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A Reconsideration of Martín Adán: The Case of *La casa de cartón*

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"...ojo puesto en todo ya ni sabe lo que ve."
–Silvio Rodríguez

Critics have only intermittently turned their attention to the radically innovative *La casa de cartón* (1928) by the Peruvian Martín Adán in the academic impulse to re-evaluate the Spanish American literary canon after a frenzy of Boom and Post-Boom criticism. One possible reason for this relative lack of attention is a tendency by critics to obfuscate the contribution of Adán's only "novel" to the Spanish American literary canon by considering it the work of a writer who rejects social concerns or criticizes the social, without proposing an alternative based on action.[1] This presumed renunciation occurred at a time when some Peruvian intellectuals experienced an awakening to injustices in their societies, especially with regard to the exclusion of indigenous cultures from national discourse. The most famous examples of such an awareness in the Perú of the 1920s were Cesar Vallejo's socially committed poetry and chronicles or José Carlos Mariátegui's essays, which turned to nationalist forms of Marxism and *indigenismo* to address social problems. Perhaps due to the critical tendency to see Adán as the polar opposite of Vallejo and Mariátegui, both of whom remain widely read in Perú's intellectual circles, most of the criticism to date has situated *La casa de cartón* within what Julio Vélez has called the "insular" (1067–68), as opposed to the collective face of Peruvian modernity, which strove for a national expression of cultural identity. Similarly, critics have identified Adán's text with what Hugo Verani, among others, has deemed the "vanguardia estética," which reflected a more intellectual attempt to deconstruct through European experimental forms the faith in rationality and progress that

accompanies capitalist expansion, presumably rather than projecting concerns with the social milieu (Introducción 12).[2]

Undoubtedly one could say that *La casa de cartón* belongs to what Nelson Osorio has labeled the cosmopolitan vein of the Spanish American *vanguardia*, due to Adán's preference for the urban motif and "el buceo en la subjetividad" (241), as well as in his radical rupture with inherited literary forms that, according to Osorio, would culminate in the Boom (242). One of the most compelling reasons for identifying Adán's text with this tendency of the Avant-garde would be its defiance of generic classification. Critics have alternately called *La casa de cartón* a poematic narration (Sánchez, *Introducción crítica* 156), a poetic novel (Castro Arenas 203; Unruh 110), and "anti-literatura" that we should situate in an indeterminate space between poetry and prose, a lyric novel and an intimate diary (González Vigil 188). The text is comprised of a series of unnumbered fragments that begins at the end of the summer vacation with a nameless adolescent poet who must travel from Barranco, a beach community popular with upper class Peruvians and foreign tourists, to school in Lima: "Ahora hay que ir al colegio con frío en las manos" (Adán 21). It ends with what would appear to be the end-of-the-day train ride: "Ya se acabó el bochorno, el estarnos quietos, el fastidio encerrado, la sombra inevitable de esta misa de cuatro horas" (96). In between are impressions with only a trace of a conventional plot and no apparent chronology, comprised mainly of scenes of Lima, Barranco, and a group of teenaged intellectuals, filtered through the narrator's poetic consciousness.

The generic ambiguity, the primacy of the narrator's poetic consciousness, and the text's level of difficulty, have contributed to the image of Adán as a "pure" poet without social concerns, a literary bohemian who isolates himself from collective possibilities, who remains disdainfully evasive, aristocratic, and apolitical. Peter Elmore goes so far as to assert that what he considers the "cynical," hermetic quality of *La casa de cartón* is indicative of the author's "elan aristocrático" and results in the artist's total isolation, as well as the impossibility of Adán creating alliances outside of a small community that shares his "eccentricity" (39, 67).[3] However, such an evaluation, I believe, is based on essentialist oppositions between the private and political, as well as representation and non-representation, which seem arbitrary and artificial, resting upon the notions of reality as a

photographic representation and political action as collective in its hegemonic sense rallied around one single ideological identity.

Notwithstanding the experimental nature of Adán's work, the present study calls into question the idea that *La casa de cartón* and its narrator are divorced from the social milieu. My approach is both theoretical and historical. Specifically, I will analyze ways in which the text engages with literary and social questions of the time in order to expose ideologies and the exclusionary oppositions and identity politics that characterize them in order to provide a radically alternative model of collective cultural endeavor.

I focus first on what Michel de Certeau has called "practices of space" or "spatial practices" (*The Practice* 96, 100), and the "tactics of wandering" ("On the oppositional" 6–32), which he distinguishes from Michel Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon, used to analyze the formation of modern, individual identity. Foucault bases his ideas of the modern individual on Jeremy Bentham's prison model, the Panopticon, which allowed an omniscient supervisor to see all prisoners from a tower above, so that prisoners would internalize individualized subjectivities that made them keenly aware of their visibility, thereby making them complicit in their own subjection (201–02). For Foucault, this model symbolizes the formational process of the modern "soul" (identity) through a "microphysics of [...] punitive power" that continually supervises, trains, and corrects the social body (29). De Certeau opposes the "tactic" to the "strategy," the latter being tied to a "proper place:" "tactics are calculated actions determined by the absence of a proper *place*. No delimitation of exteriority (ideology, *a priori*) furnishes it a condition of autonomy" ("On the oppositional" 6). The condition of autonomy is partly what grants a strategy a globalizing vision, while the nomadic tactic inscribes a pathway that is the consequence of and reciprocal to Foucault's Panoptic analysis of power structures (*The Practice* 96). While Foucault's supervisor depends on a static, God's-eye view, de Certeau's nomad reflects an ubiquitous perspective in constant movement. This approach proves to be especially useful if one considers the text as an incarnation of an adolescent's impressions on his way to and from school as he looks out of the window of a train and adopts various perspectives in his literary musings.

Within de Certeau's framework, I examine from an historical view the narrator's multi-faceted perspective, as compared to the unitary

perspective of the text's most mysterious figure: Ramón, one of various artist characters whose "death" appears to incite the narration. Some critics have considered Ramón as the narrator's alter ego, representing the "man of action" that the narrator renounces in favor of inertia, passivity, and literary contemplation.[4] Others posit that the impossibility of distinguishing between Ramón and the nameless narrator forms part of the latter's insistence on deconstructing the concept of integrated identity that forms such an important part of the realist novel.[5] While I reject the first interpretation, I do not think that the second is erroneous, but rather incomplete, since it ignores fundamental differences between Ramón and the nameless narrator.

One finds the fusion of the narrator's perspective with Ramón's in the text's twenty-fourth fragment, where they do seem to share the same skepticism in the face of the models that traditionally divide cultural expression into a dichotomy of the Spanish American versus the European. In the text's twenty-third fragment, both intellectuals mock the "concepto behaviorista de la humanidad" (Adán 56) in the works of Shaw, Pirandello, and Joyce, as well as "las vidas perfectamente humanas e inútiles [...] sin inhumanidades" (57) of writers such as Benavente and Pérez Galdós. Their criticism of Hispanic and European fiction centers on its characters whose identities do not deviate from hegemonic forms—the Church and science—and narrators who create a distance between reader and character, as part of the hegemonic impulse. The authors portray the so-called "deviants," "que el lector ve de lejos, sin peligro" (57), but the authors do not permit us to approach their creations outside of the bounds of "dignified" humanity. Ramón, like the narrator, rejects these models.

In spite of their shared mockery of current models, the narrator and Ramón portray "humanity" in a markedly different way, in scenes where their perspectives diverge. In the text's twenty-second fragment, the narrator reads an excerpt from Ramón's diary that presents a "human" description of a man in order to "rehacer íntegra" (52) the man's figure in the mind of his reader. Here, Ramón resembles César Vallejo after the publication of *Trilce* (1922), a radically experimental poetic collection, and Vallejo's later Parisian chronicles that reflect his rejection of experimental forms and his commitment to Marxism. For example, in "El duelo de dos literaturas" he denounces the literature of "Byzantine" (*El arte* 111) writers, whose work he considers egotistical and emptied of social content. Also, in "Poesía nueva" and "El

arte revolucionario, arte de masas y forma específica de la lucha de las clases," he rejects cosmopolitan techniques and metaphors, which he considers pompous "juegos de salón" (114), and advocates simpler, "human" or proletarian poetry (134). Like Vallejo, Ramón wishes to make a social statement through a description with "human" language. The nameless narrator, though, finds Ramón's portrayal unconvincing: "Pero estos apuntes no sé si serán verdaderamente la imagen que de aquel hombre había en Ramón o simplemente locuras que se bajaron a los dedos de mi amigo [...] trasmutados en tontas ganas de señalar algo [...]. ¿Lo habremos creado Ramón y yo con facciones ajenas, con gestos propios?" (Adán 53). Here the narrator questions the possibility of writing any portrait that does not relate as much to the writer's "place" (preconceived models of thought and experience based on "gestos propios") as to the object portrayed ("facciones ajenas," based on external actions viewed through the writer's own lens) "para señalar algo;" that is to say, to convey a social message that has as much to do with the writer as it does to what he observes.

Therefore, while Ramón writes with a totalizing view of the man's face, eyes, fingers, etc., his interpretation of these "facciones ajenas"—"el dedo de los ociosos, el de los canónigos" (52)—originates in a vision which creates the same distance between subject and object as the other institutional forms of identity that he criticizes. The nameless narrator, in turn, does not see the same unity in the man initially, and questions the effects of Ramón's automatic dismissal of the man's Hispanic heritage:

> Porque yo veo ordenarse los datos que dice Ramón... humanamente [...]. Y también veo a aquel hombre disperso, incompleto [...]. Yo siento ahora un deseo [...] de hacerle las tremendas preguntas cuyas respuestas revelan la humanidad o la inhumanidad de un sujeto. "¿Es usted leguísta? ¿De cuál marca fuma usted? ¿Mantiene usted una querida?" (53)

The nameless narrator questions the value of what is "human," by implying that his friend's idea of humanity instead produces ideology. Ramón's version of "human" segregates, creates hierarchies, and makes necessary the questions that divide people into

factions—*leguísta*/communist, bourgeois/proletariat, *propio/ajeno*—that share no common ground and are arbitrarily assigned. According to Foucault, this type of binary thought is part of the "double mode" of the exercise of panoptic, individuating power over others: "that of binary division and branding (mad/sane [...] normal/abnormal) and that of coercive assignment of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized)" (199).

Ramón's binary thought and labeling, as interpreted by the narrator, also resemble those of José Carlos Mariátegui, who advocated a new Marxist-ndigenist myth that would replace decadent bourgeois culture and reactionary *criollismo*. Examples of this vein of Mariátegui's thought are found in "El ibero-americanismo y el panamericanismo" (*Obras completa*s 12: 26-30), where he declares the separation of America from "la España reaccionaria de [...] Primo de Rivera" (30); "Pasadismo y futurismo" (11: 20–24), where he criticizes what he sees as *criollo* literature's adoration of the viceroys; "Nacionalismo y vanguardismo" (11: 72–76), in which Mariátegui advocates the rejection of the Hispanic as part of foreign imperialism, and the resurrection of Perú's Incan roots; "El hombre y el mito" (*Obra política* 308–10), in which he posits the replacement of "decadent" religious myth with a new mythical paradigm based in socialism; and in "Indigenismo y socialismo" (223–26), where he links the vindication of indigenous elements with socialism.[6] Like Mariátegui, Ramón dismisses as reactionary the Hispanic heritage incarnated in the man's "dedo de canónigos."

To this vision, the narrator adds another: "Si aquel hombre respondiera que él era monarquista, que él no fumaba por carecer de narguilé, que él amaba a una vieja piadosa [...] ya podría yo saber con certeza que aquel hombre lo habíamos hecho nosotros, Ramón y yo" (Adán 53–54). In his portrayal, the nameless narrator, like Ramón, inserts his "gestos propios;" he remembers his Hispanic heritage while still documenting the man's material circumstances. The passage that sums up the narrator's comparison contrasts fragmented potential with what he sees as Ramón's vision of emptied wholeness: "Niños hay que no son sino la alegría de la gorra marinera—niños que ni siquiera son la gorra que llevan— [...]. ¿Qué será aquel hombre?" (54). In emphasizing the impossibility of knowing the true interior reality of another, the narrator implies not the sterility of all writing, but rather the inclusive possibilities that open up when one recognizes

the exclusionary impulse behind unitary *a priori* models such as that which informs Ramón's perception. In trying to interpret the man through the lens of a more social language and a God's-eye view, Ramón creates the opposite; that is to say, he creates a narcissistic fiction based on his own "gestos propios," which acts on a hegemonic impulse that he wants to impose on the social milieu. In turn, the nameless narrator sees fictional man as made up fragments of thought and experience, which add up to no particular "whole" and allow for inclusion of disparate elements that come from disparate "places," in social discourses. His "tactic" of vision does not presume a subjectivity or identity autonomous from his object of observation.

This tactic becomes clearer in the *La casa de cartón*'s eighth fragment, where the narrator compares Miss Annie Doll, one of several non-Hispanic tourists, with a tree: "Pero Ramón no ve en el jacarandá tu imagen dilatada por el sol [...]. Tú eres una cosa [...] que lleva un Kodak [...] y hace preguntas de sabiduría, de inutilidad... Un jacarandá es un árbol solemne, anticuado, confidencial, expresivo, huachafo, recordador, tío" (30). Ramón, like Vallejo, rejects metaphorical games and shows an antagonism toward the city. According to the narrator, he also creates binary categories: the "inauthentic" *gringa* as opposed to the tree's natural, autochthonous "authenticity," which also reflect a polemic between Vallejo and Mariátegui regarding cosmopolitan theories and techniques. Whereas Vallejo, in "Autopsia del superrealismo," considered Surrealism as a dying, bourgeois genre (*El arte* 83–89), in "El balance del suprarrealismo," Mariátegui saw in it the subversion of bourgeois rationality and identity (*Obras completas* 6: 45–52).[7]

Ramón's interpretation of Miss Annie Doll also resembles Mariátegui's assertion that, to create a truly national literature, cosmopolitanism would necessarily take the *vanguardista* intellectual back to Perú's Incan roots, socialist in nature (11: 25–29, 72–76; *Siete ensayos* 11–12, 48–54). In the tree that is "anticuado" and "recordador," Ramón looks for a return to national purity in a totalizing myth distinct from the ridiculous *gringa*, amateur anthropologist with her static vision, as reflected in her Kodak, and a suitcase that can hold an entire civilization. But in his search, according to the narrator's point of view, Ramón commits the same mistake as she does: the impulse to dominate instead of communicate, and to hold a distancing global view based on ideology, instead of proximity, which inevitably

prohibits acknowledging the multiple realities that his binary views do not include.

In contrast to this vision, the narrator's springs from the interstices that he looks to in order to question the exclusionary impulses inherent in binary oppositions and he also speaks from his urban reality. The Englishwoman is a *jacarandá* found in the city, on Mott Street, "con un muñón de flores violadas [...]. Ante él dudamos como ante los huacos del Museo, que no sabemos si son de Nazca o de Chimú, si auténticos o falsificados" (Adán 31). Even more crucial, by questioning the artifacts, the narrator renounces what Roberto González Echevarría has designated the mediating anthropological discourse that characterizes twentieth-century Spanish American narrative, whose object is not nature, but rather language and myth.[8] That is to say, the nameless narrator rejects what Elzbieta Sklodowska calls "la única estructura sobre la cual la vanguardia había edificado su estética: el paradigma mítico" (159). In doing so, he points to what he sees as the flaws in the ideas on how to effect social change proposed at the time by declining to adopt the global view of *indigenismo* or an original, autochthonous identity as an ideological model. This rejection reflects not a lack of concern for such issues, but rather a wariness of any unitary, exclusionary, or Panoptic vision.

Adán's text, however, does not simply rest upon his criticisms of ideology. The reader finds the narrator's alternative model for collective artistic endeavor in the way in which he and Ramón respond to Catita, Ramón's only love interest. Ramón's bases his response on a rejection of her Catholic morality, seen in his previous dismissal of a man's "dedo de canónigos." In the ninth fragment, Ramón shows the narrator a trifle that Catita has given him: "una estampa en que hay un ángel con cara de estreñido y un crepúsculo bellaco en primer término. Un regalo de Catita rra, rre, rri, rro, rru, tontería de internado" (35). Ramón considers the gift nothing more than a silly toy from a Catholic schoolgirl, which represents the useless Hispanic tradition and its concomitant morality, implicit in the playful use of the word "estreñido" that prohibits sex outside of marriage; and Ramón is frustrated because Catita rebuffs his sexual advances.

Ramón denies that creative possibilities exist within the Hispanic context and renounces games because he considers any game that does not find meaning in the Marxist "realist" sense of proletarian life to be useless and cut off from the "real world." Even more significant,

Ramón sees woman only within the context of her material presence: her sexuality. His vision of her does not reach beyond the limits of her hegemonic identity; instead, it has only shifted from the terrain of the virginal, spiritual woman of Catholicism, defined by her lack of sexuality, to Marxism's materialist terrain, defined by her freedom to have sex with whomever she pleases. In the end, though, she is still defined as a sexual object, and thus, from the narrator's point of view, represents the metaphorical "death" not only of the woman, who in this case also represents cultural expression, but also of the man who "loves" her.

One finds the fullest expression of this idea in the *La casa de cartón*'s thirty-fourth fragment, where Ramón realizes his desire in a dialectical description of the sexual act that is equivalent to his metaphorical death:

> Ella encajaba una pierna gorda [...] bajo la derecha de él [...]. Ella permanecía impasible como una ramera. [...] Ramón enflaquecía. Ella engordaba. Ramón era una bestia que empezaba a hacer ideas. Ella era una mujer que principiaba a bestializarse. [...] Pasaba atronado el ferrocarril de la noche. Ramón y ella subían [...] a un triste y oscuro vagón de carga. (78)

Metaphorically, the sexual act signifies Ramón's "maturity," which for him has translated to the adoption of an exclusive model and the end of childhood's inclusive vision. Upon realizing his desire, Ramón begins to have ideas, or rather the Idea: a unitary model that imposes itself and thereby excludes multiple cultural dimensions. As he "matures," his ideas make a beast of the woman, a person defined only by her sexuality. Thus, "maturity," like the conventional "humanity" seen in Ramón's previous portrayal of a man, equals the adoption of one ideology from a strategic, God's-eye view. Ultimately, such a vision equals the metaphorical death of any attempt to portray the complexities of humanity, which prefigures the "death" of Ramón.

Ramón's response to Catita does not convince the nameless narrator to accept his vision. The narrator, whose fourteen years of age oppose Ramón's sixteen, obviously admires his friend: "Yo voy con él, cerca de él, con oscuro disgusto de que mis pies no lleguen al suelo" (33) Yet, he is wary of the exclusionary tendencies of Ramón's "maturity," or unitary ideology: "Pero, en cambio, en mi

mano demasiado larga, caben los lomos de todos mis textos" (33). Despite the passage's humor, there are provocative implications in this confrontation between Ramón's "maturity" and the narrator's "childishness." Whereas Ramón looks for that which coincides with his unitary identity, associating Catita's trifle with infantile games of a schoolgirl that has not yet reached his level of "maturity," the narrator finds solace in the image, in multiple models (his books), and in the repetition of the vowels: that is, a chance to recreate himself: "Mi vida pende de una primera nota como una miguita de pan de un hilo de telaraña" (33). The narrator's life depends on the vowels, which represent an openness to and engagement with, rather than imposition on, what he observes through language, since for him language permits a way of seeing and relating to the world, as opposed to vying for hegemony.

In the narrator's own portrayal of Catita, who is one of many adolescent girls with whom he flirts throughout the text, he, like Ramón, includes (a description of) Catita's material aspect in the text's thirty-fifth fragment, and at the same time parodies her Hispanic literary portrayals from the Medieval era to the *vanguadista* present. Furthermore, it becomes evident that for the nameless narrator, there are two kinds of materiality in play: "Ella era una brava catadora de mozos. Todos nosotros hubimos de rodar la cabeza por sobre su pechito duro y redondo. Así de este amor inevitable hacíamos una era—'Cuando yo enamoraba de Catita [...]'" (79). On one hand, this statement is an innocent commentary on a flirtatious schoolgirl who enamors a group of boys, and whom the boys, as men, will one day remember. On the other hand, Catita represents the era of a Medieval Hispanic schoolgirl: "Catita es un nombre gótico; hace pensar en ojivas lívidas de crepúsculos, en fuentes de bronce musgoso, [...] en moñosos cinturones de castidad" (79). Next, she becomes the womanly ideal of a post-Independence, racially pure jewel of the bourgeois/realist house: "Catita era una ventana rubia de mediodía; una pila de cemento blanco, moderna, pulcrísima; un sobrillón de trapo para la playa, un lazo loco de colegiala" (79). Here she represents the decadent era of the *modernista* poets: "Catita [...] mariposa diseca, serojo de ictericia o amarillo gorro de jebe [...] Catita, [...] con botecitos panzudos" (79–80). Finally she is the new Marxist/nationalist icon of twentieth-century Lima: "Catita mar redondo encerrado en un muella semicircular, embanderado de ciudades" (80).

Above all, Catita is only a name and a girl: "Catita, todas las vocales apareciendo en ella, cabal, íntegra, en cuerpo y alma en la a desapareciendo poco a poco [...] en la e tierna y boba; en la i flaca y fea; en la o, casi ella pero no [...]; en la u, cretina, albina..." (80). In a radical parody of the portrayals of the woman ideal throughout Spanish American literary history, the narrator, "de abajo arriba" (79), lowers Catita the Idea to her basic and immanent materialities of language and the persona represented by language, so that she can be perceived in all her possibility and impossibility. The unitary portrayals, from the narrator's multiple perspectives, are Ideas erroneously taken for reality. His game in no way represents a return to a mythical origin, since he constantly juxtaposes each idea with the image of the girl and the adolescents. Nor is adolescence here a Freudian regression, a return to the exclusively Hispanic[9] or the stage of an "underdeveloped" country that one day hopes to be its father, Europe.

This distinctive response to Catita, in turn, signals a crucial similarity between Ramón and the nameless narrator, for the reference to "los barquitos de papel" at the end of his parody is an image unmistakably *vallejiana*. The reader may recall, for example, the third poem of Vallejo's *Trilce*, where the poetic voice remembers childhood in the image of paper boats that he launches with his brother, a time of harmony:

> Ya no tengamos pena. Vamos viendo
> los barcos ¡el mío es el más bonito de todos!
> con los cuales jugamos todo el santo día,
> sin pelearnos como debe de ser;
> han quedado en el pozo de agua, listos
> fletados de dulces para mañana. (*Obra poética* 172, my emphasis)[10]

The narrator uses Vallejo's techniques and images to call for a truce during a time of polemics and division that separate those with similar goals of changing society, but with conflicting ideas on how to reach them. In fact, many of the poetic techniques in *La casa de cartón* can also be found in Vallejo's poetry, including the play with the concepts of life and death, humanity and inhumanity, and the "abajo arriba."[11]

The artistic vision given to us by the narrator is an alternative form of collective endeavor that does not depend on a unitary model that

inevitably excludes someone or something. To the contrary, the narrator posits adolescence as a metaphor for collective activity in which artists, in all their discursive diversity and from their respective places, may launch their paper boats without the impulse toward the mythical hegemony of a unitary cultural identity or ideology. Ramón, from the narrator's point of view, begins with the global—Marxist realism in Vallejo's case and an *indigenista* Marxism in Mariátegui's case—and imposes it from top to bottom, rejecting cultural concepts that do not coincide: "Quedó Ramón en el cielo, en aire, en medio, en equilibrio. [...] Ramón cayó mal, de barriga, de bruces" (Adán 79). In contrast, the narrator lowers the Idea to a place where he can create a multitude of connections and the possibility of reciprocity between subject and object: "Esta mula nos está creando al imaginarnos. En ella me siento yo solidario en origen con lo animado y lo inanimado. Todos somos imágenes [...] que se folian o se enyesan y fenestran. [...] Cósmica lógica que nos distingue a todos en indefinidas especies de un solo género... Una ventana y yo... Una paloma y yo..." (92–93). For the narrator, to restrict desire to a monolithic path is the equivalent of death, "la imagen que se enyesa," and so it is that Ramón "dies" in the text.

At the same time that he distances himself from his friend, though, the narrator in no way suggests an outright rejection, nor a sense of superiority, but rather acknowledges that he owes his existence to Ramón, which is why one cannot fully distinguish between the two:

> De Ramón sólo me queda [...] una manera de pensar y ver que me posibilita vivir en este amorfo agrupamiento de casas [...]. Solamente el mar no ha dejado de ser las largas ondas, negras, líneas a lápiz prolijamente equidistantes de las mil curvas de la playa... Obsesión precisa de cadenas y proyecciones, de escalas y cifras. Bendito sea Ramón, el loco que me enseñó a ver el agua en el mar, las hojas en los árboles, las casas en las calles, el sexo en las mujeres. (87)

The tactical renunciation of the dominating God's-eye perception and the ability to bring language and poetic vision into proximity with its referents through poetry are thus Ramón's gifts to the unnamed narrator, and with those, the gift of dying and resuscitating without end.

The metaphorical concept of death indicates a last similarity and difference between Ramón and the narrator, for in addition to

"dying," Ramón has a name, and when he "dies," he goes "a casa" (65), whereas the narrator has neither name, nor house or "proper place," and remains a fragmented, imperfect being, perhaps the nameless poet's most striking tribute to Vallejo, to Mariátegui, and to Marxism. For, above all, *La casa de cartón* stands as the testimony of one artist's need to "die" by divesting himself of name, family, and the ideologies that spring from such ties, in order to see, write, and thus continually recreate himself and the world in the life opened up by "orphanhood," also a common image in Vallejo's poetry.[12] Implicit is the possibility of an alternative form of social or collective endeavor that allows for and respects differences in a time of polemics, that engages with, rather than imposing a hegemonic vision upon, the social milieu. Ultimately such an endeavor would allow for a literary community positioned in no one ideological *place*, engaged in a limitless, multiple play of perspectives and identities, no less profound and vital despite its ludic quality. If this collectivity did not materialize during Adán's literary career, surely the onus does not lie solely with him.

Notes

1. This tendency is present beginning from Luis Alberto Sánchez (21) and José Carlos Mariátegui ("Colofón" 91–92), who provide respectively the prologue and colophon of the first edition, up to more recent criticism by John Kinsella (*Lo trágico* 56–57; *Tradición y modernidad* 8–10), Peter Elmore (39, 67), Vicky Unruh (106), and Mirko Lauer (19, 23). For other examples of this tendency, see Mario Castro Arenas (203, 206); Luis Fernando Vidal (12); and Luis Loayza (124).

2. Eduardo Gargurevich utilizes the same model when he speaks of the international *vanguardia* with aesthetic ends, and the indigenous *vanguardia* with nationalist and social goals (34). This dichotomy also appears in the analyses of Esther Castañeda Vielakamen (21), Washington Delgado (13–17), and Nelson Osorio (231). Ana Pizarro and Gloria Videla de Rivero comment on a third propensity among *vanguardista* writers, which attempts to synthesize the cosmopolitan with the indigenous through the recuperation of autochthonous themes with the techniques of the cosmopolitan *vanguardia*. And in a study of Peruvian vanguard manifestos, Yazmín López Lenci notes two tendencies: one associated with the international urban Avant-garde, which looks to redefine the concept of tradition through the dynamic of social

revolution, and another that attempts to create a new cultural subject from the interior Andean regions (21).

3. The idea of the artist's divorce from political action also springs, in part, from Adán's refusal to take an organized political stance during his life or to align himself with any of the nationalist or political movements that began to organize the intellectual community during the *vanguardia*. Also pertinent to this anti-social interpretation of Adán's work is the fact that the author, after completing his studies and working briefly, spent the bulk of his life in bookstores, hotels, and sanitariums due to the financial decline of his family, his alcoholism, and his apparent indifference to what society would call "productive" work. For in-depth biographies of Adán, see Gargurevich, Jorge Aguilar Mora (9–153), José Antonio Bravo, and Luis Vargas Durand.

4. See, for example, Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez (99), Kinsella, (*Lo trágico* 25, 49–53; *Tradición* 15); Verani ("La casa" 1083; *Narrativa vanguardista* 68), and Lauer (27).

5. Unruh (106, 108–09), Elmore (59), and Edmundo Bendezú (170) have all interpreted Ramón as one whose ambiguous interaction with the narrator defies the realist notion of conventional, integrated identity. José Antonio Bravo (15) and Jorge Aguilar Mora (55), in turn, speculate that Ramón is, in part, an extension of Adán's dead brother.

6. Vallejo had also demonstrated skepticism of the value Spain's influence in recent literature. In "Estado de la literatura española" (1926), the poet laments the mediocrity of Spanish and Spanish American Literature, criticizing both the avant-garde vein, as well as "orientaciones de cliché" such as the naturalist novel and "el estilo castizo" (*Artículos y crónicas* 297–98).

7. Mariátegui also engages in a polemic with Luis Alberto Sánchez, Adán's old professor, when Sánchez calls into question indigenous projects proposed by *costeños*. Mariátegui's responses can be found in "Indigenismo y socialismo" (*Obra política* 223–26), "Réplica a Luis Alberto Sánchez" (*Obras completas* 13: 226–28), and "Polémica finita" (*Obras completas* 13: 225–28).

8. In *Myth and Archive*, González Echevarría analyzes the institutionalization of the study of pre-Columbian cultures that accompanies twentieth-century political upheaval in Andean countries, as well as the Mexican Revolution (154). The critic links the anthropological eye with the literary Avant-garde, citing, among others, the work of Miguel Ángel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier (14, 154). González Echevarría's thesis centers on mediating discourses in Latin American literature during colonial times (legal), the nineteenth century (scientific), and the twentieth century (anthropological).

9. Lauer has suggested that underlying *La casa de cartón* is a "regression" to *lo criollo*, "nunca confesado pero siempre presente en su obra" (23), or the stage of an "underdeveloped" country that one day hopes to be its father, Europe.

10. Another example of this image in Vallejo's poetry is found in "El barco perdido," first published in *Cultura Infantil* in 1916, where the poetic voice laments the lost boat of his childhood, before the advent of consciousness:

> Fatigado al mediar mi vida triste
> he pensado con pena
> en el perfil proscrito de ese barco
> que ahora no existe [...] ¡Oh lindo barco gualda que te fueras
> yo no sabré hasta dónde!
> Ahora me ahogo en mi Conciencia
> ¡qué bueno si volvieras [...]! (*Obra poética* 141)

11. To cite all examples in Vallejo's work would exceed the limits of this study. It will be sufficient to consider poem "LXXV" in *Trilce*, where the poet addresses the paradoxical death of conventional existence:

> Estáis muertos, no habiendo vivido jamás.
> Quienquiera diría que, no siendo ahora, en otro
> tiempo fuisteis. Pero en verdad, vosotros sois los cadáveres de una vida
> que nunca fue. Triste destino.
> El no haber sido verde jamás. (*Obra poética* 261)

One finds the notion of "abajo arriba" in "Hoy me gusta la vida mucho menos:"

> Dije, chaleco, dije
> todo, parte, ansia, dije casi, por no llorar.
> Que es verdad que sufrí en aquel hospital que queda al lado
> y está bien y está mal haber mirado
> de abajo arriba mi organismo. (*Obra poética* 346)

12. Of course, Vallejo's orphanhood and rebirth is partly related to the literal death of his family. However, in his poetry the concept of orphanhood also refers to the poet's rejection of structural, existential, and linguistic security, as one can see in poem "XXXVI" of *Trilce*: "[...] rehusad la simetría a buen seguro [...] / ¡Ceded al Nuevo impar / potente de orfandad!" (*Obra poética* 212).

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