

Cities of Love and Disorder: Mysticism and Augustinian Social Critique in Ernesto Cardenal's Gethsemani Writings

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Abstract: This article is an exploration of the encounters between Ernesto Cardenal's Gethsemani writings and Saint Augustine's theology. I propose that Augustine's framing of love in Confessions and City of God inform many of Cardenal's own spiritual reflections on the existence of iniquity and oppression. Although in his memoir *Vida perdida* the poet expresses animosity towards the saint for his sexual negativity, the poet also draws on Augustinian concepts in the Gethsemani texts *Vida en el amor*, and *Gethsemani KY*, to poetically and spiritually examine Nicaragua's experience of oppression under the Somoza regime.

Key words: Ernesto Cardenal; Saint Augustine of Hippo; Anastasio Somoza García; Gethsemani, Kentucky; Nicaragua; Mysticism; Sin.

Resumen: este artículo explora los encuentros entre la teología de San Agustín y los escritos espirituales producidos por Ernesto Cardenal durante y después de su residencia en el monasterio de "Our Lady of Gethsemani" en Kentucky, EE.UU. entre 1957 y 1959. Propongo que ciertas teorías agustinianas del amor desarrolladas en *Confesiones* y *La Ciudad de Dios* informan la consciencia de opresión en las reflexiones espirituales iniciales del poeta nicaragüense. Aunque en las memorias de Cardenal el santo es criticado por su negatividad sexual, Agustín también provee una estructura conceptual con la que el poeta explore poéticamente y espiritualmente la experiencia nicaragüense bajo el régimen de los Somoza.

Palabras clave: Ernesto Cardenal; San Agustín de Hipona; Gethsemani KY; escrituras espirituales amor; opresión.

1. Introduction

The spiritual writings which Ernesto Cardenal produced during his brief residence among the Trappists at Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky are among his least studied. In 1957 Cardenal entered the Cistercian monastery —longtime home of Thomas Merton, with the intention of fulfilling his vocation there. Prior to completing his novitiate in 1959, however, Cardenal developed health problems and was forced to leave. The poet's monastic experiences would have a profound effect on his theological and political ideals as well as his writing. The self-abnegating fraternity and simplicity of monastic life would forge an ideal which Cardenal would later attempt to realize through both the founding of the community of Solentiname and supporting the Nicaraguan Revolution. Meanwhile, Cardenal's poetry would be shaped by the Gethsemani experience to express a view of the universe as an integrated whole in which the divine, the material, the intimate, the social, the political and the cosmic are all interconnected.

This integrated view of the universe first emerges in Cardenal's 1961 work *Gethsemani KY*, —based on notes taken during his residence among the Trappists— and is further developed in the prose work *Vida en el amor* written shortly after his departure. Imagistic in style and contemplative in tone, these texts derive their theme of universal interconnection from various theologies, including, surprisingly, Augustinian tropes of love and social disorder.¹ Cardenal's vocational choice represented the resolution to an inner struggle between religious life and marriage which shapes his pre-monastic poems such as *Epigramas* (1957) and *Carmen y otros poemas* (1945). Reflecting on the Gethsemani years in his 1999 memoir *Vida perdida* the poet situates the figure of St. Augustine in the centre of that tension, as simultaneously a cause and synecdoche of a Christianity that, in the words of Georges Bataille “Sets its face against eroticism” (32).

¹ Luce López-Baralt, for example cites the theological works of Tielhard de Chardin and Meister Eckhart, as well as Thomas Merton and San Juan de la Cruz as influences on the poet's mystical theology. (13) Similarly, Ivan Carrasco describes the poet's “holistic visión”, expressed in *Cántico Cósmico* as informed by de Chardin's theology: an “evolución de la materia hacia el espíritu, de lo animal a lo humano y lo divino, desde el punto Alfa hasta el punto Omega, fundamentada en todos los avances de las ciencias de frontera: la física cuántica, la astronomía contemporánea, la biología experimental, las teorías de la relatividad, de la indeterminación, del caos, la teología de la liberación” (130). The influence of Augustine is surprising especially considering the poet's animosity towards the saint as expressed in *Vida perdida* (see p. 5).

Nevertheless, Augustinian concepts of love and social order also inform many Cardenal's Gethsemani reflections, particularly those touching on oppression and iniquity. Augustine was one of the first theologians to conceptualize the "social dimension" of love in Catholic thought. In *City of God* Augustine explains sin as misdirection of love in which "lower" things, (goods, sex and interpersonal relationships) are prioritized above "higher" things (God, justice and charity). Both this "ordered" love which foregrounds the Creator and the "disordered" love which foregrounds the self form metaphoric social geographies, two cities: the "City of God" and the "City of Man". These cities of love and disorder are also found in Cardenal's monastic writings, in spite of the de Chardinian bent of the poet's theology.² I argue that Augustine's views on love ground the consciousness of oppression in Cardenal's early mystical evolutionary theology. At the heart of Cardenal's more conservative works, prior to his turn towards liberation theology,³ Augustine acts as a primary source of social consciousness.

2. The Poet and the Saint: Cardenal's Confessions

Although neither the monastic poems, nor Cardenal's later contemplative writings discuss Augustine much, the poet's 1999 memoir *Vida perdida* evokes the saint repeatedly in reference to Cardenal's personal crisis leading up to his departure for Gethsemani. Augustine's *Confessions* provides a reference point for Cardenal's narrative framing of his own conversion account. Cardenal compares himself directly to Augustine at one point, recognizing his failure to live up to the great sinner:

² De Chardin, as Luce Lopez Baralt points out, possessed an extreme "redemptive optimism", viewing all material life as sacred and sin as nonexistent. Cardenal embraces this view to some degree, "Todo es limpio e inocente: la santidad divina se refleja a traves de las pupilas de los credos, e incluso lo ordinario deviene excepcional en este universp santificado" (in Lopez-Baralt 53). At the same time, however, Cardenal's poems demonstrate the consciousness of iniquities both personal and social.

³ Cardenal's socialism and alignment with liberation theology didn't become solidified until the suspicious death of Thomas Merton in 1968 in Vietnam and Cardenal's visit to Cuba at the behest of Cintio Vitner in 1970. In the 1950's the poet aligned more with the Conservatism of his upbringing. Stephen Henighan, for example, even notes that Cardenal supported Francisco Franco during his visit to Spain in the early 1950's "Like other young men rebelling against the Liberal dictatorship of Somoza, Cardenal and [Pablo Antonio] Cuadra sought in the Fascist Spain of General Francisco Franco a restitution of Catholic corporatist values" (48). The poet's participation in the April Conspiracy against the Somoza dictatorship in 1954 was perfectly in-line with Conservative Catholicism in Nicaragua, which opposed Somoza as fiercely as the socialist left.

Sería erróneo pensar que yo fui un pecador como san Agustín. Más bien yo sentía envidia de san Agustín. Yo hubiera querido tener la vida intensa de pecado sexual que él tuvo antes de su conversión; y también deseaba tener como él mi conversión pero después. Después de haber pecado como él. ...Con lo que he relatado —estas “confesiones” mías— se verá por qué es que yo envidiaba a san Agustín (Vp 63).

Indeed, briefly examining the structure of both *Confessions* and *Vida perdida* one finds similarities: both follow a dialectic pattern which Enrico Mario Santi, in his analysis of Pablo Neruda's poetry associates with conversion narratives. Santi explains that the narrative representation of religious conversion “rests on a retrospective structure issuing from a self who, having reached self-understanding and ontological coherence, proceeds to give an account of his spiritual progress” (89). The convert's experience is “narrated from the end”, once “his spiritual crisis is over, and the plot of his story assumes a rhetorical difference between the self he has become and the self he used to be” (89). Both Cardenal and Augustine construct a similar dialectic, reflecting on the conversion journey backwards from the position of resolution and divine communion through a period of crisis. Thus, Cardenal begins his narrative with an image of himself on the plane toward Gethsemani “Al bajarse mi tío Alejandro sentí que Dios me decía “Bueno ya estamos solos, viniste a buscarme y aquí me tienes” (Vp 10), while in the opening book of *Confessions* Augustine begins his narrative at the end: the encounter with God in his famous “restless heart” discourse:

Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite. And Thee would man praise; man, but a particle of Thy creation; man, that bears about him his mortality, the witness of his sin, the witness that Thou resistest the proud: yet would man praise Thee; he, but a particle of Thy creation. Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee (*Conf.* I:1).

This posture of resolution which initiates the narrative sets up its central conflict: the “restless heart's” search for meaning through a myriad of false paths, witnessed and troubled by the same divine presence addressed in the opening of the narrative. Indeed, this presence deepens the self awareness of the narrative speakers, making them unflinching in their self analysis. Cardenal describes multiple

failed relationships leading up to his Gethsemani exodus which ended because of his indecisiveness, youthful foolishness or jealousy, while Augustine plumbs the depths of his adolescent lust

But what was it that I delighted in save to love and to be beloved? But I held it not in moderation, mind to mind, the bright path of friendship, but out of the dark concupiscence of the flesh and the effervescence of youth exhalations came forth which obscured and overcast my heart, so that I was unable to discern pure affection from unholy desire. Both boiled confusedly within me, and dragged away my unstable youth into the rough places of unchaste desires, and plunged me into a gulf of infamy (*Conf. II: 2*).

Both protagonists experience this “gulf of infamy” as a period of drunkenness, casual erotic encounters and, interestingly, intellectual engagement with the political and intellectual trends of their respective periods. Cardenal travels to New York to undertake his studies at Columbia University, encountering both women and poetic modernism, while Augustine travels to Rome and becomes an orator and a Manichean. During these iniquitous periods, both are haunted and rebuked by the divine presence, unable to fully enjoy their pleasures. Augustine states “Thou wast always by me, mercifully angry and flavoring all my unlawful pleasures with bitter discontent, in order that I might seek pleasures free from discontent” (*Conf. II.2*) Cardenal laments: “Yo era perseguido por Dios, y lo sabía. Por eso ese pánico del que ya les dije, cuando yo me sentía cerca de tomar una decisión definitiva” (20).

Both authors also describe personal crises leading to states of desolation which, in turn, precipitate their transformation. Augustine loses one of his beloved childhood friends, which embitters all subsequent experience of human love “All things looked terrible, even the very light itself; and whatsoever was not what he was, was repulsive and hateful, except groans and tears, for in those alone found I a little repose” (IV:7). Cardenal, Meanwhile falls in love with an eighteen year old art student named Ileana who rejects him for a Somoza functionary: “El hecho es que me sentí abatido hasta el fondo del abatimiento. Lo que yo sentía es lo que expresa aquel salmo llamado *De profundis* ‘desde lo profundo clamo a ti Señor’. Entonces me rendí a Dios” (Vp 76). Interestingly, during this period Saint Augustine emerges directly in Cardenal’s life in the form of a sermon given by a Jesuit priest during Holy Week when the poet and Ileana had briefly separated:

El jesuita reiteraba cómo san Agustín se había convertido, habiéndolo dudado mucho, después de una vida de mucho pecado. Decía que no habían brillado sus meritos literarios mientras estaba esclavizado por sus pasiones, sino hasta después cuando fue liberado de ellas. Decía que si no hubiera sido por su conversión nadie lo recordaría ahora entre los escritores latinos. Decía curiosamente, que era un águila atada en elfango y que no podía volar (*Vp* 70).

Cardenal takes the sermon as a direct message from God which, along with his final separation from Ileana due to her marriage, precipitates his final decision. In spite of this clear intertextual relationship between Augustine and Ernesto Cardenal's personal narratives, Cardenal also expresses antipathy towards Augustine as a figure. Augustine both represents and creates the central conflict in the poet's pre-monastic life: his desire for sexual encounter with women at odds with his vocational longings.⁴ Initially, this conflict manifests in the form of two Augustinian priests who act as confessors for the poet. For one of these confessors "nada de lo que hubiera en relación de novios, por mucha excitación que yo sintiera, era pecado" (*VP* 55). For the other "prácticamente todo lo que hubiera entre novios era pecado" (55). These two priests come to represent "las dos vidas que había tenido San Agustín, la de la primera época y la de la segunda época" (55). The "second period" of the saint's life, following his conversion Cardenal characterizes as an "obsesión antisexual", which "embitters the lives of Christians for 15 centuries," including the poet himself (55). In a subsequent passage the poet describes losing his virginity in a brothel in Francoist Spain, blaming Augustine for the decision to do so. The poet turned to prostitutes because, in his view, the internal conflict between sexual desire and religious vocation made it impossible for him to commit to women: "Yo diría que también es injusto que un joven tenga que ir a comprar sexo a un burdel. ...Por cierto que San Agustín es el responsable" (63). Cardenal explains further "Sus remordimientos a través de los siglos han llegado hasta nosotros. Y también se han hecho nuestros esos remordimientos" (64). In a somewhat Orientalist fashion, Cardenal then compares Western prudery with "Eastern" and "Islamic" views on sexuality which treat it "una actividad natural como cualquier otra" and concludes that without Augustine "No

⁴ López Baralt describes the poet's sacrifice of sexuality as one of his greatest sources of personal suffering "Ignoro por qué lo dice, pues sé bien cuánto ha sufrido Ernesto Cardenal, con su renuncia al amor humano; con su país en Guerra; con la revolución, que tantas muertes costó, traicionada" (90).

habría habido tal dilema en mi vida. Y mi rumbo hacia Dios habría sido otro” (65). Orientalism aside,⁵ this discussion from *Vida perdida* demonstrates Cardenal’s conflicted relationship with the Saint and his writings. Augustine is a figure with whom he experiences a kind of psychological *méconnaissance*, both identifying with and rejecting simultaneously. In Jacques Lacan’s terms, Augustine is an Oedipal father whose “Law”, in the form of Catholic teaching on chastity, displaces the poet’s primal desires and initiates him into a religious symbolic order.⁶ Instead of the closed circle of interpersonal eroticism, Cardenal will experience a mystical eroticism encoded into language and the material structure of the universe, which envelops him as its object rather than its agent.⁷

Admittedly, this Oedipal reading seems to overemphasize the relationship between the two. I only bring it up to focus on a single dynamic: the expansion of both language and vocation that occurs through erotic deferral. Due to the Augustinian/Catholic prohibition on sexual expression in religious life, the poet’s experience of love becomes deferred through symbols and metaphors. The Gethsemani experience becomes an erotic one, but transformed from singular sexual desire into a lived consciousness of love’s more expansive manifestations, including a thirst for social justice nourished by mystical encounters with the divine presence. Hence in *Vida perdida* Cardenal credits his celibacy (and thus Augustine) with both making him both a mystic

⁵ In fairness, Cardenal’s interest in Eastern cultures came initially by way of Merton’s interest in Sufi and Taoist mysticism and would evolve as Cardenal became more involved in revolutionary politics. Andrew Morrow studies the relationship that developed between the poet and the Islamic world following Cardenal’s meeting with Islamic leaders from Libya, Lebanon, Iran Iraq and Syria while serving as Sandinista minister of culture (Morrow 2). Cardenal would go on to support the Islamic Revolution in Iran and to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini in person as a show of solidarity. Nevertheless, it is notable that Cardenal’s idealization of Eastern “sexual naturalism” ignores the shame-based strictures placed on women in these cultures, some of these strictures Cardenal even seems to defend (for example see Morrow 59-66).

⁶ Chieza Lorenzo explains that in Lacanian thought “Full structuration of speech in the individual is always brought about by the Oedipus complex: language as speech is fully structured for the Child only when he has properly located himself in the symbolic order” (62).

⁷ This brings up a whole discourse on mystical eroticism which, for reasons of brevity, I am unable to dedicate much space to here. One of the tropes of mystical erotic writing is that the mystical voice is always feminine and enters into a feminine state of consciousness. Feminist Luce Irigaray addresses this in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. “It is for/by woman that man dares to enter into the place, to descend to it, to condescend to it” (151).

and a revolutionary “Pero sin este error yo no hubiera tenido la unión con Dios. Es más, sin este error de escoger el celibato yo no hubiera sido revolucionario. Habría sido burgués” (65). Theologian Dorothee Soelle, —herself a reader of Cardenal’s who wrote the introduction to the 1989 publication of *Salmos*— explains the language of mysticism as one which draws primarily from sublimated eros:

Of that [mystical] experience, Buber says that it “is originally an entering into God, *enthusiasmos* (enthusiasm) being filled with the god. Forms of this notion are the eating of the god; inhalation of the divine fire-breath; loving union with the god (this basic form remained characteristic of all later mysticism); being rebegotten, reborn through the god; ascent of the soul to the god; into the god... (45).

For Soelle, these images “have a sexual-ecstatic dimension.” But, she argues, it is important not to “reduce them to the sex drive or to trivialize them as compensation for lives that have not been lived out” (45). Soelle argues that these desires are neither solipsistic nor egomaniacal “because they assert that all humans have the ability for God” (45). Thus, Mysticism radically substantiates the dignity of each human person as the basis for social justice. Interestingly, Augustine’s central ideas on love have a role in this mystical schema, at least as it manifests in Cardenal’s writings. They affirm the mystic’s desire for justice by pinpointing the places where it lacks and by diagnosing the cause of its failure.

As there are several Augustinian conceptualizations of love found among the poet’s monastic reflections, some discussion of Augustine’s philosophy on love is necessary. The notion which grounds all of Augustine’s reflections is ‘love as motion’. A more axiomatic version of this concept is found in *Confessions*:

The body by its own weight strives towards its own place. Weight makes not downward only, but to his own place. Fire tends upward, a stone downward. They are urged by their own weight, they seek their own places. Oil poured below water, is raised above the water; water poured upon oil, sinks below the oil. They are urged by their own weights to seek their own places. When out of their order, they are restless; restored to order, they are at rest. My weight, is my love; thereby am I borne, whithersoever I am borne. We are inflamed, by Thy Gift we are kindled; and are carried upwards; we glow inwardly, and go forwards (*Conf. XIII: 9*).

It's important to distinguish the Augustinian definition of "weight" from its modern equivalent. According to Augustine scholar Phillip Cary, the philosopher was drawing on Cicero who, as a stoic, defined the soul as a "divine fire" and considered "weight" as an ontological property in line with the physics of his time. Cary explains that in classical physics "Each kind of thing has its own specific weight, which may move it up or down. As the weight of a stone pulls it downward to its natural place of rest on earth, the weight of fire draws it upward toward the celestial fire of the stars, which is where it belongs" (5). Augustine transforms this into a metaphor for the movement of the soul. Cary explains that love "moves" humans not merely by "stirring up emotions" but "by attracting us to what we love" (5). Thus "a soul's earthly loves attract it to earthly things while charity, the love of God, is like fire ascending to heaven" (5). In *Eighty Three Different Questions*, Augustine uses this metaphor as a warning against circularity, "Then again, since love is a kind of motion, and since there is no motion except it be toward something, when we seek what ought to be loved we are looking for something to which this motion ought to direct us" (*Eighty Three* 64-5). Love is intended to move the soul both towards God and towards the other, not to collapse inward onto itself in a kind of solipsism or narcissism, which as we will see in Cardenal's writing, equals the corruption or destruction of love.

This extension of love beyond the self invariably leads to the question of how societies are formed. The center of Augustine's social theory, argues Cary, is found in the nineteenth book of *City of God*. Here, Augustine refutes Cicero's definition of a "civitas" as a group of people unified by "Law".

But if we discard this definition of a people, and, assuming another, say that a people is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love, then, in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love. Yet whatever it loves, if only it is an assemblage of reasonable beings and not of beasts, and is bound together by an agreement as to the objects of love, "it is reasonably called a people; and it will be a superior people in proportion as it is bound together by higher interests, inferior in proportion as it is bound together by lower" (*City* XIX:24).

It's important to recognize here that Augustine views vice and its attendant social corruption as not stemming from lack of love but from its misdirection. For example, "Beauty" argues Augustine is "good" and "but only a temporal, carnal, and lower kind of good, is not fitly

loved in preference to God, the eternal, spiritual, and unchangeable good" (City XV: 22) Augustine continues "When the miser prefers his gold to justice, it is through no fault of the gold, but of the man; and so with every created thing. For though it be good, it may be loved with an evil as well as with a good love: it is loved rightly when it is loved ordinately; evilly, when inordinately" (City XV: 22). Superior things such as God, justice and charity ought to be loved more than pleasures and possessions. Societies, meanwhile, are shaped by the thing they love. The quality of the collectively loved objects determines the quality of the society formed. If the collective love object is temporary or fleeting, the society is characterized by conflict, for as Cary suggests, loving anything other than God is loving something limited and finite, "there is never enough to go around and what there is must be divided before everyone can have a piece. Such is the ontological basis of war and peace". (13) Loving God, however, means loving the highest, infinite good which cannot be divided and thus not fought over, making social unity and undisturbed love possible.

Social peace as founded in the common love of God sounds strange to modern sensibilities, yet as Cary also explains, Augustine views the supreme good as both an inner reality as well as a transcendent one. "The inner world of the soul" Cary argues "is by nature a space shared in common, not a private world in which each soul is separated and alone." (13). Augustine adapts to a Christian hermeneutic, Plotinus' belief that "The one they love is at their center, if they would only turn inward to see it". Turning inward via contemplation and confession leads not to a greater isolation, but rather to recognition of "the Common Good in which all souls are united." This dimension of Augustinian thought has much resonance to Cardenal whom, in *Vida en el amor* states "Dios está en todas partes, no solo dentro del alma. Pero también está dentro del alma, y uno se ha dado cuenta de su presencia en el alma, y quiere gozarla." (32) Cardenal like Augustine recognizes a continuous interchange between the inner sphere of contemplation and the outer sphere of social interaction. The contemplative experiences an inner encounter with the divinity and with that Good which all humans hold in common, and then translates that encounter into positive and just actions. The soul corrupted by misdirected desires whose will has been divided against itself, becomes enslaved and enslaves others. The clearest manifestation of these ideas is found in Cardenal's theological reflections in *Vida en el amor*, which borrows from Augustine in several places. Here Ernesto Cardenal argues that the soul's misdirected love

is the origin of social and historical oppression, including that imposed on the Nicaraguan people by Anastasio Somoza García.

3. Vida en el amor

Written during the poet's post-Gethsemani stay in Cuernavaca between 1959 and 1961, *Vida en el amor* is a work of mystical contemplative prose. Luce López Baralt compares the work, both in importance and in style to Teilhard de Chardin's *Milieu divin* and Thomas Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation*. López Baralt explains "Se trata del libro más gozoso, más compasivo y más armónico del poeta, en el que salta a la vista el júbilo del místico reciente que ha descubierto que ese amor avasallante de Dios es el centro ontológico del universo" (49). This "júbilo" however, is also balanced by a perceptive recognition of the iniquitous state of humankind. Indeed, this recognition is found early in the text:

En los ojos de todo ser humano hay un anhelo insaciable. En las pupilas de los hombres de todas las razas; en las miradas de los niños y de los ancianos y de las madres y de la mujer enamorada, del policía y el empleado y el aventurero y el asesino y el revolucionario y el dictador y el santo: existe en todos la misma chispa de deseo insaciable, la misma ambición infinita de felicidad y de gozo y de posesión sin fin (Va 27).

This passage is of particular interest because it seems to derive directly from the "restless heart" discourse of Augustine's *Confessions*. Indeed, Cardenal expands the axiom at the centre of Augustine's discourse —"thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they repose in thee"— through a strategy of compacted rhetorical parallelisms. The parallels are set up as contraposed figures: innocence (saints, children), vulnerability (elderly, mothers, women in love) worldliness (police, employee), iniquity (dictator, adventurer, murderer). These contrapositions emphasize the universality of the restless condition and the intrinsic equality of all persons regardless of their spiritual or sociopolitical station. Also, in a rhetorical strategy reminiscent of the poet's re-writing of the psalms in *Salmos*, the poet uses figures immediately evocative of the modern political landscape (police, dictators, revolutionaries) in order to apply Augustine's axiom to contemporary issues of oppression. The "restless heart" is found among universal, transhistorical human archetypes and among common figures of modernity crossing all axes of contemporary

power. Contemporary expressions of virtue, justice, iniquity and social oppression are attributed the same motives as the archetypical ones.

Thus in the same passage, Cardenal situates this restlessness as the cause of both modern loves and modern crimes:

Por este amor se cometen todos los crímenes, se pelean todas las guerras y se aman y se odian todos los hombres. Por ese amor se escalan las montañas y se desciende a los abismos del océano; se domina y se conspira, se edifica, se escribe, se canta, se llora y se ama. Todo acto humano, aun el pecado es una búsqueda de Dios: sólo que se le busca donde no está. Por eso dice san Agustín "Busca lo que buscas, pero no donde lo buscas" (VA 28).

The verses in this passage recall the 139th psalm, in which the psalmist expresses the inescapability of the divine presence and of divine love using similar parallel juxtapositions "If I go up to the heavens, you are there;/ if I make my bed in the depths, you are there./If I rise on the wings of the dawn,/if I settle on the far side of the sea,/even there your hand will guide me" (Ps 139: 7-10) Cardenal's echoing of the psalm is intentional. In the original psalm the parallelisms emphasize the omnipresence of the divine. Cardenal creates a twist on the same parallelisms, using them to summarize the totality of human actions as a search for the same divine presence. The passage sets up a paradox between divine love, which motivates all human activities including iniquitous ones, and the sinful actions which, though motivated by divine love, also move the soul toward the one place where the omnipresence is excluded: the heart that shuts it out in preference for something else. Sin, argues the poet, is trying to satisfy the divine thirst through lesser things such as "cines" "bares" "orgias" and "fiestas". Here the concept of iniquity as misdirected love follows directly from Augustine's earlier idea of love as motion. All actions in the natural and human world are motivated by love. The difference between the murderer, the dictator, the woman in love and the saint is where that love is directed and how that thirst is sated.

Where Cardenal refuses to acknowledge a difference, however, is in the question of social sin versus personal. The dictator is no more a sinner than the murderer. This is one of the central tenets of Augustine's social theory which views the personal and social as existing in a continuum with each other. There is no concept of independent oppressive systems in Augustinian thought except as collectivized

extensions of personal iniquity. In *City of God* Augustine argues this explicitly:

*Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, "You are my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, "I will love You, O Lord, my strength" (*City of God* XIV: 28 emphasis mine).*

The "City of Man" extends from the corrupted heart, loving only itself and pursuing its own interests, to the relationship between rulers and their subjects. Oppression is a by-product of the rulers' inordinate love for themselves and for power and glory. Those who love "ordinately", meanwhile form a communitarian culture of mutual service and self-sacrifice, such as the one Cardenal experienced in Gethsemani. Indeed, in *Vida en el amor*, Cardenal himself agrees with Augustine on the two main arguments of this passage: that self-love has a corrupting influence on the soul, and that tyrannical oppression is the by-product of a collectivization of selfishness:

Dios es amor, pero nuestro amor propio es un auto-amor y por tanto es un anti-amor, porque el amor se entrega de la persona a otro, y el amor propio es la auto-entrega o la no entrega de la persona, el amor propio es el amor al revés. Es el amor vuelto sobre sí mismo, es el odio (Va 61).

Selfishness pits love, which is expansive and other-centered, against its own nature leading to deprivation of the other and corruption of the self. Cardenal expresses this idea metaphorically through the image of cancer, a metaphor which concretizes the philosophical abstract while at the same time taking to its organic conclusion Paul's rhetorical construction of Christians as a single body⁸:

⁸ See Romans 12:5.

Somos un solo cuerpo compuesto de innumerables individualidades, y el egoísmo individual es antinatural, como es antinatural el egoísmo de una célula de nuestro organismo individual que centrándose en si misma antipusiera su interés a la función orgánica del conjunto entrando en guerra con las demás células. Esta es el cáncer (61).

For Cardenal, the human being is by nature a collective entity, part of an organism. Selfishness acts upon the social body the way cancer acts on the individual by perverting the outwardly oriented nature of one of its cellular units. The perversion of love towards selfishness or narcissism, however, occurs at the level of the will alone, since in Augustinian thought the will is both “the power of the soul by which we love” (Cary 5) and also by which we sin. Cardenal agrees: “Solo la voluntad del hombre puede pecar y cuando no hay voluntad, no hay pecado” (118). Social dissention and conflict, such as that which leads to wars and dictatorships are by products of this selfishness. Cary explains “our disordered loves, separating us from God, also separate us from one another. Our inner selves are obscured from one another, not because they have to be, but because of our darkened affections” (14). Corruption thus occurs on the individual level first, as a corruption of the will, but its outcome affects the entirety of the social body breeding both conflict and oppression.

Thus, oppressive social systems of power emerge as the product of individual corruption infecting the social body up to the level of its rulers. Cardenal in *Vida en el amor* elaborates:

El condenado es uno que eternamente se ha tiranizado a si mismo y que comete contra si mismo una gran injusticia. El pecado no es libre, sino que es la entrega de la libertad, pero le hace creer a uno que esa es su libertad como la propaganda de las dictaduras que pregonan que ellas son “el gobierno del pueblo”. Muchos creen que son libres porque hacen lo que “quieren”, pero no se dan cuenta que la dictadura la llevan dentro, y que ella es la que gobierna su voluntad, y que hacen lo que no quieren aunque creen que quieren. Por eso se arrepienten de lo que hacen: porque hacen lo que no quieren y no quieren lo que hacen. Y creen que son libres porque la dictadura les brota de adentro, la tienen instalada en el centro mismo de su voluntad, tienen el tirano dentro y creen que ellos son el tirano, cuando son esclavos. Y cuando un hombre así gobierna un pueblo, entonces ese pueblo es gobernado por una dictadura. La codicia, la soberbia, la crueldad o el odio son también los que tiranizan ese país y son el Primer Ministro o el Presidente de ese pueblo (119).

Here, Cardenal uses Augustine's continuum idea to analyze the origins of social tyranny such as that which he experienced in Nicaragua under the dictatorship of the Somoza family who held power in the country from 1936 to 1979. It's worth noting here that the poet had some involvement in the dictatorship's opposition, which stretched across various ideological groups including conservative Catholic families.⁹ Cardenal participated as a lookout in the failed 1954 "April Conspiracy" against Anastasio Somoza García along with Pablo Leal and Baez Bone who were executed for the attempt. Cardenal also wrote many protest poems against the Somoza regime in the early 1950's, facing censorship due to the regime's total control of the media.¹⁰ Somoza García, who held control over the country until his assassination and succession by his son Luis in 1956, becomes the archetype of the tyrant in Cardenal's early writing, one whose obvious personal avariciousness are implicated in his oppressive acts against his people. Thus, in the above quoted passage the "condemned", begins by seeking freedom through false paths such as money, power and glory, while trying to convince himself of his liberation. The poet compares the individual soul's rationalizations to "la propaganda de las dictaduras que pregonan que ellas son "el gobierno del pueblo", a veiled reference to the populist bent of the Somoza dictatorship which according to Javier Galván tried to make itself "accesible" to the general population through an open doors policy at the presidential palace as well as self-promotion in the media (109). Cardenal frames dictatorial propaganda as a collectively applied version of the same individual self deception that propelled Somoza García to in the words

⁹ According to Stephen Henighan, the April Conspiracy against Somoza was itself a conservative and practically internecine undertaking. "Báez Bone was a retired military officer; Pablo Leal, the oligarch who notoriously had his tongue pulled out by Somoza's torturers prior to being murdered, was the father of a girl whom Cardenal had courted as a young man.: (77) The purpose was not to enact a sweeping social change, but to "restore a lost (or imagined) past of Nicaraguan independence and cultural autonomy (77).

¹⁰ In a comment to Margaret Randall Cardenal describes his difficulties publishing under Somoza García "I'd been publishing in magazines, but I couldn't publish the political epigrams, for example, even outside Nicaragua under my own name. Because, under Somoza García's dictatorship, press censorship was much worse than under the other Somozas. The other Somozas were forced to let up to some extent. They allowed at least veiled attacks in *La Prensa*. But Somoza García wouldn't even tolerate a joke. During his first year in power he even forced the opposition papers to publish articles in his favor. A paper could be closed down indefinitely for the slightest uncomplimentary allusion to his person (97).

of Galván “clearly and openly [use] the presidential office to enrich himself and those close to him” (111).¹¹ The tyrant tells himself and the people the same lies, and both are equally under tyranny as a result. Somoza is under the dictatorship of a corrupted will committed to actions contrary to good governance both of the self and of the people. Cardenal reiterates Paul’s self reclamation in Romans 7:14 “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” The tyrant experiences a self divided between the will which is corrupt and the conscience which knows right and whose desire for justice and “freedom” manifest in its deceptions and occasional moments of repentance. The dictatorship resides in the will, the faculty which determines both love and its attendant actions. Thus the tyrant’s governance of the people is shaped by the same oppression as his inner life. Inner inclinations towards hatred, greed, cruelty or *superbia* are personified as political advisors to the tyrant or as themselves governors of the people. A people governed by a tyrant are thus really governed by the tyrant’s sins.

There are, of course, some problems with this idea. The classist divisions in Central America and the interventionist ideology of the United States that propelled Somoza to power in Nicaragua preceded him and had as much an effect of shaping his ruling ideology as did his own inner inclinations.¹² To lay the blame solely on an inner struggle with sin is reductive. At the same time, not all tyrannies are headed by figures of such obvious cupidity as Somoza García. As C.S. Lewis notes,

¹¹ Galvan explains that Somoza put family members in charge of government offices, created companies explicitly for government contracts, leased national industries to foreign companies for a special fee in addition to using “extortion, intimidation and violence to harass business owners and convince them to sell their companies” (111).

¹² Indeed, the “tyranny” of US interventionist policy in Latin America can be traced back to Theodore Roosevelt’s own idealism regarding of America’s role in the West as expressed in his 1904 State of the Union address in which he explicitly denies “land hunger” as motivation. “All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”

the “worst kind” of tyranny can be exercised not out of cupidity but of self-sacrificial idealism, “The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity temporarily sated, those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience” (324). Social psychologist Roy Baumeister, who has studied the psychology behind evil agrees, suggesting that much of human atrocity is a product of the belief that violent actions lead to moral ends such as defense of one’s homeland, social restitution or the creation of a utopian society. (186) An Augustinian reading of the idealist tyrant might suggest that his acts oppression are a product of the same misdirection of loving intentions,¹³ but this interpretation is not discussed by Cardenal here. What emerges in Cardenal’s writings, however, is a revolutionary concept similar to that of Paulo Freire, that human oppression is internal as well as external, and that liberation requires an examination of conscience. The oppressed, like the sinner/tyrant suffer from a divided consciousness, a “duality” which has “established itself in their innermost being” and must be reconciled and purged before any revolutionary social change can take place (Freire 48). Cardenal, at the same time, experiences in Gethsemani the possibility of a society ruled almost entirely by *caritas*, in which as Augustine stated earlier “the princes and the subjects serve one another in love” or as Cardenal refers to Gethsemani, “una vida comunista y de amor” (in Borgeson 54). The poetic work *Gethsemani KY*, explores that society through a series of lyrical impressions and reflections.

4. Gethsemani KY

The brotherhood which Cardenal experienced in Gethsemani becomes a prime example of Augustine’s City of God, a community defined by shared love of the creator and buffered by contemplative discipline and the conscientious practices of virtue. Cardenal would describe this society in an interview as a “small utopia”, one in which “los hombres tratan todo el tiempo de amarse unos a otros, de no explotarse, de no dominarse unos a otros” (in Borgeson 51). This practiced *caritas* at the

¹³ This is certainly Lewis’ interpretation, Lewis refutes both the idea that a society is best ruled by Christians, as well as humanitarians precisely for this reason “In reality, however we must face the possibility of bad rulers armed with a Humanitarian theory of punishment. A great many popular blue prints for a Christian society are merely what Elizabethans called ‘eggs in moonshine; because they assume the whole society is Christian or that the Christians are in control. Even if it were, our rulers would still be fallen men, and therefore, neither very wise nor very good” (324).

center of Gethsemani results in a “communism” of goods as well and a reduction of cupidity and conflict. “Todo es de todos. En la Trapa estaba prohibido decir la palabra “mío” aplicándola a algún objeto: uno tenía que decir “nuestros zapatos”, “nuestros vestidos”, etc. Es también una vida pobre como la de nuestros campesinos, y los monjes viven de su trabajo” (51). That divine love and community manifests itself in Cardenal’s poetic text: a series of imagistic impressions infused with contemplative mindfulness such that each image, from monks mowing grass to the sound of locusts, is loaded with divine love and presence.

En Pascua resucitan las cigarras
 ...cantan y cantan todo el día
 y en la noche todavía están cantando.
 Sólo los machos cantan:
 las hembras son mudas.
 Pero no cantan para las hembras:
 porque también son sordas.
 ...¿Para quien cantan los machos?
 ¿Y porque cantan tanto? ¿Y que cantan?
 Cantan como trapenses en el coro
 delante de sus Salterios y sus Antifonarios
 cantando el Invitatorio de la Resurrección (*Poemas reunidos* 85).

In *Vida perdida*, Cardenal describes arriving at Gethsemani during the Spring of 1957 as “El tiempo del *Cantar de los Cantares*”. Surrounded by nature at its most fertile, the poet feels that “Everything is song and loving” and “in that spring that surrounded me, God wanted to express his joy at my arrival. Everything was resurrection and flowering” (*Vp* 155). The opening poem of *Gethsemani KY* situates this exuberant eroticism within the context of Augustine sexual renunciation. The poem refers to the phenomenon of seventeen year locusts which were hatching from their extended larval stage just as the poet arrived.¹⁴ All throughout the monastic writings, bird and animal sounds are closely associated with mating. The locusts’ utterances, however, are distinct. The females are deaf and mute, unable to respond or produce a song in kind. The lack of a coupling impulse behind the insects’ songs estranges them from the regular patterns of the natural world and creates a

¹⁴ “Yo llegué a Gethsemani cuando estaban las cigarras de “17 años” (the seventeen years locust). Ellas sólo salen cada 17 años. Todo ese tiempo han estado enterradas en estado de larva... Todo el monasterio y sus bosques resonaban con millones de cigarras” (*VP* 150).

lacuna or mystery which breaks the flow of the poet's thoughts in the ninth line and urges him into a series of contemplative questions: "To whom are they singing?" "Why do they sing?". Following the questions in line 10, the lyrical speaker reflects on the similitude between the cicadas and the Trappist choir singing its Easter psalms, antiphons and invitatory. The monks are analogues to the locusts: in their cloister, under the vows of silence and Augustinian chastity they are both deaf and mute to ordinary dyadic communication between lovers. Both monks and locusts experience a disconnection between sexual pursuit and utterance which displaces the song from its isolated trajectory and amplifies it, both in reach and significance. Rather than groanings of mating, the love songs become sublimated and re-structured as psalms and invitatory celebrating the Resurrection, not merely of Christ, but the whole of nature in the process of awakening from spring.

The locusts and monks, by displacing their erotic utterance from mating to the creator, enter into a spiritual fraternity with each other and with the whole of creation. The monastery forms a society whose by-product is a communion of love among the brethren and across the human-nature divide. Gethsemani constitutes Augustine's "assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love". Yet Cardenal also introduces a Franciscan dimension to these poems, extending the boundaries of the City of God beyond "reasonable beings", to the beasts and birds, each uttering its own "Laudato Sie" to the creator. The locusts are thus not merely metonymic analogues to the monks, they are fellow brethren and members of the same choir. In Gethsemani, the whole of nature is in collective accord. All are part of the same flow of life that manifests itself in song and burgeoning:

Los insectos acuáticos de largas patas
Patinan sobre el agua como sobre un vidrio
Y patinan en parejas. Se separan
Y se persiguen y se emparejan otra vez.
Y pasan toda su vida bailando en el agua.
Tú has hecho toda la tierra un baile de bodas
Y todas las cosas son esposos y esposas (*Pr* 89).

A similar metonymic link between nature and humankind is created in this poem which beautifully illustrates the Augustinian axiom of love as motion through observation of the natural world. The poet contemplates small aquatic insects as they come together on the

surface of a lake in erotic dances of separation and pursuit. The poet's perspective then expands as he turns and addresses the divine being: the lake becomes a metonymy of the Earth itself in which "all things are husbands and wives," moved by the impetus of love in endless cycles of union and reunion and set in motion by the divine being who relates to it conjugally as "El Esposo", "The Bridegroom. The anaphoric repetition of "Y" intensifies the poem's flow, illustrating the erotic movement of the creatures as the lines increase in speed through the reading. The divine being is introduced in lines 6-7 through a sudden redirection of the poet's focus. The Bridegroom, God, is evoked as the *prima mobilae*, the one who set the dance in motion. Interestingly, the subsequent verses 8-9 "Y solo Tú eres el Esposo que se tarda / Y sólo yo soy la esposa sola sin esposo" explore how the rhythmic movement of the insects also applies to the relationship between the mystic and the Bridegroom. Just as the insects "se separan", "se emparejan" y "se separan otra vez", the Bridegroom retreats away from the poet, leaving him in a state of loneliness and waiting. Thus, the repetition of the word "solo" in these lines has two effects, isolating the poet and the bridegroom's verses from the dance of nature as a specialized kind of love, and also expressing this loneliness. The poet is a part of nature, but is also excepted from it due to an unutterable mystical love for a divine being transcendent to creation. Dorothee Soelle, explains:

One of the most beautiful names given to the beloved in the lyricism of the troubadours and the poetry of mysticism is one of *loin-près* (the far-near one). It is for him, the far near one, that the soul waits in anticipation. He is simultaneously far and near, bright and dark, in the words of the mystical Trinitarian hymn of the mustard seed [*granum sinapis*]. The beloved can't be named in a single word. The words of nearness, happiness, fulfillment and sweetness are themselves limited. They cannot express the power of the erotic in a way that it truly remains the power that cannot be possessed and for that reason is "other", far away, eluding, and ever giving itself anew (119).

Cardenal thus echoes a common paradox in mystic writings. Cardenal's contemplative poet is surrounded by manifestations of God's *eros*, yet is also isolated from it due to the transcendent nature and will of Bridegroom. The separation and reunion of the insects thus functions as a metonymy for the withdrawal and reunion of the divine being to the mystic soul. It is no coincidence then, that these lines that single out the divine being and the poet are placed in the middle of the

poem, breaking the meditation on the insects and bringing in a note of sorrow. Cardenal is the lone bride at her own wedding, bookended by the dancing insects in lines 1-5 the poem and the chatter of mating rooks in lines 10-13. Alone in the midst of a multitude, the monk-poet is isolated from eros but also by it. Because his love is directed to the Bridegroom himself, and the bridegroom is absent, he is exiled from the others even as he shares in their conditions and erotic movements.

Love, inasmuch as it moves actions of seeking, sharing, consumption and contemplation, also moves acts of iniquity through its Augustinian misdirection. Amidst a series of meditations on the burgeoning of nature through cycles of elemental death and rebirth as manifestations of divine love “como comíais las plantas que antes fueron hombres/ y antes plantas y antes fósforo, nitrógeno y potasa/ Porque hidrógeno somos y en hidrógeno nos hemos de convertir” (*Pr* 87), Cardenal includes an invocation of Somoza:

Ha venido la primavera con su olor a Nicaragua:
 un olor a tierra recién llovida, y un olor a calor,
 a flores, a raíces desenterradas, y a hojas mojadas
 (y he oído el mugido de un ganado lejano...)
 ¿O es el olor del amor? Pero ese amor no es el tuyo.
 Y amor a la patria fue el del dictador: el dictador
 gordo, con su traje sport y su sombrero tejano,
 en el lujoso yate por los paisajes de tus sueños:
 él fue el que amó la tierra y la robó y la poseyó.
 Y en su tierra amada está ahora el dictador [embalsamado
 mientras que a ti el Amor te ha llevado al destierro (*Pr* 89).

The love which moves the entirety of nature also moves the two human figures in this poem, the poet who is addressed in the second person twice only in the fifth and final verses, and the dictator whose presence interrupts and sequesters the poem's meditations. Somoza's presence announces itself in the fifth verse by violently appropriating the poet's own, natural love for his homeland and along with it any sense of patriotism as an intrinsic element of one's relationship to one's native soil. The poet's patriotism, and the poem itself becomes are stained by Somoza's presence and the signs of his avarice, his corpulence and possessions, which becomes its central focus. Somoza's love, perverted by avarice, moves him not to commune with the land as the poet does, but to appropriate and possess it. Thus the 9th line of the poem uses a chain of three preterit verbs “amó la tierra” “robó” y

poseyó” creating a causal relationship between the action of love on the will “amó”, the violent act that ensues, “robó” and the outcome “poseyó”. The preterit tense forces the reader to see these three verbs as a chain of actions rather than emotional or situational conditions (a more familiar usage in Spanish would be “amaba”). Love is thus, as in Augustine, an act of the will as is sin. All three actions of Somoza’s emerge out of his corrupt will which interprets divine love as the desire to possess the land. The poet, meanwhile, is also moved by divine love, capitalized as a reference to God himself, not to his homeland, but into exile. Thus the poet situates his exile as similar to that of the prophet Elijah, whose enmity with the wealthy and corrupt rulers of Israel is born directly out of his love of God, and who is forced out of his homeland into the wilderness because of this.

Thus the text, inasmuch as it characterizes Gethsemani as a city of God, also recognizes the iniquities which hem it in. Cardenal draws attention to the juxtaposition of this city existing in the heart of the United States and the industrialized world. In Augustine’s philosophical treatise, the “City of God” and “City of Man” are inseparable, as one emerges from prelapsarian human nature and the other from its corruption. Thus the situational existence of Gethsemani within the United States allows the borders of both cities to become perceptible through contemplation. Two poems in particular express this contrast:

En la noche iluminada de palabras PEPSI-COLA
PALMOLIVE CHRYSLER COLGATE CHESTERFIELD

Que se apagan y se encienden y se apagan y se encienden
Las luces rojas verdes azules de los hoteles y los bares
Y de los cines, los trapenses se levantan al coro
Y encienden sus lámparas fluorescentes
Y abren sus grandes Salterios y sus Antifonarios
Entre miles de radios y televisiones.
Son las lámparas de las vírgenes prudentes esperando
Al esposo en la noche de los Estados Unidos (*Pr* 91).

In this short poem, the boundary becomes perceptible through a comparison of nighttime activities and the way both cities employ the use of lighting. Both cities employ modern technology to illuminate their spheres of love and action, the Trappists using fluorescent lamps for their night prayer of the Holy Office, while the denizens of the City of

Man use the same electricity to light up barrooms and hotels, as well as to create advertising, radios and televisions. One can read electricity here as a metaphor for divine love which indiscriminately flows through all conduits regardless of their use. Those within Gethsemani use it for prayer, while those outside construct edifices dedicated to pleasure and acquisition. Interestingly, both the denizens of the City of God and those of the City of Man differentiate themselves from the natural world by means of nocturnal activities. The monks, inasmuch as they create night spaces of electric light, ruptures in the gregarious darkness of nature, however also remain in harmony with both the divine being and creation, while those in the City of Man inhabit a sphere of urban alienation which manifests itself as the fruitless search for possessions and illicit erotic encounters. The poem compares the former to the “prudent virgins” in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25, focused on the Bridegroom and preparing for his arrival, implying that the latter are the foolish ones who waste their resources and are left out in the cold.

2 AM. Es la hora del Oficio Nocturno, y la iglesia
 en penumbra parece que está llena de demonios.
 Esta es la hora de las tinieblas y de las fiestas.
 La hora de mis parrandas. Y regresa mi pasado.

“Y mi pecado está siempre delante de mí”

Y mientras recitamos los salmos, mis recuerdos
 interfieren el rezo como radios y como roconolas.
 Vuelven viejas escenas de cine, pesadillas, horas
 solas en hoteles, bailes, viajes, besos, bares.
 Y surgen rostros olvidados. Cosas siniestras.
 Somoza asesinado sale de su mausoleo. (Con
 Sehón, rey de lo amorreos, y Org, rey de Basán).
 Las luces del “Copacabana” rielando en el agua negra
 del malecón, que mana de las cloacas de Managua.
 Conversaciones absurdas de noches de borrachera
 que se repiten y se repiten como un disco rayado.
 Y los gritos de las ruletas, y las roconolas.

Y mi pecado está siempre delante de mí” (92).

This longer poem, the longest of the text, uses the same themes as “la noche iluminada”, differing in its conclusion. While in “La noche iluminada” the poet considers himself among the “prudent virgins”, firmly entrenched in the City of God and using his “light” properly, in

this poem he comes to recognize that the boundary between the Cities of God and Man are within his own soul. The late night hour, serving both as a time of prayer and “la hora de mis parrandas” becomes the site of a diachronic confrontation between the poet’s pre and post Gethsemani selves. The poet himself was one of those “imprudent virgins”, who spent his love on futile pursuits which come back to him as a rebuke and a temptation.

The poem’s organization is thus intentionally designed to foreground the poet’s own iniquities even as it evokes numerous examples of historical sinners and social injustices. Cardenal finishes the first stanza with a topic sentence “y regresa mi pasado” upon which the second stanza then elaborates with a staccato of nouns calling up elements of his pre-Gethsemani life which “interfering in the prayer like radios and jukeboxes”. The predominance of “s” sounds in the nouns used “Viejas escenas de cine, pesadillas, horas solas en hoteles, bailes viajes besos” is vaguely evocative of the sound of radio static. Interestingly the similitude “como radios y roconolas” not only refers to the thoughts’ interference in the contemplative act of prayer, but also evokes the prior poem’s association between electricity and the misdirected love of the City of Man. As Cardenal would point out in his tribute to Marilyn Monroe, the City of Man is one “contaminated by sins and radioactivity”, only now Cardenal now recognizes himself, or is forced to recognize by the demons of memory, as part of that same city. The second Stanza “Y surgen rostros olvidados. Cosas siniestras/ Somoza asesinado sale de su mausoleo”, strengthens the “S” sounds of the earlier lines with the image of an undead Somoza García emerging snake-like from his mausoleum. This line, in addition to contributing to the nightmare feel of the poem’s nocturnal ambience also bridges the poet’s own iniquitous actions with those of Somoza García himself, while at the same time using the moment to take a swipe at the slain dictator by equating him with Sihon and Og, two biblical rulers destroyed by divine justice in Psalm 136.¹⁵ The stanza ends by returning to the theme of nocturnal illumination/electricity and its connection

¹⁵ The reference to Sihon and Og along with Somoza is clearly a reference to the latter’s assassination. The Psalm goes:

[give thanks] to him who struck down great kings,
and killed mighty kings—
Sihon king of the Amorites
and Og king of Bashan—
and gave their land as an inheritance,
an inheritance to his servant Israel (Ps 136: 15-18).

to the poet's own sins, describing the "lights of the Copacabana", the sounds of "absurd conversations repeating like a broken record" and "roulette wheels and jukeboxes". While the third Stanza carries this illumination to the lights of nocturnal War Councils, the house of Caiaphas, Somoza's palace, torture chambers and secret meetings of spies, the mafia and the secret police. In this way the poet links his own nocturnal iniquities with those of the dictator and others. The world is a vale of suffering, which becomes evident at night when sin and death show their true dominion over human life, and the dawn birds calling for the sun, like the sweating Christ in the Garden, and the poet himself can only confront it with prayer and tears.

Interestingly, the poet confronts this *vallis lacrimarum* not merely with lamentation, but also with repentance, by reciting a verse from the *Miserere* as an antiphon between stanzas. Also called psalm 51, the *Miserere* is the most common penitential psalm used in liturgy especially during the season of Lent. It is also commonly supertexted as having been composed by (or about) King David following the discovery of his sexual abuse of Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah by Nathan the Prophet. Whether the poet's use of this psalm took this into account is yet to be clarified: the psalm is such a ubiquitous part of both the Holy Office and Lenten liturgy that its inclusion may merely be part of a memory. Nevertheless, the psalm's inclusion makes it possible to read it in connection Gethsemani writings' theme of the misdirection of love. One could read King David as a figure that unites both the poet and Somoza in one icon, a figure whose inordinate desire for one woman leads to grievous abuses of political power and authority. However, this is purely speculative. What emerges clearly however in the poem is not merely the Augustinian idea of sin as disordered love, but also the reparation for both social and personal sin which rests in self-examination. Cardenal's response to the barrage of terror and sadness is to turn inward, to repeat the lines of King David pleading to be cleansed for his part in the iniquitous state of life. In the verse it is his sin, not those of Somoza or the modern world, which haunts him and for which he begs release. Like Augustine wrote and like Paulo Freire would write ten years later, oppression is internal as well as external and its solution requires turning inward, seeking both the common and the supreme good.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, While Augustine, with his Classical logic and anti-sexuality, is not one of the first theologians one thinks of when one reads a mystic poet like Cardenal, there is a clear vein of Augustinian thought in Cardenal's Gethsemani writings. Cardenal's Gethsemani writings represent the poet's attempt to negotiate questions of oppression through a Christian hermeneutic partially using Saint Augustine's ideas of love and society as a model. Cardenal recognizes value in Augustine's concept of love as motion, which informs some of the mystic perceptions in his examinations of nature. Additionally, the Saint's ideas on sin as a misdirection or "disordering" of love helps the poet to explain the existence of iniquity and oppression in a world supposedly created and moved by divine *caritas*. Finally, the poet takes to heart Augustine's prescription of self-reflection and self-examination as a stepping stone towards making the City of God a reality in the world.

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