s definition, a “performative utterance” enacts something in the real world. Typically, the utterance has to occur in the appropriate setting in order for it to have an active force, as saying, “I do” in a dentist’s office would not have the same effect as it would in a marriage ceremony, thereby nullifying its ability to create action. In the Parish, however, there are no rules for when and how the performative is pronounced. The physical boundaries of the Parish are mutable, as the world is bounded by *omnium*, a substance that can create anything. If for instance, a speaker wants one hundred pounds of jam, in the presence of *omnium* it will appear. If it can be spoken, it is possible, and with innumerable speakers, there is no end to the fluctuations and iterations in the boundaries of the hellscape. In the Parish, language creates the boundaries and purposeful obfuscation at the hands of the police and of philosophers leads to dire circumstances for the body that is acted upon. When the individual is not privy to the linguistic rules he is at the mercy of the system. The text reaffirms the necessity of linguistic precision and exposes the dangers of sloppy thinking through taking whatever is said here to its most literal extreme (Clissman 216). If whatever is said becomes real, then those who speak have a responsibility to speak with caution and to mitigate the consequences of their utterances. Without that linguistic contract, chaos ensues. Without physical limitations and with the power to create from nothing, all speech becomes performative under

Austin's definition. The context no longer matters because all speech acts can generate a physical manifestation.

The inhabitants of this world are more adept at limiting their speech, and therefore, the actions associated with their words. MacCruiskeen's aphorisms are similar to Old Mathers' peculiar speech patterns. The Mathers of the hellscape has developed a method of speaking that thwarts the iterative power of language. He responds to all inquiries and requests in the negative. Communicating with him requires understanding his compulsion and asking him questions in a way that allows him to respond with more than a simple no. His refusal to answer functions like MacCruiskeen's rules as a way to avoid divulging information and is a mode of protection others' manipulation. He decides "everything you do is in response to a request or a suggestion made to you by some other party either inside you or outside" (30). Since, in his estimation, the majority of these requests are either sinful or simply bad ideas, he has learned to respond 'no' to everything he is asked. By defaulting to a simple true/false dichotomy Mathers refuses to participate in the performative speech act. He retains his own power as an individual agent who avoids entrapment in the speech acts of others. This defensive manner of speaking reveals a deep mistrust for those around him, or perhaps a deeper familiarity with the structures of speech in this world.

His suspicions are not unfounded. In the world of the policemen, voice can be manipulated both physically and rhetorically. Here, the voice is not only rarified and removed from human hearing, but is also instrumentalized as an energy source to fuel the police station. In an odd twist of contemporary notions of physics, the policemen capture

sound and run it through a mangle to “stretch it out” into energy, as MacCruiskeen explains:

Light is the same omnium on a short wave but if it comes on a longer wave it is in the form of noise, or sound. With my own patents I can stretch a ray out until it becomes sound... And when I have a shout shut in that box with the wires, I can squeeze it till I get heat and you would not believe the convenience of it all in the winter... The box is full of noise. Myself and the Sergeant spend our spare time in the summer collecting noises so that we can have light and heat for our official life in the dark winter. That is why the light is going up and down. Some of the noises are noisier than the others and the pair of us will be blinded if we come to the time when the quarry was working last September. (110)

With the help of the policemen’s machine, light can be converted to sound and vice versa. Much like Lugones’ destructive Omega Force, with this device light, sound and heat are collapsed into one single form of energy. In capturing voices, recording them in essence, the policemen are able to both to turn those voices into energy, and to stretch out light to recreate the original speech or sound that was collected. The fluid movement between forms allows the policemen to utilize all forms of energy to their own ends, regulating and defining the terms of the system. The morphing of the rules of physics renders all speech as the potential property of the realm. Everything can be overheard, collected, stored, and utilized. The familiar “everything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law,” in American Miranda rights, is in this world terrifyingly

true. Words are not only evidence collected at all times and without the speaker's knowledge, but they also serve as energy to literally fuel the state.

The "recordings" from MacCruiskeen's mangle do, in fact, hold evidence against the narrator and has captured the moment of Old Mathers' murder. As MacCruiskeen stretches out the sound and begins to decipher what the original words might be, the narrator experiences an extremely unsettling moment as he realizes the crime he has committed in his own world has followed him to the Parish. The hellscape is a distorted version of the narrator's reality. He has arrived here after committing a murder and the hellscape is, presumably, his punishment. It is not a parallel universe to the narrator's, but rather a layered one with points of contact to the other. Therefore, the scene in which MacCruiskeen stretches out light into sound, doubles the moment the narrator kills Old Mathers in the "real" world.

As he lies dying, Old Mathers mutters something that the narrator can't quite make out: "As he collapsed full-length in the mud he did not cry out. Instead, I heard him say something softly in a conversational tone—something like 'I do not care for celery' or 'I left my glasses in the scullery'. Then he lay very still" (16). In the background, Divney yells at him to "finish him with the spade" (16). When this scene is replayed in the hellscape, MacCruiskeen turns the handle of the mangle until "the light seemed to burst and disappear and simultaneously there was a loud shout in the room, a shout which could not have come from a human throat" (107). The officer asks the narrator to try to guess the contents of the horrifying scream. In the same way he had tried to decipher Old Mathers' last words, here he tries to make out what might be contained in this packet of sound:

I could not be sure what it was but several phrases sprang into my head together and each of them could have been the contents of the shout. They bore an eerie resemblance to commonplace shouts I had often heard such as *Change for Tinahely and Shillelagh! Two to one the field! Mind the step! Finish him off!* I knew, however, that the shout could not be so foolish and trivial because it disturbed me in a way that could only be done by something momentous and diabolical. (108)

Though the narrator cannot decipher the layers of energy, the phrase “finish him off” recalls the scene with Old Mathers. He does not, or cannot, explicitly link the two incidents together, but the phrases carry more resonance for him than bits of half remembered remarks. His own guilt combined with the terror of being found guilty of his crimes lies at the base of his deep disturbance. To hear Divney’s words echoed back to him is unsettling enough, but to also hear them recounted in a police station where confessing to this act would prove dangerous is far worse. In this world, Old Mathers has been murdered, but not by the narrator. Nonetheless, the police have determined that he must hang for the crime. In the real world he has gotten away with the murder, here he will suffer the consequences. This doubling acts as a structural element in the narrative, serving as connecting moment in the text and signaling the inescapability of this world. While the narrator thinks he has been cunning and has kept his secret, here all is already known through the hyper-surveillance of the police, an ominous rendering of the omnipresence of the security state.

In O’Nolan’s Ireland suspicion, and deep mistrust are part of the culture. By the twentieth century, Ireland has one of the most elaborate nationwide prison systems in

Europe. Beginning in 1815, while Ireland is still under British rule, the British begin a wide scale effort in constructing a penal system in Ireland to contain an “unruly” Irish population; the extent to which was unprecedented on the continent. After the partition, many of these tactics remain in place. “The techniques of surveillance, incarceration and interrogation, enabled by the Special Powers Act that had been in force in Northern Ireland virtually continuously since its foundation, heralded the gradual formation of the ‘strong’ or security state that is increasingly the norm for what were the liberal democracies” (Lloyd 13). The Special Powers Act of 1923 operates to contain IRA factions who are opposed to the partition of Ireland and refuse to accept any nation but a unified one. In order to quell violence in Northern Ireland, the Special Powers Act authorizes the police to use broad authority to arrest, detain and imprison a suspect for “not preserving peace or maintaining order” (Hancock). This phrasing is open enough for broad and sweeping interpretations, and the Act’s provisions allow for wide authority in searches and seizure, censorship and detention without warrants or trials. Enforcement of the legislation remains in the hands of the Royal Ulster Constabulary a primarily Protestant force authorized to carry heavy weaponry, and who are known for targeting Catholic citizens (Hancock). Though this Act affects mainly Northern Ireland, the politics of the two countries are deeply intertwined and the Act remained in place until 1974.

Interrogation and surveillance were common practices that made the oral, and therefore the aural, space a “counter-space of modernity” (Lloyd, 15) in which speaking, or not speaking, is a mode of resistance. As David Lloyd explains, the use of language, particularly Irish, and the culture it carries with it, threatens the precarious unity of the Republic. Lloyd cites Henri Lefebvre’s definition of counter-space in relation to Irish

orality and the prison system. For Lefebvre “a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality: against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power, against the endless expansion of the “private” and of industrial profitability” (qtd. in Lloyd 12). As de Valera’s penal system intensified around the containment of dissidents and political prisoners, orality marks a site of resistance that even the prison cannot close.

The undertones of interrogation are evident throughout the novel in the construction of energy. Through omnium, the police have total control of this world. Their main job is to investigate stolen bicycles, yet by the end of the novel it becomes clear that the officers themselves have orchestrated these thefts. The standard tenets of law are inverted and there is no possibility of justice when the laws and regulations are obscured. The possession of the sounds, stories, and speech of the populace allows the police always to be one step ahead of any potential perpetrator. They need no admission of guilt, as they always already have the evidence for crime in hand in the form of the “criminal’s” own words. At the same time, the police have a particular concern with the identities of the inhabitants of the Parish. Their obsession with cataloging and monitoring translates to a need to inscribe citizens into their structure. This impulse is of particular consequence for the narrator who, as condition of his untimely death, no longer remembers his name. When he first awakens in this new world, the narrator asks Old Mathers for the cashbox, to which Mathers responds by asking his name. Since the narrator has no name, Mathers is perplexed as to how to turn over such an item to him. “Then how could I tell you where the box was if you could not sign a receipt? That would be most irregular. I might as well give it to the west wind or to the smoke from a pipe.

How could you execute Bank documents?” (31). Without a name, a definition within the system, he does not exist. He is invisible and under erasure. Anonymity on the one hand, offers a protection from the Parish’s justice system in that even if he is recorded and watched, without being inscribed and catalogued there is no official “person” to link to the crime.

Paradoxically, since the narrator technically does not exist for the police, he then can be guilty of all things unexplained and they can inflict any punishment they want on him, since without an identity, “no one” would be punished. “The policemen,” Kenner explains “are not cogs in some larger machinery of justice, a-clatter with courts and magistrates, lawyers and jailers. No, they are the machinery of justice in a cosmos that has regard for only two things, bicycles and documented identities” (“Fourth” 100). The narrator’s inability to document his own existence poses a problem for the officers when they condemn him to hang for Mathers’ death. Since he cannot remember the basic details of his former life and there is no way to verify his identity, he asks the police if they can actually hang an anonymous defendant.

‘It is true,’ [MacCruiskeen] said, ‘that you cannot commit a crime and that the right arm of the law cannot lay its finger on you irrespective of the degree of your criminality. Anything you do is a lie and nothing that happens to you is true[...]

For that reason alone,’ said the Sergeant, ‘we can take you and hang the life out of you and you are not hanged at all and there is no entry to be made in the death papers. The particular death you die is not even a death...only an insanitary abstraction in the backyard, a piece of negative

nullity neutralized and rendered void by asphyxiation and the fracture of spinal string. (102)

The operating principle of the justice system in this world does not depend on any concept of guilt or innocence. Rather than shield him from wrongful conviction, the stripping of the narrator's individuality allows the police to prosecute him with abandon. The pseudo-legal jargon in the last sentence of the passage satirizes the ability of the legal system to manipulate its operations for its own benefits by hiding behind obscure regulations and bylaws. If one follows the twisted logic here, then because the narrator cannot verify his identity, the validity of his statements can also not be assessed. Therefore, anything he says must be a lie. If he has no name, he is not a person and if he is not a person, there is no body on which to inflict punishment. Since he does not officially exist, his hanging, and therefore his death, cannot be recorded, effectively erasing and denying any trace of his existence. Participation in this world requires a name, the ability to be transcribed and encoded into the system. The refusal, or the inability, to be identified as a participant in this society results in erasure from the structure of the police state.

In the Parish, Fox is the highest ranking official and the one with control of the omnium, and therefore the ability to erase or encode anything into the system. Fox's explanation of the inner workings of the Parish becomes the object of O'Nolan's sharpest satire. Fox is absent for much of the novel and the only trace of his presence is through notes he leaves at the station for the other officers. His existence as text rather than speech allows him the flexibility and the freedom to move about this world unfettered. He is the extreme example of Mathers who answers "no" to all questions. Fox goes one

step further in not speaking at all, leaving him impervious to the linguistic manipulations of this world. His invisibility and inaudibility grant him a mysterious presence outside the grasp of the other policemen. The inability to know him makes him dangerous. When the others speak of him it is in hushed tones as if he might appear at any moment. When the narrator finally meets him, these fears are justified as he learns that Fox controls all of the omnium, the element that orders the world. He creates the conditions for the reality of the world including the tasks for the two other policemen. While those two occupy themselves with small inventions and regulating the complicated dials and registers that keep the world running, Fox is behind it all from his semi-omniscient position. Yet, the narrator quickly sees that for all his power, Fox is amazingly shortsighted:

I could not help smiling at him, not, indeed, without some pity. It was clear that he was not the sort of person to be trusted with the contents of the black box. His oafish underground invention was the product of a mind which fed upon adventure books of small boys, books in which every extravagance was mechanical and lethal and solely concerned with bring about somebody's death in the most imaginable way possible. (190)

While the narrator imagines the limitless possibilities for omnium, Fox is only able to come up with the most puerile ideas. Not a great mastermind, or political genius, he is simply a man who found himself in charge and in possession of this power. Fox, as the holder of omnium, becomes divine. Once the narrator gains a sense of order, he can recognize the world for what it is, arbitrary and manipulated by a dictator of sorts who enjoys watching the other inhabitants scramble to fulfill the monotonous duties of maintaining the state/parish.

Under these political circumstances, evasion becomes standard practice. O’Nolan figures this character, who holds the highest level of knowledge in the Parish and is the one who can explain the inner workings of the structure of the hellscape, as a “world champion gawm,” an idiot. Because he writes the rules, however, it matters not if the rules are smart, or just, or real, only that everyone in his jurisdiction must follow them. Through Fox, the narrator learns that his entire journey was unnecessary as his search for Mathers’ cashbox was a futile one. Fox had taken possession of it “in virtue of section 16 of the act of ’87 as extended and amended” and had sent the cashbox back to the narrator, its rightful owner, and delivered it to his house. All he had to do, presumably, was ask Fox the right question and the world was his. Without access to any part of the “act of ‘87” or any idea what might be included in section 16, the narrator is unable to effectively navigate this world and embarks on an entirely useless journey.

Semantics holds the key to access and political participation. Locked out of these paths through legal obfuscation and wrongful accusations, the narrator is at the mercy of this system in the same way that an Irish citizen of this era has to renegotiate the familiar spaces of a now decolonized territory. Nation building overwrites the colonial history, re-inscribing its own terms over the colonizer’s maps, laws, and narratives. The average citizen then, is in the same position as the narrator forced to traverse the familiar yet renamed and reclaimed spaces under a new set of hierarchies that is terrifyingly similar to the ones that came before, re-experiencing the same atrocities now committed by a native hand. This satire reveals this uncanny terror drawing on Ireland’s rich history of storytelling and mythology to connect O’Nolan’s current moment with the long history of the Irish people. His intricate language play preserves the cultural oral space while

critiquing attempts to close it through satire. His boisterous writing shows the potential in the Irish language and the Irish mouth for its capabilities beyond the modern security state. With its polyphonic resonances and multilingual play, his work stays one step away from the censors and contains enough surface level humor to placate any audience, while revealing complex system of correspondences and connotations for those who can go with him into Ireland's cultural and linguistic heritage.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In each of these texts, sound plays a crucial role in the development of science and technology. Their grappings with these innovations vary politically and structurally, yet they all exhibit an engagement with rapid advancements and shifts in modes of perception as a result of the intrusion of new technologies. As Ulrika Maude explains,

Twentieth-century literature can be read as a chronicle of the manner in which these auxiliary organs gradually do grow on to us, producing in us a double-perception that differs from earlier modes of perceiving. In tracing this process of internalization, which changes the way in which we see, hear and generally perceive our surroundings, twentieth-century literature and specifically modernist writing, maps the manner in which technology changes our relationship to the world and to ourselves. (“Modernist Bodies” 117)

These texts illustrate a change in the sensorium and in representations of the world. Modernists and Latin America’s vanguard authors open the world to new ways of hearing and seeing that grow alongside of technology. They pave the way for the postmodern experiments in fragmentary and inchoate realities reflective of an even greater distance between the cohesive body and its representation and offer a model for a coping with a new, mechanized, future.

The modernist era offers a unique perspective in that it is immersed in the world of rapidly emerging science, negotiating, adapting and sometimes appropriating scientific discourse. The texts chosen here all show an engagement with this burgeoning world, but

they also trace the voice of the population at large and register the complicated relationship between the individual and the machine. Sound technology marks the beginning of the significant interrelation between body and machine and an increased dependence on machines in daily life. Literary experimentation in this era struggles to find new modes of articulation that can encompass increased, machine-aided perception and the development of complex narrative forms reflect this gap as it appears worldwide. Multiple modernities and modernisms arise from contact with these new modes of perception and shift with the successive arrivals of new technologies as seen after the arrival of cinema and computing. With each new discovery, technology becomes increasingly naturalized as a normal part of life. In the modernist era, technology is not yet fully established itself. Modernists stand on the threshold of this new world illustrate the literary negotiation of the space between technology and the body.

The bevy of new technologies moves beyond the printing press and opens new avenues of mediation and reliance on new technologies. According to media theorist Friedrich Kittler the turn of the 20th century marks a critical moment in the history of technology and man's relation to it:

Once the technological differentiation of optics, acoustics, and writing exploded Gutenberg's writing monopoly around 1880, the fabrication of so-called Man became possible. His essence escapes into apparatuses. Machines take over functions of the central nervous system, and no longer as in times past, merely those of muscles. And with this differentiation- and not with steam engines and railroads- a clear division occurs between matter and information, the real and the symbolic. When it comes to

inventing phonography and cinema, the age-old dreams of humankind are no longer sufficient. The physiology of eyes, ears, and brains have to become objects of scientific research. For mechanized writing to be optimized, one can no longer dream of writing as the expression of individuals or the trace of bodies. The very forms, differences, and frequencies of its letters have to be reduced to formulas. So-called Man is split up unto physiology and information technology. (16)

The key transition here is the movement of technologies from replacing physical labor, the movement of muscles and the performance of work, to replacing mental labor, the mechanical storage of memory. Technologies like the phonograph and cinema now move beyond the singular capacity of the physiology of the human body. These tools extend the possibilities for human experience. Man, as a concept becomes a fundamentally different organism, divided not between body and mind, but physiology and information.

This shift occurs in the same historical moment as modernismo and modernism emerge. If in this moment the age-old dreams are no longer sufficient for a technologized future, cultural production needs to re-imagine what this modern life holds and the modernists and modernistas, feel this shift and understand the old forms of literary expression are not capable of expressing this newly oriented Man. By sampling texts from the beginning and the end of the modernist era, this project examines the advancement of science and sound technologies through a progression of literary responses through this era of change, from a fear of this reassembly of senses and the threat to the notion of human at the beginning of the century, to the realization of those fears in World War II. As these technologies become more prevalent and ubiquitous in

their integration into the daily lives of citizens, literary form becomes more complex, mirroring the advances and alterations to the human sense experience. Shaw and Lugones toy with the potentialities of mechanical interventions into human experience, fearing the loss of human agency and the slippage of the very definition of human. For both authors the fear lies in the disintegration of a cohesive self. The space of the human is a space that should be preserved in light of these technological disruptions and interventions. In their case, the literary expression of this fear is communicated in thematic representations.

Yet for O’Nolan and Torres Bodet, the time for anxiety has already passed. The moment of transition has already happened and Man is already reconfigured. Resistance to this alteration is no longer effective. Therefore, the literary expression of this change also becomes more normalized and is more fully integrated into the form of their writings rather than only in thematic resistance. Torres Bodet expands the textual sensorium to use metaphors not only of sight but also of sound, while also utilizing new concepts of memory aided by machines like the gramophone and guided by telephones, telegrams, and urban technologies. O’Nolan introduces formal features to the text that reflect the disintegration of a cohesive self. His text features bodiless narrators, fictional footnotes and illogical structures of speech and hearing. Both authors are aware of the shifting nature of modern life in relation to technologies. While Torres Bodet’s texts operate as more of an exploration of these topics through form, O’Nolan, writing the latest into the century offers a scathing satire of the dangers of these technologies when they are turned against the citizen.

My approach crosses national boundaries as well as disciplinary ones through technology and sound studies, expanding current methodologies in transnationalist Modernist Studies. Rather than applying an Anglo/American model of modernism to world literature, I employ a comparatist approach that grounds the text in its own context and examines the monumental shifts in literature and art in response to rapid industrialization and mechanization, as a simultaneous, interconnected process. Kittler's moment of transition does not happen in isolation in a single location. Instead, the effects of these technologies are felt on a wider scale as they proliferate and arrive in distinct nations and contexts. Examining this phenomenon from a macro perspective illuminates the cross-currents and cross-fertilizations of media and technology as well as the literary and artistic responses to its arrival.

This dissertation functions as an initial investigation into these narratives of sound and an inroad into theorizing the human voice and its potentialities. Through this research a new connection has emerged between these disparate texts. Many of these authors reference Irish born physicist John Tyndall in their texts, specifically in regards to his work on energy and sound. Although he died in 1893 and was most active in the 1870s and 80s, before the modernist movement, he is mentioned by name in nearly every one of the texts examined here. Though an influential physicist of his time, he is hardly remembered now. The future iteration of this project will further examine his role as a public intellectual and his lasting impact on these modernist writers.

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