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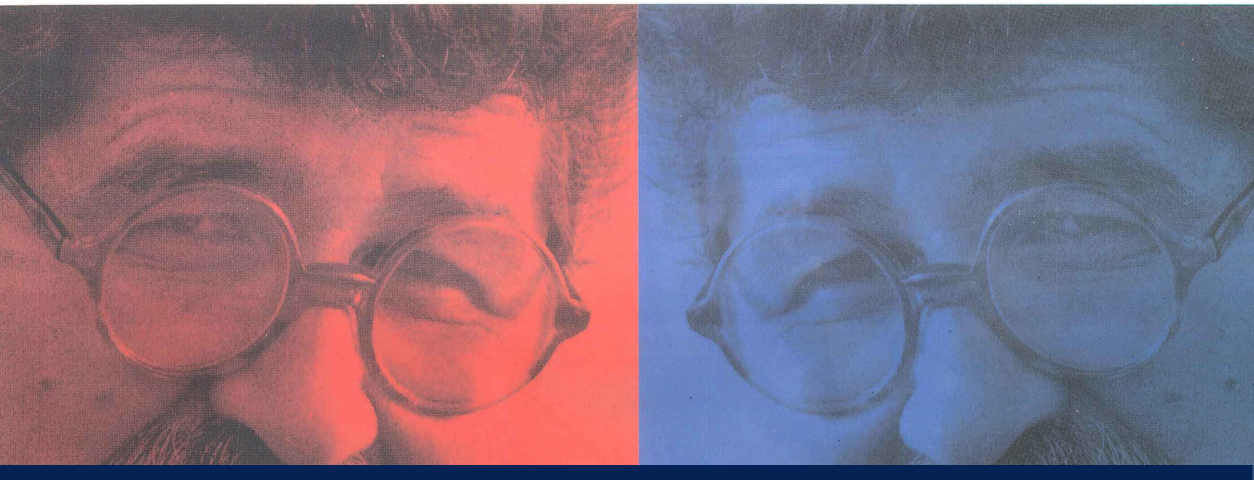

Capítulo 30

LOS MUNDOS DE ALFREDO BRYCE ECHENIQUE

Nuevos textos críticos

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On the Border: Cultural and Linguistic Trespassing in Alfredo Bryce Echenique's *La vida exagerada de Martín Romaña* and *El hombre que hablaba de Octavia de Cádiz*

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Alfredo Bryce Echenique's narrative claims territories through language. His novels trace the geographical displacement and linguistic estrangement of travelers crossing into foreign terrain. His characters verbally renegotiate their identities in relation to the dominant language behaviors around them. As they traverse linguistic and cultural zones, they overstep boundaries. The characters' transgressions make room for other texts and cultural codes to infiltrate the fiction. This intertextual process in Bryce's later fiction presents characters struggling for intimate and group identity in an alienating transnational world.

Bryce's novelistic diptych, *La vida exagerada de Martín Romaña* (1981) and *El hombre que hablaba de Octavia de Cádiz* (1985), explores the cross-cultural dynamic of Latin American intellectuals in contact with Europe. These novels chart geographically distinct worlds that the narrator distinguishes through linguistic experimentation and intertextual jokes. His narration, a combination travelogue and personal diary that documents his European residency, records his blurred cultural boundaries and confused class identification. Martín writes to reaffirm and reestablish his confounded identity in strange surroundings. *MR* is composed of Martín's personalized language that stretches Spanish to accommodate new realms of meaning, and experience. *OC* expands upon this cultural and linguistic mapping, to document social class consciousness and its relativity.

This fictional project is one of many narratives about Latin Americans in Paris. The story emerges from the legend of Paris's prestige and promise, and the eventual demystification from real experience with European life. *MR* tells the story of Latin American university students in Paris in the late 1960s, with climactic episodes during the

May, 1968 *revolution*. Martín's Peruvian girlfriend Inés joins him in Paris and they marry. Their marriage disintegrates along with Martín's mental health and his commitment to revolutionary causes. *OC* continues the story of Martín's professional and emotional life in Europe. He works as a lecturer at La Sorbonne after he and Inés are divorced. Octavia is one of his students and she becomes the interlocutor of his writing. He pursues an affair with her despite the obstacles of age, social class and nationality. As the sequel's title indicates, their liaison is reduced to Martín's longings and solitary conversation. Eventually, he leaves academic life for a career in writing travel guides, and returns to Peru.

The story intertextualizes its Latin American protagonist's European experience. Martín encounters the Paris dreamed of by generations of poets and artists in Latin America. Beyond a plot occurring in European places with a stock of allusions and references, these novels actually cite extra-American material as a textual corpus of history and signs. The narration incorporates and invents signs from European and Latin American cultural sources that structure the story. Paris becomes a Latin American cultural construction that synecdochically represents all of Europe. Martín describes a collaborative effort between Hollywood, French public relations and tourism:

> Y desde la eterna primavera parisina, que la Metro Goldwyn Mayer se encargó también de eternizar, el general De Gaulle, cual sonriente arcangelote, bendecía este mundo *made in France* que llegaba hasta nosotros en paquetitos enviados a las Alianzas Francesas, conteniendo películas, diapositivas, profesores bien pintones, y alguna que otra alusión a la libertad de todos los pueblos... [yo] conocía tan bien París a través de los documentales sobre Notre-Dame, Tour Eiffel, I'Opérá (me obligaba a pronunciar así), Maurice Chevalier, Le Louvre, etc., vistos boquiabierto y por toneladas durante mi adolescencia de limeño cinemero... (*MR* 156-157)

Martín must adjust his expectations of this marketed, utopian *package* of Paris he was fed in Lima to his *lived* experiences there. He struggles against his own expectations as well as those imposed by an entire culture that looks to established *European* standards.

Europe participates in *MR* and *OC* as a constellation of meanings, roles, fantasies and references for Latin Americans. Paris in these novels becomes a filter of Latin American experience abroad, where the play of illusions and disillusions surfaces. The intertextual use of European culture creates a collage of literary allusions, institutions, erotic references, and emotional expectations. Martín's cumbersome cul-

tural baggage intertextualizes Vallejo, Darío, Proust and Hemingway. He drops references to Edith Piaf and Yves Montand. Literary references combine with music, film, street life, travel, history and social class in a vast intertextual display that considers any cultural material textual ammunition.

The literary elements of Martín's European construct especially draw on Hemingway. The Hemingway subtext permeates the novels' Spanish and French terrain as Martín romanticizes Hemingway's fascination with Spain and his stay in Paris. He searches for the «hemingwayana» (*MR* 70) dimensions in his own experience. The protagonist uses these intertexts to try to reconcile a combination of his anticipated versions of places, based on his own reading, and imagination, with his own current circumstances. Spain does not measure up to Hemingway's bravato, nor is Paris the feast supposedly prepared for North American writers in the 1920s: «Claro, el pelotudo de Hemingway se lo trae a uno de las narices a París con fracesitas tipo *éramos tan pobres y tan felices*, gringo cojudo, cómo no se te ocurre poner una nota a pie de página destinada a los latinoamericanos, a los peruanos en todo caso, una cosa es ser pobres en París con dólares y otra cosa es serlo con soles peruanos... qué pobres ni qué felices ni qué ocho cuartos...» (*MR* 137).

Martín injects his own colloquial Spanish into his cultural text of Europe. Eventually, after enduring European life a bit longer, he begins to translate it back into a Latin American or specifically Peruvian[1] version: «Releía como siempre la poesía de Vallejo y empezaba a pensar que era una revisión, para uso de latinoamericanos, del París era una fiesta, de Hemingway» (*OC* 209).

Martín's European context, both in *MR and OC*, relies on literary readings and renderings that are frequently at odds with his own experiences. Martín attempts to realign his European intertext with his own language and cultural texts from home. Martín's discourse linguistically and intertextually yields to and reembraces his Latin American cultural identity. His diary paves the way for the return to Peru that concludes each of the novels.

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[1] The adjective *Peruvian* to the expressions in Bryce's work that insist on Peruvian settings or are etymologically of Quechua origin. Martha Hildebrandt defines *peruanismo* as «todo uso lingüístico-fonético, morfológico, sintáctico-vigente en el Perú pero excluido del español general» in her *Peruanismos* (9). However, she also recognizes that *peruanismos* may have a variety of origins (not only indigenous), and that many terms and expressions are no longer exclusive to Peru, but have been assimi-

Established institutions make up another central component in Bryce Echenique's intertext between Latin Americans and Europe. Characters' encounters with universities, cultural organizations, landlords and *concierges* orient their European experiences. These encounters constitute the major components of Bryce's unsettling humor, and mark an anxious interfacing between cultures. The French university system structures Martín's life in Paris from the beginning, as a student in *MR* and then as a lecturer in *OC*. He incorporates in his story the university cafeterias, parking lots, plumbing and construction problems, and campus neighborhoods among his many mappings of class and social status in Paris. Martín teases in *OC* that the students' cars are more valuable than the professors' at the Nanterre campus of the Université de Paris. The novels also ridicule the traditions and prejudices of European domestic institutions. The first Parisian *hotelero* in *MR* decides Martín must have a serious tropical disease since he showers so regularly. Martín dubs the complaining, and intransigent landlady in the Latin Quarter «Madame Labru(ja)». In Martín's next Left Bank apartment, the landlady accepts him as a tenant, but despite his friends' personal recommendation, she refuses to give him a lease. Martín finds himself at the mercy of the social institutions to which, he continually laments, Hemingway seemed immune.

Martín Romaña: The Narrator's Personalized Linguistic Defense

Bryce's humor derives from his characters' confusion and mistakes. He places his characters in humiliating situations that rather than obliterating them, heighten their anxious self-consciousness. Martín defends himself in *MR* by increasingly personalizing his language as protection against the bombardment of cultural differences. He narratively subjectivizes his world with translations, hybrids and word inventions to account for the cultural transpositions he endures. He redefines his foreign surroundings with Peruvian colloquialisms, regional Americanisms, even Limenian expressions, presenting the otherness of European spaces in personalized and intimate language.

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lated into other Spanish American national uses of Spanish (15-16). Although the *peruanismos* studied here are used in other northwestern South American countries, as well as in Peru, referring to them as *peruanismos* in this analysis will distinguish them from other, more widely used *Americanismos*.

Bryce practices a playful bilingualism, in which the narration communicates in two or more languages that lexically splinter the discourse in Spanish (see Grutman). *MR* includes lexicon from other national languages (such as English, Italian, French), as well as from other codified systems (such as Marxist and Freudian jargon). Martín's Spanish is transformed by an interplay of primarily French and Peruvian content. In his intertextual bilingualism, Bryce mixes angry references to Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* with Proustian social elimbing, and American colloquial insults. Beyond the thematic and the semantic, the language in these novels experiments with sounds and syntax, poetically wrenching words and references from their habitual geographical and discursive contexts.

MR especially exploits the cultural polarity and ambivalence between Paris and Lima, purposefully blurring their differences. In Martín's narration, signs cross and overlap not only language boundaries but cultural modes, idiomatic humor and semantic codes. In Paris, *putamadre* becomes a verb («Putamadreé como loco...» [*MR* 21]); in Lima, Marcel Proust becomes a new noun («... en un loco marcelprousteo...» [*MR* 18]). The references to French culture are more than mere allusions; they are made Spanish, translated intertextually and gramatically woven into the narration. The narrator appropriates this new world of signs, embedding them into his language, although not without a tension that signals their otherness.

Bryce traps his narrator-protagonist in a hybrid world of signs. The narrator adopts French terms and expressions, transposing them into his own hybridized Spanish. Thus the French lexeme *clochard* is transformed into a new Spanish verb, *clochardizarse* («un latinoamericano jamás se clochardiza» [*MR* 51]). The trash collection crisis during the strikes in May, 1968 was starting to «alcanzar alturas eiffelianas» (*MR* 247). The narration weaves in cultural references and marks their difference with translation and syntactical transposition.

As Martín increasingly subjectivizes his European experiences in his narration, his Spanish not only incorporates neologisms and translations but also applies Americanisms to European situations. At his most intimate linguistic personalization, Martín expresses his Parisian life in metaphorical Peruvian phrasings. He describes parties in Paris as a «huaynito tristísimo», making reference to a popular song form (*MR* 95). His North American friend Sandra's hotel room in the Latin Quarter becomes a «pocilga andina» (*MR* 289). In Lima he used to measure things in the terms and even the language of supposed European (especially Parisian) standards, and now he comes to as-

sess his Parisian experiences in Peruvian language. The France-Peru axis becomes his main semiotic gauge.

He judges trains, for example, by this scale of signs. Martín, his mother and his wife Inés travel to the Côte d'Azur on «el tren más elegante de Francia, o sea el más elegante que había tomado en mi vida, porque trenes de lujo sólo había tomado en el Perú, y sólo cuando mi padre pasaba el billete, además, pero es sabido que el mejor tren del Perú equivale más o menos al peor de Francia...» (*MR* 200).

On another trip, this time in Spain, when the train advances very slowly, Martín vents his frustration «maldiciendo ea maquinista porque este tren parece peruano o es que el tipo conoce mi ansiedad y no quiere que llegue nunca» (*MR* 318).

Martín's regionalized, colloquial language helps him retain his Peruvian, even more specifically Limenian, identity. Regional expressions such as «vaina», and indigenisms such as «estar chocho», «cholo», and «le importa un comino» abound throughout the novel. This is Martín's method of retaining his Peruvian identity in the throes of cultural bombardment. His conversational tone, even though he is often speaking French or English in Paris, or Italian in Peruggia, maintains the expressions and cadences of Peruvian Spanish. The Peruvian punctuations and exclamations such as «uyuyuy» and the repeated «Ah ya» of the attentive listener appear in his transcribed conversation with his neighbor Nadine, although she is French. In this way, he reports more thoroughly on his own emotional perceptions than on precisely what was said. He uses his personalized, frequently hybrid and resistantly Peruvian language defensively, for example with the term *ñangué*: «Eran, como solía decir mi padre, de ñangué, palabra ésta que he buscado desde la Real Academia hasta los peruanismos, sin suerte para ustedes, porque a mí me basta con recordar el gesto de mi viejo diciéndola y lo entiendo todo» (*MR* 98-9).

He insists on using a specialized lexicon, and he refuses to interpret or define it for his readers.[2] Frustrated and tired by the semiotic confrontation in his life and in his writing, Martín maintains his grip on his linguistic home ground even if it may exclude his audience.

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[2] According to Santamaría, the expression is an *afronegrismo* used in Peru meaning antiquated, «del tiempo de Maricastaña» (339). The same definition is given in Morínigo (427).

The Paris-Peru polarity comes to define Martín himself. A fluctuating blend of these two worlds draws from a series of cultural conceptions and contexts: from student activist to Latin American writer in a Parisian garret to middle class husband of a beauty meriting the «Miss Seville» prize. Martín describes his own appearance as marked by his stay in Paris: «[...]con esa cara de ropa vieja ya marcada por el determinismo geográfico que significan un rincón junto al cielo parisino, años de restaurant universitario, una escuelita infame para ganarse el pan, más varios años en cuclillas en los waters de hueco en el suelo que me tocaban uno tras otro» (*MR* 201-202).

Martín's self-definition seems unable to dodge either Peruvian or Parisian content. At the end of the novel, in a psychiatric hospital in Barcelona, Martín introduces himself to his fellow patients, «Vivo en París, porque leí mucho a Hemingway para ser escritor, y soy peruano» (*MR* 440). Martín's identity straddles both worlds.

Octavia de Cádiz: The Fiction of Social Class

Place and identity work together in *MR* and *OC* as Martín struggles to ascertain where he belongs. He experiments with an array of cities, groups, and lovers all of which pertain to different cultural worlds. In *MR* Martín relies on non-European, *foreign* alliances for his identity. In *OC*, Martín makes contact with more Europeans and has to contend with the complex hierarchies of their social structure. The issue of social class becomes particularly acute in his second volume. He tries to negotiate his own identity in relation to the social situation around him. Each new acquaintance presents a challenge in comprehending, and integrating himself into what he judges a strangely archaic but persistent organization of social class.

Martín carries with him from Peru certain *topoi* about Europe that determine his class consciousness. Among these thematic associations is the bohemian as esthete who contests dominant or *high* culture. Martín assumes from the beginning of his experience abroad that «una vida en Europa suponía una buena dosis de bohemia» (*MR* 42). The bohemian subtext of *MR* and *OC* means enduring poverty and social marginalization, but all for the ennobling cause of social revolution (*MR*) and artistic achievement.

As a foreign student with limited resources during the first years of his residence abroad, Martín has little problem enacting the bohemian role he associates with living in Paris. Martín's living quarters

initially provide the framework for his marginalization. He first occupies a room in a «hotel sin baño», since he considers it too bourgeois to have a room with a private bath. This inexpensive housing, solution helps define Martín as a potential internacional revolutionary. When he is evicted from the hotel for taking too many showers, he hesitates to take an apartment, concerned that it will change his image. He does rent a studio for a short time, but distributes numerous copies of his key to other *revolutionary* friends so that they can make use of his *socialized* private bathroom. Next he rents a ninth-floor walk-up servant's room among an assortment of laborers. This setting, he believes, gives him a real connection to the proletariat. This period coincides with his ambivalent participation in the Marxist group with Inés. Martín dubs his room «un rincón cerca del cielo», a textualized motif of the poor artist's garret. The narrator evokes assumptions about social class and esthetics with these domestic spaces, only to ironically strip them of their romantic or glamorous trappings. There is no place for a Vallejo or a Darío, nor room for another Hemingway or Henry Miller. Martín and Inés eventually settle in an apartment in the Latin Quarter, married and with an elevator.

In *OC*, Bryce extends this geography of social space. Martín has to adjust to the shifting, terms of his marginality. In the sequel to *MR*, Martín is still a Latin American in Europe but now he has earned a university degree and teaches literature in Paris. His world expands beyond the closed community of expatriates to include more Europeans. In his narration, Martín introduces every acquaintance with class commentary, from their family genealogies to their residential neighborhoods.

Throughout the second part of his story, Martín is plagued by the dilemma of having, been too bourgeois for Inés yet not aristocratic enough for Octavia. Martín's bohemian marginality backfires when his social lineage is questioned from both sides of the Atlantic. He becomes enraged that he cannot meet Octavia's parents. Octavia argues that to her family, Martín has numerous strikes against him: he is older, divorced, Latin American, a writer and professor; in sum, he is dangerous to the family's class status. Martín counters defensively:

> Inés me abandonó porque yo era algo así como tú en Francia: un oligarca, una mierda, un oligarca podrido... No me vengan con que los latinoamericanos de París somos todos guerrilleros, o escritores revolucionarios, más el buen salvaje que es un indio de mierda... Se trata de que me he pasado media infancia y adolescencia dando plata para las misio-

> nes del Africa en el colegio más caro del imperialismo yanqui... O sea que no soy un árabe de mierda ni un negro que barre el metro de París. Y además, cuando quise serlo, por amor a mi ex esposa, a los árabes y a los negros, no me dejaron serlo... (*OC* 128)

Appropriate class identification continually eludes Martín. His comic exaggeration traps him in the class crevices of his relationships. Love and romance, for him once erotic and emotional, pit him against the tensions of both American and European class identity Martín's narration renders the social scale absurd, satirizing both cultures' racial and socio-economic rigidities.

Neighborhoods in *OC* present Martín's mappings of Europe's divisive social classifications. Since he associates the Latin Quarter with bohemia, he notes a contradiction between his landlords, the Forestiers, and their neighborhood. They live a convencional bourgeois family life surrounded by what Martín considers countercultural elements: «cómo podían vivir en esa zona del barrio Latino, entre hippies, punks, gochistas, clochards y cafés poblados por una fauna cosmopolita que era todo lo opuesto a lo que ellos representaban» (*OC* 26). Martín's confusion is heightened by his pre-existing notions about the Latin Quarter as representative of life in Paris in general. He struggles once again to reconcile his dreamed Paris with his experienced Paris.

The Latin Quarter also functions in *OC* as polar opposite of Octavia's neighborhood. Octavia secretly visits Martín from 4:00 to 8:00 daily, to avoid arousing her parents' suspicions. In her foray from the Right Bank into the Latin Quarter, she crosses social class lines. She becomes a foreign presence, an emissary from a world that shares little more than the same city as Martín. When Martín crosses the Seine to approach Octavia's house, he is arrested by the police and threatened against continuing to see her (*OC* 200).

The Place de la Contraescarpe in the Latin Quarter is the capital of Parisian bohemia for Martín. The narration persistently depicts his neighborhood with a touristic multicultural tone. The novel includes a repeated scene there at an Asian restaurant called «La Sopa China». There Octavia has «vino con tapita de plástico» for the first time in her life; «[e]s más, no sabía que existía semejante barbaridad proletaria» (*OC* 159). They frequently follow their meager, romantic meals at this local restaurant with a visit to the Rancho Guaraní, another *ethnic* establishment in the neighborhood with live Latin American music. Octavia expresses her enthusiasm over the exotic

otherness of this section of the Latin Quarter by proclaiming her royalty to «Che Guevara» and shouting «Vive I'Amérique Latine!» (*OC* 160). Octavia consciously collaborates in class renegotiations by lending Martín social capital. When Martín is feeling vulnerable as a foreign tenant without a lease, Octavia suggests that she arrive in her ex-boyfriend's «coche de lujo». She parks conspicuously in front of his building, to attract the landlady's and the concierge's attention. As in all the transactions and encounters between Octavia and Martín, neighborhood and class associations work together to define the characters and their motives.

Octavia also introduces Martín to European aristocracy. He meets her Italian and Portuguese ex-boyfriends, her Belgian cousin Prince Leopold, and her noble Milanese husband later in the novel. Martín tries to comprehend the internal hierarchies of these «cabezas coronadas», «los que pertenecen a una familia con cierto tipo de título» (*OC* 174). His own conceptualization of European social life did not include this category. Confused, he badgers Octavia for clarification. He constantly compares his own name, lineage and family history to these illustrious old European families, those of «apellidos muy largos».

An accumulation of last names or an «apellido largo» becomes one extreme of another Brycean polarity in these novels. On one end of this polarity are artists and writers, particularly if they are from Latin America. Toward the end of *OC*, Martín visits Octavia and her husband in Milan. Martín describes a party they give in his honor as «rota en dos enormes pedazos irreconciliablemente enfrentados» of «artistas» on one side and the «amigos de apellido largo» on the other. Octavia's husband is a count who falls into deep depressions if he is not serving as a patron to a marginalized artist. He adopts Martín in an absurdly inverted relationship of dependency in order to give his own life meaning. Martín agrees to this arrangement initially, in order to be nearer Octavia, implicating himself in a fictionalized reproduction of European Renaissance literary history. Martín's own marginal status offers him a way out. Octavia and her husband remain inscribes in their own fictions of social class, trying to perfect the roles assigned them by an elaborate fantasy.

The Metafiction of Identity

Bryce displays a range of metafictional artifice in his novelistic diptych. The autobiographical stance of *MR* and *OC* poses Martín in his «sillón Voltaire», filling first his red and then his blue journals. *OC*

even bears the subtitle, «Cuaderno de navegación en un sillón Voltaire», referring directly to the very process and setting of the story's writing. The fictionalized journal intime introduces both controls and liberties on language. Language for Bryce «no es simplemente una herramienta de comunicación o un espejo de la realidad; más bien es el agente creador de una realidad hiperbólica y satírica donde sus personajes no pueden desligarse de aquella voz que la expresa» (Ferreira 135).

Martín remains a prisoner of his own language. His European settings invade his discourse, and his fictions overrun his life. He only partially escapes by disobeying the rules that delineate between fiction and *reality.* As narrator, he ignores his own narrative boundaries by allowing other characters to co-author his story.

Martín breaks the autobiographical frame with numerous mentions of Bryce and Ribeyro. He evokes his intimacy with the Latin American literary scene in Paris by including encounters at cafés with these published figures whose international recognition he strives to acquire. These tongue-in-check allusions blur the roles of character and *author,* suggesting Martín's *reality* within Ribeyro's and Bryce's circles. While these teasing references undermine authorial control, Martín yields his authority even more to Octavia when he empowers her to write her own identity. *OC* is the story of Martín losing control of his fictions. He is in pursuit of a woman under a false identity that he further fictionalizes. She conceals from Martín certain pieces of her life and falsifies her identity. Martín reads into her obscurity an invented anecdotal history. Octavia functions as an illusive figure who never occupies the full space the narrative seems to offer her. She is constrained by Martín's conflicting demands on her as well as by her family's class imperatives. Martín counters her deceptive development with a relentless insistence on his own private version of her.

Octavia's name becomes the central hermeneutic device of *OC*'s metafictional scheme. The narrator delays telling the reader Octavia's *real* name (Octavia Marie Amélie de la Bonté-Même [*OC* 173]), only to reveal at the end of the novel that her name was never actually Octavia at all. Martín's subjective world once again translates into his own naming system: «Adoraba a Octavia y me encantaba el hecho de poderla llamar siempre Octavia de Cádiz. *Ella era Octavia de Cádiz para mí. Mi* suerte, *mi* mente, *mi* cuerpo, *mi* pasado, todo lo que yo era me hacía estar plenamente convencido de que mis sentimientos correspondían exactamente a cada partícula de la realidad» (*OC* 103, emphasis added).

Martín may call Octavia whatever he pleases, because as a writer he *authorizes* reality. Martín's restricted access to much of Octavia's existence furthers the fantasy of her identity. He declares Octavia immortal (*OC* 122), and eventually questions her existence at all: «Octavia de Cádiz no era real, era un ideal, fue una quimera» (*OC* 364). He invents or redesigns reality to the extreme of believing it himself and no longer distinguishing between his life and his fictions.

Martín's exaggerated version not only rewrites other characters' identities but also revises his own. Octavia calls Martín «Maximus», usually repeated three times, underscoring the hyperbole at the core of both *MR* and *OC*. Martín eventually adopts the pen name Maximus Solre, basing the invented surname on Octavia's cousin's property in Belgium. He grows so accustomed to it that by the end of *OC*, «Martín Romaña era aquel imbécil que siglos atrás había vivido en París» (*OC* 360). His *real* name is converted into a fiction that his recent pseudonym supersedes.

At the end of *OC*, Martín discovers that Octavia's name is actually Petronila. Rather than accusing her of semiotic betrayal, he realizes that they together fashioned her falsehood. In order to regain some semblance of control, he persists in his own naming categories. Even after death, another threshold the novel crosses, he declares to Leopoldo who accompanies him to heaven that «seguiré llamándola Octavia toda la... toda la... Leopoldo, ayúdame por favor con el vocabulario del cielo» (*OC* 375). He is determined to access the proper language with which to account for his surroundings, continually conscious that wherever he is, he writes as an outsider.

Bryce works at erasing the borders between fiction and *reality* in *MR* and *OC*. Martín's language reigns in determining, the regions of his story, to the extent that «la única frontera real es aquella que separa al "yo" del mundo que lo rodea» (García Bryce 17). Martín attempts to define himself in the throes of cultural difference and class rigidity. His identity as a writer emerges out of the *tropezones* of his Peruvian self-consciousness in European territory. His meta-narrative becomes the custom house of his individual and collective border crossings.

Just as Martín crosses narrative boundaries in his journal writing, he crosses national boundaries in his travels between France and other parts of Europe. Although his linguistic boundaries are fluid, helping to defy the limitations of his situation, he unsuccessfully searches for fixed structures in national borders. Martín is convinced that his marital problems with Inés will be resolved in Spain: «Lograrían arreglarlo todo en España, bastará con cruzar la frontera,

el amor conyugal renacería, y en estrecha colaboración con la Madrepatria» (*MR* 407). He expects that crossing the Spanish-French border will cure everything from his skin rashes to his depressions. These borders betray him, however, dashing, his expectations. His rashes recur, he and Inés separate, and his depression remains a struggle wherever he lands. In a border episode in *OC*, Octavia disappears just north of the Belgian-French border. Martín's barely successful search for her in dense fog underscores her ephemeral identity. Borders promise to clarify and delineate, but only disorient Martín in their ambiguity.

Bryce situates himself along with his characters on these precar-i-ous borders. Early on in *OC*, Martín mentions that Bryce Echenique always pondered over the word métèque (*meteco*), the crude insult so frequently encountered in Paris by foreigners. This classical Greek term referred to new residents of a polis who did not have the status of citizens. In French slang, it sends an unwelcoming message to Mediterranean or North African immigrants. According to Martín, Bryce Echenique made vain attempts to find *meteco* in a dictionary. Finally, «... se pasaba horas instalado en la frontera franco-española, gritándole meteco inmundo a cada automóvil con placa francesa que entraba en España, basándose para ello en el acuerdo de doble nacionalidad que tenemos los peruanos con la madre patria, y en una aplicación muy estricta del principio de la relatividad» (*OC* 49).

On the borders between cultures and languages, Bryce problematizes the struggles for identity in Latin American writing. His fictional language is a subjective, semiotic experimentation that skips over the borders and the rules of any one national language. His cross-cultural linguistic humor both maintains distance and encourages proximity as he sits on the border to ponder pejorative slang. He joins his characters in teasing and pitying the Latin American writer in Paris who is never sure on which side of the aesthetic border he is creating. He and his characters may be stuck on the border of uncertain cultural belonging, but they confront that uncertainty with the intimate play of invented language and pretend identities.

Martín's story takes place in territories of transgression. He bends the rules of language, oversteps the boundaries of class and confounds the separation between *reality* and fiction. This dyptich is the result of his exaggerated effort to *belong* and comprehend *foreign* places and cultures. His esthetic resistance defies class and cultural limits as he writes a borderless frontier.

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