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César Moro's Impossible Futures:

L'art de lire l'avenir

Among the luminaries attending the opening of the Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo at the Galería de Arte Mexicano on a Wednesday evening, January 17, 1940 were two foreigners who had organized the exhibit. In one photo the painter Wolfgang Paalen, "saboreando un exquisito 'wiskey,'" poses with three others including Inés Amor—the gallery owner—and Salvador Novo. In another, César Moro inclines slightly toward the camera and smiles, chatting with Elías Nandino and Juan Soriano in a press of black jackets and evening gowns. Nobody in either picture pays the slightest attention to the artworks visible in the backgrounds. Neither does *Excelsior*, where these two photos appeared side-by-side on the second page of the second section, Saturday the 20th. Its review mentions the exhibit itself only as a pretext to chronicle the "brillante acontecimiento social, al que concurrieron las más destacadas personalidades de nuestros círculos artísticos y literarios".

Paalen and Moro, both political émigrés to Mexico, had organized the show along with André Bretón, working from Europe, whose fascination with the country he called the "tierra surrealista por exelencia" had only increased after his lengthy stay there in 1938[1]. The exhibit was an event of signal importance on more than a social level. And to be fair, not every contemporary account ran on the society pages. But even where the artwork takes center stage, it is treated as something less than a legitimate and complex form of expression, rather as a sort of bag of tricks (Schneider, 178). Sometimes the commentaries sank even lower. One chronicler, Roberto Manzanares, singles out works by both Paalen and Moro for sarcastic scorn, perhaps in payback for having inflicted the exhibit on an unsuspecting public. Of Paalen's *Combate de los Príncipes Saturnianos* (1938), he says:

> Él, y nadie más que él, sabrá por qué. Los príncipes peleen denodadamente; no hay más que verlo... Terminarán haciéndose daño, como si estuviesen en las Líneas Siegfrid y Maginot. ¡Qué imprudentes son estos príncipes saturninos, es decir, saturnianos...[2]

He deals harshly with Moro as well. Among the four items the Peruvian exhibited—with two early paintings and a surrealist *objet*—was the collage "L'art de lire l'avenir" (1935), which Manzanares makes fun of rather broadly:

> César Moro titula este maravilloso cuadro suyo, *El Arte de leer el porvenir*. (Unos cerillos apagados, un poco de plomo, unos manchones de pintura y unas cuantas chinchas clavadas en el lienzo), no sabemos lo que el Señor Moro leerá en este cuadro; pero desde luego un psiquiatra también debe leer algo. ¡Palabra de honor!

Though the work Manzanares describes bears little resemblance to Moro's collage (was he remembering an amalgam of the four pieces Moro exhibited?), the question he poses does carry certain validity. What should one read in this assemblage of odd bits? It's not a work that yields itself up immediately to our understanding. We approach the piece expecting to find a clear and deliberate message, for the title has the ring of allegory and sends us off in search of one. Perhaps the title was ironic or arbitrary[3]—reducible, in that case, to a surrealist strategy for questioning artistic conventions and pretensions? One fact argues strongly against such arbitrariness. Moro gave the same title—'L'art de lire l'avenir'—to at least two other works: a second collage[4]; and a poem appearing in his 1942 collection *Le Chateau de Grisou*, most of which he composed in 1940-41 during and just after the Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo. In its imagery the poem appears unrelated to the collages, yet their mutual title challenges us to seek commonalities or to read them, at the very least, as separate episodes in a continuing meditation on common themes.

In this paper, taking a cue from "lire l'avenir", I view two of these works as rather cynical statements on the condition of the individual—that is, the poet-speaker in the poem and the depicted subject of the collage. Attempts to discern the future through prophecy, or construct it through thought, spring from confusion and result in more confusion. At the same time, inspired by the other title word "l'Art", I see both pieces as statements about artistic practice in two degrees of optimism. The collage, forcefully exemplifying surrealist technique through its construction, tears down bourgeois (that is, nineteenth-century) art but posits a revolutionary art working towards a hopeful future both at the level of the individual and that of the society. The poem, no less dedicated to the efficacy and value of new art (embodied in powerful trance the poet enters through automatic writing), leaves aside questions of social change to focus entirely on the poet-speaker. Art, the catalyst of change, produces no change; the speaker returns to the same initial state of anguish and unease from which he started. In the poem, the speaker continues to express faith in the power of art, but a growing pessimism undercuts this faith when no positive change occurs. I

view both works in the context of surrealist collage practice and I explore what Moro's collages can tell us about his working method or aesthetic as he wrote the poem. Ultimately my readings use terminology from Nelson Goodman's philosophical aesthetics, formulated in *Languages of Art*, *Ways of Worldmaking* and *Reconceptions in Philosophy* (with Catherine Z. Elgin), to elucidate how a single author, through different media or in different "languages" with their distinct patterns of signification, conducts quite different meditations on the same themes.

I. Is this Collage a Poem?

The theory of art Moro formulated sporadically in his essays beginning with "Los anteojos de azufre" (1934) distinguishes "Poesía", a sort of soul or essence animating works in all media and genres, from art's physical side, the manipulation of words or paint, which he used to call its "aspecto 'cocina'". His article on the painter Alice Rahon, Wolfgang Paalen's wife and Moro's close friend, is a case in point: he defines the value of her painting explicitly in terms of what it contains of poetry (*Anteojos*, 71). This conception was not unique to Moro; indeed, it was a view he shared with other surrealists (Adamowicz, 19). The idea of "Poetry" gives us an entry point into the confusing collage Moro titled "L'art de lire l'avenir" (figure 1). One way of starting to answer Manzanares sarcastic question—*¿Qué leerá el Señor Moro en este cuadro?*—is to try to answer another question—where would Moro say it's poetry lies?

Essentially its "poesía" lies in the surrealist effect it produces: an irruption of the marvelous; a *dépaysement* the spectator suffers, through which surreality bursts into her or his conscious mind. For the surrealists, art had to induce this moment of astonishment, shock, surprise or *dépaysement* when the boundary between the conscious and unconscious is attenuated, and surreality produced. They used a variety of procedures to accomplish this: unreal images placed in naturalistic surroundings, wit, black humor, etc. Perhaps most importantly, they juxtaposed signs from divergent realms whose proximity produces a disjuncture impossible to resolve through ordinary logic. As a result, surrealist works often appear fractured, unreadable. A surrealist text, therefore, must be read, in the words of one critic, "non pas malgré leur illisibilité, comme une énigme à décrypter, mais dans cette illisibilité même, comme un process à réactiver"[5]. Surrealist poets often generated unexpected collisions of elements from diverse realms through

the technique of automatic writing, which strove to duplicate hypnotism or dream as nearly as possible. Breton defined the typical fruit of this procedure, the surrealist image, as the combination of two disparate elements coming from realms as separate as possible. Collage produced a similar effect naturally, though; within its frame components from such distinct universes as renaissance art and contemporary advertising could collide. Along with automatism, collage became one of the two primary avenues of surrealist production (Adamowicz). "L'art de lire l'avenir" is designed, on one level, to provoke and frustrate viewers such as Manzanares accustomed to nineteenth-century art—that is, those incapable of reading the piece from within its "illisibilité". Yet for a viewer capable of seeing it, one sensitized to the code, the "poesía" in the piece must lie in the surreality it produces. Yet this answer to the question, however true viewed from an artist's standpoint, is too simplistic to serve our critical ends, and must be qualified in a couple of ways.

First, Moro seems preoccupied with formal concerns in this collage to a greater extant than many surrealist collage-makers—artists who took their cues from Max Ernst. Moro's work is a hybrid mixing surrealist techniques with cubist ones. Surrealist collage practice in the twenties replaced the self-conscious concern with form in cubist collage with sarcastic wit, outrageous re-combinations of imagery that often functioned bluntly as visual metaphors. Moro returns to Cubism by using geometric clippings of wallpaper just as Picasso and Bracque had done when they developed collage in 1912. The surrealists had abandoned playing cards, sand, newsprint, wallpaper, and other materials favored by the cubists for materials richer in semantic value: engravings from old catalogues, photographs, advertisements, and so forth. Moro does not hesitate to use materials whose semantic value is subordinate to their formal value. Moreover, he composes the piece carefully in the cubist style: he has affixed geometric pieces of paper to a white ground to form a roughly cruciform underlying scaffolding. To this he grafts four ready-made black and white reproductions that announce that indeed this is a surrealist work. Yet in quoting the earliest *papiers collés* of Bracque and Picasso, Moro returns to cubism to verify it's essential contribution to twentieth century art and it's foundational position in his own art[6]. At the same time we must admit that the outrageous, macabre, decapitated cut-out seems to make fun of Cubism's self-seriousness. Moro turns his own use of cubist composition into a parody. To underscore the degree to which his composition questions Cubism (in the face of Surrealism, which has superceded it),

Moro rips away a good portion of the cubist part—that is, the wallpaper that forms the central vertical element—leaving behind only those parts in contact with the glue. The artist challenges cubism as part of his general questioning of art, but he does not destroy it or discard it; he affirms the earlier movement's value by exemplifying it's technical aspects and relying on them as to the foundation of his own composition.

The underlying shape, with it's horizontal and vertical elements, is that of a rough cross at the four extremities of which Moro places three cut-outs and, at the top, the title word "l'Art". It is a disjointed cross, not neatly resolved. To unify what looks disjointed Moro uses a careful play of V shapes. The V on the label of the jar echoes the upside-down V the diver is making of her legs and torso; the decapitated body forms a V with his spread legs while the loose head has one arm of an approximate V cut from its face. Together, the three images describe a larger V with the jar at it's elbow.

Given these strong formal elements running counter to much of the work we know as surrealist collage, we might ask if Moro's piece can be termed a surrealist collage—and the answer has to be an unequivocal yes. Collage has often been defined quite generally[7]. Elza Adamowicz has tried to restore it to its proper specificity within a surrealist context by proposing a definition with two general principles. First, a work should foreground the cutting and pasting by which it was produced. In Goodman's terminology, it should exemplify the disjunctions between one image or one word and the next. It must, as Adamowicz says, call attention to "the overt staging of seams, material tears, semantic incoherence, iconographic anomalies or narrative nonsequiturs" (15). Second, the work must suggest the *merveilleux* "through the combination of banal and defunct images, clichés and rewritten texts" (15). Conforming to both Adamowicz' criteria, "l'Art de lire l'avenir" takes part in the tradition of surrealist collage, yet in some sense the homage it pays to Picasso and Bracque proclaims Moro's independence from Surrealism quite early, at a time when his poetry had not yet branched off to the mature and individual style it would take in the Mexico phase. It should be seen as a mark of artistic heterodoxy at a moment when, from within orthodox surrealism, he was in the process of forging a distinctive voice. (Of course, drawing these clear lines is always dangerous; let's not forget that Picasso was revered by Breton's circle and in fact contributed to the Mexico City exhibition.)

A second reason to not simply affirm that the ineffable "poesía"

César Moro sought at the heart of all art lies in this work's surrealist effects is that it can be viewed metaphorically. Goodman's terminology proves helpful here[8]. In "L'art de lire l'avenir", the papers cut in geometric shapes exemplify their forms and colors. One level of reading sees significance in the balance and interplay between these abstract elements. At the same time, they act as samples for the whole sheets from which they have been cut. They refer specifically to their partiality, their status as fragments, they exemplify fragments, never letting us forget they take part in a collage. The wallpaper goes a step further, acting as a literal sample, a swatch, exemplifying the pattern, color and texture of the roll from which it has been cut. To exemplify, it is necessary to refer to a label, and in doing so it refers to "wallpaper" in its original use as a material used in home decorating, and to all the other labels within the scheme "wallpaper" is a part of. It ironically conflates the codes of visual art and home decoration, questioning the purpose and nature of art. In doing so, it follows Bracque and Picasso footstep by footstep. Additionally, on a third level, the wallpaper exemplifies cubist collage technique.

Turning to the cut-outs, they depict what they portray. The Pond's jar depicts a jar of moisturizing cream, the diver a diver, and so forth. In depicting the Pond's jar, the image labels it, and refers implicitly to all the other labels within its scheme and thus to all the items in the jar's realm. The diver follows the same pattern of signification, and the clash between one realm and another, their combination into a single, unexpected image that cannot be resolved following the logic of the everyday world, produces the surrealist *dépaysement* already discussed. This is an effect identified by the surrealists themselves, even by the Dadaists. The jar and its label, obviously clipped from a magazine ad (echoing, in another cubist parody, Juan Gris' inclusion of bottle labels in his collages), additionally exemplifies advertising, which in turn metaphorically exemplifies buying and selling (through the process of transference called metonymy). The jar infects the whole piece with a sarcastic irony towards capitalism and the political, social, and ideological structures that support it. It particularly targets the other typographical element in the work, the carefully drawn, art nouveau lettering of "l'Art" that stands opposite the jar label at the top of the vertical axis. By juxtaposing these two words Moro accuses bourgeois art of complicity with capitalism.

To explain the collage's title we look to the most aggressive clippings, the head and the headless body. Both depict what they are, and the head, containing the eyes, locus of sight, denotes its function as

well—that of reading. The legs and torso, meantime, signify locomotion towards the future through a chain of elementary referential relationships whereby striding through space becomes movement through time. Moro, an activist artist intervening in the life of the subject he depicts, obstructs both functions by the cuts he has made. The eyes stare forward along a line of sight soon blocked by the upright wallpaper, or descending along the path of greenish paper cutouts into a labyrinth. The legs, directionless without eyes, stumble off the page not really following the lines laid down by the geometric framework (their trajectory angles toward the bottom right). By their inconclusive dynamism they express power and strength but no obvious outcome, no sure future.

The title is ironic since neither in reading nor in advancing towards the future does the work offer a clear outcome. Both elements, that of reading and that of the future, become entangled in inconclusiveness. What does the head read? What future does the body advance toward? They annoy and disturb us through their inconclusiveness. Because they do not propose a clear allegory where we expect to find one, they act as an irritant on our given aesthetics (of which allegory is an important feature), corroding them through humor, and laughing as we try to resolve the piece into a narrative. The obvious commentary Moro makes here on the futility of trying to know one's future itself gets tangled in the irony of the title. We cannot place our faith in the artist's honorable intentions in constructing this metaphoric meaning. Perhaps it is a trap for unwary viewers—we dare not commit ourselves. We are forced back to a higher level of signification, that which sees the whole reading we have attempted to make as an element in a meta-commentary represented in the third title word, "L'art". Traditional art, bankrupt by contamination with bourgeois ideologies and capitalism, is worthless in the enterprise of constructing a viable future. The dialectic play we have witnessed between the cut-outs of the head and the body across the rough horizontal axis of the piece is mirrored in the interaction of its two important typographical elements, "L'art" and "Pond's", at either end of the vertical axis.

To sum up, Moro presents two conflicting groups of ideas corresponding roughly to the horizontal and vertical formal axis of the composition. When we read it horizontally, we see a dismembered subject whose clairvoyance is blocked by the absurd cuts the artist has made projecting forward from the eyes. This is a subject in confusion, with no clear resolution to his conflicts available along any of the pictorial lines of the picture. Not only can he not see, but his advancing be-

comes a quixotic venture in which his trunk and legs forcefully stride toward the nothingness outside the pictorial frame without a brain or eyes for guidance. The artist makes a joke of agency, his subject's ability to act either through the eyes or the legs. He pokes fun at the thought that an effort of will might be able to cut through the modern existential predicament, with all its equivocations, it's natural confusion. His is an essentially pessimistic view of the individual. Meantime, following the vertical axis renders a distinctly less personal and more social reading. The future here is constructed as a collective endeavor, and art (the title word the artist has penciled in as a rubric, a commentary on the whole composition) as a tool for building it. Old art, the art of the 19th century, acting in the service of capitalism, has in part brought the world to a political impasse (Europe in 1935). Cubism and especially Surrealism, the new art, attack this old partnership with a corrosive dynamism that comes to the fore through the exemplification already discussed. The piece at once casts the harsh light of interrogation on complacent or bourgeois work, and proposes an alternative by its own practice. In this quite hopeful vision, the artist places his faith in a collective future through action[9].

II. Is this Poem a Collage?

Moro's poetry often presents a challenge of legibility. Hermetic, difficult, surreal—these adjectives all point to how it resists interpretation. Often it is easier to pass off the poems as abstract than to attempt an internally coherent reading. Within our context, it might be easiest to call them collages, where the phrases are pasted onto the page in sequential order but maintain their autonomy, resist ordering into narratives or even coherent imagery, snatches of story-lines, etc.—in short, resist any ordering hierarchy the reader seeks to impose. As with collage, what the apparently fragmentary phrases and images express most aggressively is the disjuncture between them. Literary collage such as this, our reasoning would continue, suffers from an additional difficulty, that of memory. Visual collage has the advantage of being apprehensible in a glance whereas poems produced by a collage method must still be read over a period of seconds or minutes, just as any other poem. The difficulty of remembering what has come before without a recognizable form of discourse, such as a narrative, reduces the poem to a nonsensical stream of phrases. Yet Moro's best poetry, as this piece witnesses, can never be reduced to abstraction. "L'art de lire l'avenir" is not a literary collage, and it is susceptible to a metaphorical reading.

It differs substantially from two literary collages Moro did produce, his "Hommage à Augusta de Prusse", and his "Poema recortado".

"Hommage à Augusta de Prusse" (figure 2) is a collage poem in French held by the Getty Research Institute among its César Moro papers. It is to be published for the first time in the forthcoming Colección Archivos edition of Moro's complete poetry. It consists of phrases in a variety of type sizes and styles clipped from newspapers and print advertisements and pasted onto a cardboard backing in short lines. André Coyné incorporated another literary collage, "Poema recortado" (in Spanish, first published in *Ecos y noticias* in Puira on August 7, 1937), in his *Tortuga ecuestre* (52). The original of "Poema recortado" is not among Moro's papers at the Getty, but the title clearly tells us that it is a collage, and the poem preserves some variation in typography in its printed version. Both poems stand out from Moro's other collages (those published under the title "Rafael", for instance, or his pictorial collages) in that they contain no drawings, photographs, engravings, or other visual material.

They are, then, literary collages. Making them would have required no great leap for Moro, since in doing so he followed the precept and the practice of Breton. During the early twenties the surrealists played a sort of collage game, sometimes later publishing the results with their status as collage concealed, as it were, by uniform typesetting. Breton codified this game into surrealist dogma with his *Manifeste* of 1924, supplying both a definition and an example of surrealist literary collage. His recipe reads thus:

> Il est même permis d'intituler POEME ce qu'on obtient par l'assemblage aussi gratuit que possible (observons, si vous voulez, la syntaxe) de titres et de fragments de titres découpés dans les journaux. (67)

The motley column of phrases in varying typefaces that Breton calls "POEME" is pivotal within the document. The Futurists and the Dadaists, of course, had previously advocated a similar technique, but Breton rejects the radical atomization of their methods, which relied on recombining random words, in favor of clipping pre-formed phrases, often with an air of cliché about them that produced an effect of the *merveilleux*. The phrases follow the rhythms of logical discourse in that they often cluster naturally into units of three or four lines with some internal coherence, perhaps a partial narrative (Adamowicz):

> Sachez que
> Les rayons ultra-violets
> ont terminé leur tâche

Courte et bonne. (Breton, 69)

Yet between the groupings the thread is lost and we start anew, so that a longer discourse never emerges and we must continue to read the collage in spite of, or within, its fragmentation (emphasized by the difference in typefaces).

In "Hommàge à Augusta de Prusse" Moro practices the same rhythmic recombination as Breton, breaking his poem into five discrete phrase groupings that preserve a measure of standard syntax even when they are less than coherent. The poem reads, in its intonation and the logic it feigns, as a poem written in the natural manner. Of course, search as we might, we cannot find the thread that carries us from one grouping to the next in at least a couple of the transitions. "Poema recortado" is still more fragmentary. It's first eleven lines seem to form three distinct groupings, but thereafter the poem breaks down into a series of noun phrases with anaphoric repetition: "una mano en la sombra / una fotografía búlgara / un cubo de agua", and so forth.

Returning to "L'art de lire l'avenir", we note that its stanzas also break apart into groups of phrases that to some extent maintain an internal consistency, but as in "Hommàge à Augusta de Prusse" the gaps between these syntactical groupings at first appear unbridgeable. In a certain sense the poem mimics coherent syntax (in this case, that of proclamatory verse) as does the collage-poem, yet it splinters apart during the transitions between the verses, as do both collage-poems. It coincides with them in other details as well—in the way it avoids the use of "je" for instance. Breton personalized his "POEME" by including the first person pronoun. Moro, in contrast, constructs an impersonal artifact in "Hommàge à Augusta de Prusse"; like Breton, he uses "yo" once in "Poema recortado". Through much of his poetry Moro avoids the first person by using infinitives (as advocated by Marinetti in his Futurist manifesto)—witness the "vivre" of "Hommàge à Augusta de Prusse"—or simply by writing a catalogue of nouns or noun phrases such as we've seen (also a procedure favored by the futurist). "L'art de lire l'avenir" postpones the use of "je" until the last stanza; moreover, it starts with a noun phrase.

I do not want to suggest by this argument that Moro's two collage poems have any direct relationship to "L'art de lire l'avinir", nor that the latter poem may in any sense be considered a collage. It displays no evidence of having been pasted together from recycled advertising phrases or newspaper headlines with their formulaic tone. It's lines are longer than those of the collage-poems. Moreover, I am convinced that the poet used a modified form of automatism to write

this poem. Although he never talked freely about his compositional methods, Moro does allude to his own poetic procedure, the cornerstone of which is automatic writing. This occurs in the context of a literary spat. In 1946 Moro defended his friend Xavier Villaurrutia, who had published "Nocturno Rosa" eight years earlier, from what he regarded as nearly plagiaristic imitation by Rafael del Río, who came out with a series of sonnets entitled *Sitio en la rosa* in 1945. Moro makes his views on automatic writing known during a detailed discussion of del Río's poem:

> ... el segundo verso, banalmente visual, no es otra cosa que asunto de decir algo, de presentar imágenes sin imagen, sin contenido efectivo de valor general, sin la calidad documental de lo automático y que, sin embargo, tengan un aire de improvisación y de arrojo. Pero tanto el improvisar como el medir y penar sobre los versos nos pueden dejar muy lejos de la poesía. No somos partidarios de la medida externa; sí, del ritmo interno, del bucear hipnagógico o sonambúlico; del trabajo *a posteriori* luego del estallido ciego de la mina. Que lo dicho sea considerado como la expresión de un sentimiento estrictamente personal sin concesiones a la polémica. (*Anteojos*, 51).

After the "mina" explodes onto the page in a burst of automatic writing, the poet returns to the material in an "*a posteriori*" process of elimination, clarification, and polishing. From this text it seems clear Moro composed his poems in Mexico, including "L'art de lire l'avenir" and the other poems of *Le chateau de grisou*, *Lettre d'amour*, and *Pierre de soleils*, employing a modified form of automatism, a method that bore no resemblance to the methodical selection, cutting, composition, and pasting of collage practice.

What I do think likely, however, is that collage helped Moro develop the mature style of his Mexican period, that a sustained consciousness of collage both literary and pictorial, first in Paris, later in Lima, figured in the boundaries and definitions of what he could accept from this initial "estallido ciego" of automatic writing. "L'art de lire l'avenir" typifies many of the shorter pieces from these years, works which leave behind the extravagant *versículos* of *La tortuga ecuestre* in favor of controlled lines of lush imagery and a hallucinatory intensity, often arranged into real or mock syntactical groupings like those both Moro and Breton employed in their collage-poems. Of course many of the surrealists preserved syntax as an organizing principle, a standard of normalcy or a familiar linguistic background by contrast to which

their imagery could astonish and surprise most effectively. Moro's poetry often appears more fragmentary than that of an Eluard, however, and it seems plausible that collage practice was one among several forces that went into forging a voice that would eventually both differentiate Moro from Breton's circle and remain true to Surrealism.

III. Analysis of "L'art de lire l'avenir"

Five lines, four lines, five lines: the poem's careful stanzaic structure (nodding towards the sonnet in its fourteen lines, but differing in other respects) highlights the clockwork mechanism Moro has employed. He suppresses conjunctions and explanations for maximum compression and maximum intensity. The metaphorical analysis I propose remains hidden by a thicket of imagery on the first reading. Our confusion stems partly from the way the poet postpones naming the speaker, the "je", until the last stanza. The first and second stanzas, in consequence, at least on first pass, seem abstract. Only gradually does the structure emerge: the first and last stanzas, mirroring one another with five lines apiece, stand as the before and after of a psychic event. The middle stanza—the mirror itself—is a description of this event, at once a thunderstorm, a prophetic revelation (without interpretation, in other words, useless in divining the future or resolving the confusion that plagues the individual), and an explosion of poetry lived from the inside by the speaking subject and, through him, by the reader. The central stanza will ultimately provide the key to seeing this poem as both a description of the cyclical return to confusion and anguish the individual suffers, and as a meditation on the power of art and the hope it may or may not offer.

The first stanza begins with a series of noun-adjective combinations that denote impossibilities: how can laughter be murky? How can tears be full of holes? These combinations crystallize into surrealist images. I would suggest, continuing with Goodman's terminology, that in addition to denoting, they also exemplify. What they exemplify most prominently is not their shape or color, their materiality as words either visually or auditorily, as would be the case, for instance, with Moro's series of variations on the great poet's name in his poem "Baudelaire":

> Beau de l'air de la nuit
> Beau de la glace de la lune
> Beau de l'eau de l'air
> Eté et hiver beau

Bel oiseau de l'aire (*Obra poética I*, 144)

Rather, what these noun-adjective pairs exemplify is the surrealist image itself. In a sense they proclaim allegiance and stand up for a cause. The first sentence—the first three lines—has no verb, which naturally isolates these images and makes them carry the full weight of signification. There is no attempt to soften the Surrealism or incorporate it within a framework that would be more welcoming to the reader. It is fair to say that one of the most important levels of meaning in this poem is the literary-political level. In bluntly exemplifying Surrealism's technical features, the poem enters the literary skirmishes of the mid-century, in which the movement continued to fight to open a revolutionary aesthetic space where its works, unencumbered by prejudice, could go about fulfilling Breton's mandate to erase the border between the conscious and unconscious mind.

Most importantly, these images directly express certain emotions or emotional colorations, which the reader later learns belong to the speaker. Even if what it denotes cannot exist (for the simple reason that its terms belong to different schemes), nevertheless "trouble rire" metaphorically exemplifies (that is, it expresses) a state of agitation in which hilarity mingles with confusion, or even sorrow or foreboding. "[L]ourdeur imitée" denotes unwieldiness, heaviness or awkwardness somehow tainted with falsehood, tinged with guilt, and it expresses foreboding or sinister unease. The future impinges upon this conflictive emotional state of the poem's speaker with the next two lines—multiple paths stream with perceptive tears. These paths, reaching toward multiple futures, provoke sorrow—expressed by the "larmes"—in a crisis of indecision where the tears' perception (the capacity of the eyes to discern the future) is undermined by holes or gaps—"trouées". In short, the speaker suffers an agitated moment of indecision where the future is unknowable.

The next two lines, finishing out the stanza, offer a false resolution to his emotional crisis, a crisis so horrible it results in a "meurtre"—the murder of the father, one supposes. Has the speaker chosen, finally, from among the possible futures? A vision comes—"apparitions limpides"—as equivocal and unsatisfactory as the "larmes trouées clairvoyants". The "parricide" describes the alleviation that follows his crime as a moment of peace, yet here guilt blooms into the decisive stain ruining his emotional quiet. What he evokes in his vision seems fit for a madman—the elysian fields, perhaps, the garden of an asylum where the "trouble rire" rings out: "paisible prairie stagnante". Patricide, the most heinous crime, the crime of Oedipus, contaminates the

peaceful images of "apparitions limpides" and "paisible prarie stagnante" with a guilt that prevents us reading them as a resolution to the moment of crisis the speaker has suffered. Instead, we must take it as yet another in the series of rapid emotional flights that has also included laughter, tears and "lourdeur".

Patricide has special resonance for Moro for two reasons. First, his father died when he was young. Marco Martos has postulated that this may have motivated his name change, that is, "la necesidad de bautizarse a si mismo, de ser su propio padre, como se dice en el lenguaje de la psicología" (390). Secondly, Moro jumped at the chance, when Maurice Henry offered it to him in October of 1933, to contribute a poem to the collective tribute/protest that Breton and company produced in support of Violette Nozières, a young Belgian who had poisoned her father and mother, claiming sexual abuse in her defense. Her father died and she was arraigned on murder charges. Following Picasso, who protested with a painting, the surrealists saw her action as a mute revolt against the bankrupt bourgeois family and rallied to her defense with what José Pierre calls a tract "de caractére lyrique" (483). In the context of the present poem, then, it might be too simplistic to see patricide as a wellspring of guilt without taking into account the overtones of heroism it also carries. In any case, the first stanza of "L'art de lire l'avenir" sketches an agitated and conflictive speaker—now quiet, now laughing, now crying—confused and able neither to discern the futures lying down the paths nor to trust those presented by the apparitions.

The speaker hardly seems in a state of receptivity propitious to visits from the muse, yet the second stanza, shifting focus from the individual to the atmospheric, shows us an entirely external event that can be read as a thunderstorm, a prophecy, or an explosion of poetry. Each of these readings, of course, would be metaphorical[10]. In fact, I have been conducting a metaphorical reading, assuming that "paths" can be safely taken for "futures". "Path" has been applied to "future" so often that it has almost lost its figurative ring, it's status as metaphor, to become a fact. The metaphors in the second stanza, by contrast, are new and indeterminate; they cannot be assigned a simple metaphorical denotation. Moro has activated all the expressive capacity of metaphor by applying each label to several literal and figurative objects. The complex picture the second stanza presents, which in my reading sorts itself out finally into a storm, oracular prophecy, or poetic trance, emerges from the multiplying interplay of metaphorical significations.

Whichever metaphorical reading we accept for the second stanza (or whichever combination of them), it clearly represents the culmination or outcome of the ups and downs the speaker goes through in the first. It is an event so powerful that it wipes clean all traces of the brooding self-pity that has dominated his consciousness to this point, enacting instead a drama of wheels, ploughs and fire against the sky that claims all the poet-speaker's attention for the moment. It occurs suddenly, like a storm with its thunder ("tambour"), lightening ("flambante") and wind. A "tambour de fluide" rolls across the sky; a flaming plough sheds bits of itself—wheels and claws (the ploughshares). Bringing with it the other labels in its original scheme, the plough, a farm implement, ploughs the field of the heavens. One line later, it becomes a bird—perhaps one of the *oiseux de proie*, figures of the beloved, that haunt other Moro poems—furrowing the sky with its outstretched claws (which fall from it like petals when it becomes a flower). Ezekiel could not imagine signs more pregnant with prophecy, yet the poet proposes no interpretation, neither here nor in the following verse. It has been a sterile prophecy, furnishing no solution to the riddle of the future, important solely as an event occurring within the consciousness of the poet-speaker.

The psychic event is also a poetic event. The flaming sign the plough describes in the heavens disintegrates into other object-signifiers—"secrets et chaises pour fantômes"—which offer some evidence for my metapoetic reading. They are the enigmatic results: the images or poems left behind. At its onset, the vision overwhelms the poet-speaker to such a degree that his self—that is, the disquiet and confusion of his mental state in the first stanza—temporarily disappears. I suggest that Moro creates an analogy with poetic trance, the *estallido ciego* of automatic writing, an experience so absorbing the self is forgotten. The symbols left behind after such an experience, as enigmatic as "secrets" or "chaises pour fantômes", are the surrealist images congealed in the words of the poem.

Yet as the speaker makes clear in the third stanza neither poetry nor prophecy brings about any resolution to his quandary. He has not predicted the future despite his visions, nor has he pacified the demons that brought him to the brink of the poetic experience. Instead, he ends up exhausted and unable to rest, for if he tries "une tonne d'etoiles éclat"; perhaps dream re-opens the avenue to his subconscious that produced the crisis in stanza one. As the speaker watches, time wears itself away. Was his crisis an existential one? Was he seeking a solution to death in the prophecy and in the futures he contemplated?

No clear future presented itself; no solution arrived. Neither has he resolved his emotional crisis, for in the last two lines we see that the event or experience of the second stanza, whether mystical or poetic, has not led to forgetting. Forgetting, rising like a tide, has not managed to submerge the crag (one could imagine a scene from the Peruvian coast) with its entombed memories like boisterous sea-birds, presumably the parties responsible for the drama that has played out before our eyes. Though the speaker's situation has not been fundamentally transformed by the poetic experience or the prophecy, however, we do note a marked falling off in intensity in the third stanza, as if the experience has exhausted him. The compression and intensity that so strikes us in the first two stanzas suddenly eases, replaced with the sort of colloquial utterances that conceal nothing and that we have no trouble understanding at once: "Je voudrais m'asseoir". The poetic experience has drained him so that though no resolution presents itself (and indeed we intimate the periodic repetition of this whole process on other days), for the time being at least the intense fury that has gripped the speaker passes.

Arriving in Mexico just as Breton did in the Spring of 1938, Moro helped foment the avid interest in and controversy over Surrealism that boiled among Mexican intellectuals that year and culminated with the Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo a year and a half later. It was a period that corresponded exactly with Moro's moment of greatest passion and optimism, that is, the beginnings of his love affair with Antonio, a married sergeant in the Mexican army. From the confluence of these two forces Moro created the explosive *La tortuga ecuestre* in 1938 and 1939. By 1940, as he wrote the poems that would become *Le château de grisou* (1943), it was already becoming obvious that the love affair was not to prosper. This may account for the relatively more somber vision he presents in his poem as compared with the collage created several years earlier. The collage, at one level, ironically poses and discards the possibility of knowing the future for the individual. At another, it undermines traditional art's validity (through the juxtaposition of the Ponds jar and the Art Nouveau "L'Art") in helping sort out either our individual or our collective future. At the same time, despite the acid humor that animates the piece, it affirms by example the role progressive art (Cubism yes, but Surrealism most of all) can play in forging a meaningful future. The poem does not abandon this hope, exactly, but neither does it hold out particular optimism about art's activist role. It shows us an example of the surrealist poetic process that returns the poet-speaker to his initial state of anguished con-

fusion. He no longer seems concerned with postulating a collective future to be constructed through art; he focuses instead on how the artistic process functions within himself. The poetic trance consumes him totally as it occurs, and the power of this experience somehow upholds the validity of art (and as we've seen, the piece aggressively employs surrealist technique, a strategic decision expressing faith in the movement). Yet in the end it returns him to his past (the *oiseaux hilares* of memory) instead of remitting him to one of many impossible futures.

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Illustrations



Figure 1. "L'Art de lire l'avenir".

NOTE: The collage "hommage à Augusta de Prusse" is held by the Getty Research Institute in its collection of César Moro documents. Until now it has remained unpublished, and it appears here with the kind permission of the Getty Research institute. Moro originally published his poem "L'art de lire l'avenir" in *Le château de grisou* (1943).

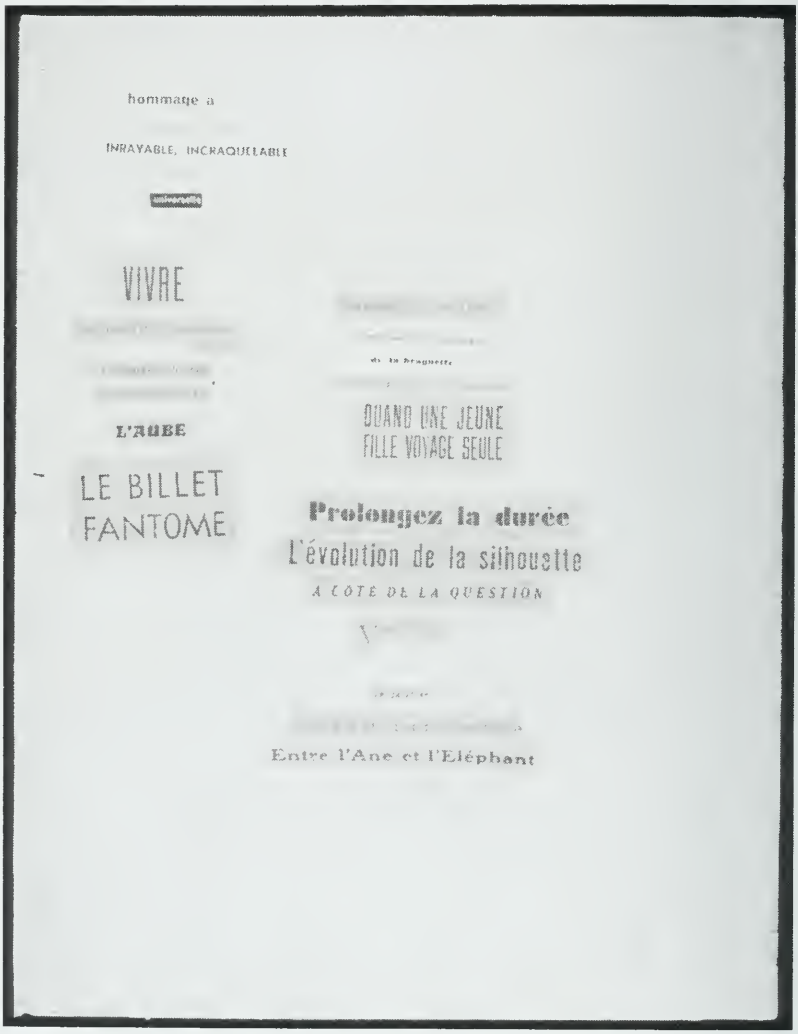


Figure 2. "Hommage à Augusta de Prusse".

Transcription of collage

hommage à
Augusta de Prusse
INRAYABLE, INCRAQUELABLE
reine
universelle

VIVRE
UNE TRADITION SPONTANEE
plus tard
LA PRIMIERE VICTIME
Les plus jolies pierres
L'AUBE
LE BILLET
FANTOME

CEREMONIE DU PRINTEMPS
SINGULARITÉ
de la braguette
et autres bibelots aussi peu rassurants
QUAND UNE JEUNE
FILLE VOYAGE SEULE
Prolonguez la durée
L'évolution de la silhouette
A CÔTE DE LA QUESTION
VOULEZ-VOUS
Le paradoxe
n'est pas une pendule électrique
Entre l'Ane et l'Eléphant

l'Art de lire l'avenir

Trouble rire ou lourdeur imitée
Bordée par des chemins ruisselants
De larmes trouées clairvoyants
Quel meurtre suivi d'apparitions limpides
Où le parricide évoque une paisible prairie stagnante

L'amère bise roule un tambour de fluide
Une charrue flambante sur le ciel
Perd roues et griffes comme des pétales
Formant des secrets et chaises pour fantômes

Si je veux dormir une tonne d'étoiles éclate
Je voudrais m'asseoir
Le temps dentelé s'efface
L'oubli n'a pas pu escalader
Le rocher funeste tombeau des oiseaux hilares

El arte de leer el porvenir

Turbado reír o imitada pesadez
Bordada por chorreantes caminos
De horadadas lágrimas clarividentes
Qué homicidio seguido de límpidas apariciones
Donde el parricida evoca una apacible pradera inactiva

El cierzo amargo hace rodar un tambor de fluido
Un arado llameante en el cielo
Pierde ruedas y garras como pétalos
Formando secretos y sillas para fantasmas

Si quiero dormir estalla una tonelada de estrellas
Quisiera sentarme
El tiempo dentado se desvanece
El olvido no ha podido escalar
El peñón funesto tumba de las alegres aves

Translation by Armando Rojas

Notes

[1] Interview with Rafael Heliodoro Valle, *Universidad de México*, June 1938, pp. 5-8, cited in Schneider, 136-7.

[2] *Estampa*, January 23, 1940, 19-21. Both Manzanares quotations are taken from Schneider, 179.

[3] Westphalen supposes that Moro created titles for his pieces in

the 1935 exhibit in Lima on the spot as he mounted the show. He mentions in particular a work displayed at the time as "Las manchas oceladas del tigre son producto de la lluvia de tomates sobre la tigresa encinta" that has a different title noted on the reverse—"mangeuse d'oiseaux" (70).

[4] Rodrigo Quijano, curator of the exhibit "Con los anteojos de azufre. César Moro artista plástico" (September-October 2000, Centro Cultural de España, Lima) reports the phrase as the secondary title of a collage also made in 1935: "Adorée au grand air (l'art de lire l'avenir)" (Moro, *Con los anteojos*, 55). I will leave it's analysis for another occasion.

[5] Quoted in Adamowicz, 21-2.

[6] Critics have tended to overlook the pivotal role Picasso's art played in helping Moro arrive at his own voice and his own expression. Moro was a great fan, and his artistic work often betrays the importance Picasso held for him. Some drawings from the early twenties reflect "Les demoiselles d'Avignon"; those of the late twenties, Picasso's neo-classical mode; most importantly, Moro was making synthetic-cubist works into the late twenties and beyond. After arriving in Paris in 1925 he frequented exhibits of Picasso's works, as shown by his collection of exhibit catalogues (César Moro papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles).

[7] Lawrence Rainy stresses common themes in some of the recent attempts to define collage: logical relations among its elements are replaced by relations of equivalence, similarity, juxtaposition, and difference; semantic and pictorial hierarchies are leveled when images collide in a common frame without a central ordering system; accepted artistic and social codes can be subjected to a radical questioning through the mechanism of this leveling (Rainey, 124). Even grander claims have been made in the name of the collage principle, which some have seen as the most important structural model underlying not only 20th century art, but indeed scientific, social and philosophical thought as well (Adamowicz, 13).

[8] Goodman imagines that the world is sorted into infinite *realms* each of which is a set of objects or events that can be named by words, paint, tone, rhythm, gesture, and so forth. In naming each object, the codes of the various arts apply a *label* to it. The labels of all the objects within a given realm make up a *scheme*. All symbolization in art is either *denotation* (in pictures he calls this *depiction* and in literary works *description*), in which a label refers to an object directly; or, running in the opposite direction, it is *exemplification*, where a sample—that is, an

object within a work of art, a triangle for instance— takes itself as an example of a label. Exemplification can be literal, where a pattern of paint that possesses the shape of a triangle also refers to the idea "triangle", thus in essence asserting its geometry as the pertinent thing about it; or it can be metaphorical. In metaphorical exemplification, a symbol possesses some quality by metaphor while also referring to it, for instance it possesses sadness while referring to "sad", thus asserting sadness as the pertinent thing about itself. Goodman names metaphorical exemplification *expression*. The most important of these terms are the names for the three primary processes by which art can symbolize: denotation (depiction or description); exemplification (which can be used to talk about the ways abstract art generates meaning); and expression, which allows us to discuss metaphorical qualities.

[9] Some critics may protest that I have missed a grand opportunity to confront the psycho-sexual questions, or the questions of gender, posed by the nearly naked torso, the head and the diver—in other words, to follow up the psychoanalytic reading Roberto Manzanares unwittingly suggested. But severed body parts were a topos in surrealist collage beginning with Ernst's work of the early twenties; they were among its standard syntactical features. Undoubtedly they reflect a very conscious preoccupation with Freud's theories, taking part in a psychoanalytic discourse that was common to much of the thought and art of the period. Precisely because of this, they may be viewed as one among many ready-mades the artists used in constructing their pieces—parodied discourses, bits of reality like everything else in the compositions (Adamowicz, 22). They do not require (though of course they remain open to) a psychoanalytic reading. In my discussion of the collage, I have preferred to focus on how it generates symbolic meaning.

[10] Metaphor, by far the most common signifying process in poetry, is a variant of denotation wherein a label is misapplied to an object it does not ordinarily denote, a process Goodman terms *metaphorical denotation*. Metaphorical denotation, like actual denotation, applies a label to an object, only with metaphor the label is applied in a new way through one of various processes of transference, many of which have names given them by traditional rhetoric: irony, for instance, reverses a scheme (that is, a set of labels applied to a set of objects) so that one may call a dull party "great fun" and an entertaining one a "real bore". Irony, though, is in a sense an anomaly, since it merely rearranges the way labels are applied within a given realm; more typically metaphor involves change of realm: "A label along with others

constituting a schema is in effect detached from the home realm of that schema and applied for the sorting and organizing of an alien realm" (Goodman, 72). One further requirement of metaphor is that it must go against standard usage, defying "an explicit or tacit prior denial of that label to that object" (Goodman, 68-9). That said, though, it's not the same as falsehood, for one depends on misassignment of a label, the other on reassignment. I suggest that a surrealist image, with its radical detachment and recombination of parts, dwells at the borderline of metaphor and falsehood, which is why it seemed so revolutionary.

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