

Reading Landívar in Antigua: Luis Cardoza y Aragón at Home in Exile

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Abstract

Guatemalan poet Luis Cardoza y Aragón's return from exile in 1944, at the onset of the Guatemalan Revolution, presented him with considerable personal difficulties, many of which he was not able to overcome during his time in his homeland. His poetry from this period wrestles with this struggle, displaying contradictory feelings on the idea of return, and breaking from his prose works that dealt with his homecoming in more triumphant terms. He discovered in the writings of fellow exiled Colonial-era poet Rafael Landívar, however, a means of bridging his separation from the home nation by effectively guiding the earlier poet through his return to Guatemala. This article argues that Cardoza found within the works of Landívar an analogue to his own circumstance, one which would allow him to find solace in the circumstance of his troubled return. He would subsequently carry this poetic homeland with him upon his second departure from Guatemala in 1952, as a means of fixing the identity of Guatemala in terms that no longer reflected the nation's political reality but delivered subjectivity to its marginalized classes, a group he likewise viewed as surviving a political exile.

When Luis Cardoza y Aragón returned to his homeland just two days after the beginning of the Guatemalan Revolution, in October 1944, it represented a partial close to the 24 years he had lived as a student and then exile in Paris and Mexico. He describes this return in triumphant terms in his 1955 book *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, which traces his homeland's history and culture, yet his time spent in Guatemala during this period was in fact fraught with personal difficulties that made it impossible for him to remain. In 1952 he returned to Mexico, a nation he already regarded as his "segunda patria" ("Dijo el guatemalteco" 147), even though the Revolution would continue for two more years. He explained in a letter to Spanish Republican exile Juan Rejano:

No puedo permanecer más en mi tierra por falta absoluta de trabajo y posibilidad de ganarme la vida intelectualmente como en México. He llegado al límite de mis posibilidades y ya no tengo otro camino. He deseado, como siempre, cumplir escrupulosamente con mi patria. Estoy seguro de haberlo hecho. Y esto sigue magníficamente, para alegría de todos. Es el mejor régimen de América y el país más libre.¹

The difficulties of this return, in stark contrast to the optimism with which he characterizes that moment in his 1955 text (a text he began writing in Mexico in 1953, the year after his letter to Rejano), displays the struggles facing those who return from exile, only to find the nation no longer

1 *Revista Alero* 20:3 (1976), p. 150, qtd. in Mejía, p. 17.

accommodating, whether due to political or personal difficulties.

As a poet whose works often extolled the connection to the land and the identity of the homeland, the separation from Guatemala took a toll on Cardoza that he struggled to resolve in personal terms, even upon his return to native country. This condition surfaces in the works he wrote during the time of his return in 1944 until the end of the Revolution in 1954, particularly in his poetry from the Revolutionary period. These poetic works are included in his seldom-studied collections *Pequeños poemas* and *Rafael Landívar*, two works that collectively depict the contradictions of the exile's experience of separation and return.² In them, he constantly evokes exile in the poems written while he lived in Guatemala, and scarcely references it after he had returned to Mexico. While this chronology might appear reversed, Cardoza mediates his return through the works of a poet whose life bore comparison to his own: the eighteenth-century Jesuit priest Rafael Landívar. Cardoza found within the latter's epically-modeled poem *Rusticatio Mexicana* those same elements that preoccupied the twentieth-century poet: the significance of the land, the role of the indigenous population within it, and the voice of the poet speaking his own life through them.

Through these poetic texts, Cardoza utilizes the figure of Landívar, first as a figure emblematic of the concerns of exile and return, then as an analogue to his own circumstance of a poet returning to the homeland and faced with the disappointment of that reality. The politics of the Revolution appear equally prominent within Cardoza's two poetry collections and his *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, but whereas that latter work provided a representation of the entirety of Guatemala, his poetry turns instead to the personal, reflecting the psychological challenges of return and their difficult mediation through the poet's political and personal desires for his homeland. His rediscovery of Landívar upon his return to Guatemala, culminating in the repatriation of Landívar's remains from Italy in 1950, allowed Cardoza to view his own exile through the subjectivity he granted Landívar. He tellingly mediates this subjectivity through Landívar's views of the indigenous population, and attempts his own return to his homeland in poetic terms, a turn that by the end of the Guatemalan Revolution was his only way of restoring the fundamental reality of the nation, one in which the poetic voice would mediate the return of the indigenous population to its own native Guatemala.

The earliest dated poems in *Pequeños poemas* and *Rafael Landívar* are from 1945 and 1950, respectively, and both works were completed in 1964. As referenced above, these works illustrate the seeming contradictions of the poet's exile, in which he focuses most strongly on exile in the poems written prior to 1954, when the Guatemalan Revolution was ongoing and he ostensibly could have remained in his homeland. They are fascinating works that present a more personal counterpart to the (somewhat) more objective voice of the prose work, *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. This text has received considerably more critical attention, aided in part by the evaluation of Marc Zimmerman, who writes that it provides a "virtual macro-text totalizing the nation's literary expression and critical analysis, presenting and exploring Guatemala's social and cultural processes and problems" (2). At the same time its objectivity is constantly called into question, as Ana Lorena Carrillo writes: "Cardoza ignora –y no pretende saber– la metodología del historiador, de modo que su perspectiva y su discurso historiográfico pende de su personal mirada al

² These two collections appear to have been somewhat arbitrarily constructed for the 1977 publication of Cardoza's *Poesías completas y algunas prosas*, a work on which he collaborated directly, thus helping to explain the lack of critical attention paid to them. Nevertheless, the poems within have been scarcely included in critical studies, outside of some individual works such as "Laurel" from *Pequeños poemas*. The bulk of critical attention paid to Cardoza's works has centered on his earlier Surrealist works from the 1920s and 30s (though this surrealism is present throughout all of his writings), and on *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*.

pasado” (159). It is most valuable, however, to view this mode of discourse as a critical strategy by its author, who sees himself as capable of mediating the voice of the indigenous, the connection to the land, and any hope for a politically advantageous outcome for his homeland through the voice of the poet.

Cardoza invokes Landívar in the second part of *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, in the largest of the book’s four major sections. Here he presents his analysis of significant cultural figures and texts from Guatemala’s past in a history that stretches from the birth of man until the 1940s. He includes essays on the *Popol Vuh* and the works of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Antonio José de Irisarri, José Batres Montúfar, José Milla, and Enrique Gómez Carrillo, yet the longest of these pieces is the essay devoted to Rafael Landívar. It is not surprising that Cardoza found a parallel to his own exile in the writings of Landívar, given that both men were born in Antigua, and the Colonial poet was likewise exiled, forced out of present-day Guatemala in 1767 when Carlos III expelled the Jesuits from all Spanish lands. He struggled to discover a new home until finding residence in Bologna, Italy, where he wrote the *Rusticatio Mexicana*, a poetic work that attempts much the same project as Cardoza in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, exploring the homeland in totalized form.³

Cardoza’s appreciation of Landívar in this work is somewhat guarded; he writes at one point: “Su poesía me seduce menos de lo que interesa por motivos, en cierta manera, extrapoéticos” (190), and he was cautious to embrace a poet whose works on Guatemala were composed in Latin rather than Spanish.⁴ But he does extoll Landívar for writing of the land (“Landívar cantó nuestra tierra, nuestra vida, como sólo él las ha cantado. Como gran poeta” (181)), and places the earlier poet’s comprehension of Guatemala in terms easily recognizable to the latter Surrealist-influenced poet: “Se lo impide la índole misma del poeta, donde lo grande bulle oculto, difícil de percibir: lo nocturno y submergido de América” (188). Furthermore, he references the focus of Landívar’s poetry in terms likewise immediately recognizable to the always self-referential Cardoza: “escribe el primer poema de la americanidad: escribe su vida, porque aquí discurrió su infancia y mocedad y maduró su espíritu. Es un poeta de América, pionero de una poesía propia” (190).

When traveling through Italy in the 1920s, Cardoza recalled having studied Landívar while

3 Cardoza treats Landívar’s biography in poetic terms in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. For more concrete information, Octaviano Valdés’s introduction to his edition of the *Rusticatio* is instructive. An additional brief but useful biography, with bibliographic and critical information about his poem, is included in the first volume of Francisco Albizúrez Palma and Catalina Barrios y Barrios’s *Historia de la literatura guatemalteca*, p. 98-115. José Mata Gavidia’s *Landívar, el poeta de Guatemala* (1950) provides another fairly brief but helpful biography, and his *Introducción a la Rusticatio Mexicana* (1950) includes information about the genesis of the work and information about the poet’s life. A considerably earlier treatment of his life and works is found in Antonio Batres Jáuregui’s 1898 text *Literatos guatemaltecos: Landívar e Irisarri* (the latter figure being of considerable interest to Cardoza as well, and one that he would introduce to exiled president Juan José Arévalo following the end of the Revolution).

4 He writes: “¿Por qué escribió en latín para nuestros pueblos indios el primer poeta americano?” (191). In his concern over the use of Latin, he does cite Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano: “El latín y las lenguas indígenas... resultan ser, con iguales derechos, los antecedentes lingüísticos de nuestra literatura” (192), but this appears as a point that he concedes but does not wish to engage. Given that Cardoza held the indigenous population in such high esteem, he neglects the reality that “In Central America in general to speak of literature as a ‘national’ cultural form is problematic; in the case of Guatemala, this is doubly so. Only some 25 percent of the Indian population speaks Spanish, and a much smaller percentage reads or writes it” (Beverley and Zimmerman 146). This statement was made 40 years after Cardoza was writing, during a time when this circumstance would be more pronounced, and it would have been considerably more pronounced two centuries earlier. Furthermore, Landívar’s works were written in Latin because it was effectively his first language, and a language that was, in the words of Menéndez y Pelayo, “no muerta... sino viva y actual” (qtd. in Valdés 20). Cardoza’s desire to have Landívar write in Spanish instead of Latin would be to, in effect, doubly displace him, removing him not only from his homeland but also the language that he knew better than any other.

a student; while passing through the Bologna train station he recalled the city as the site of Landívar's exile, writing in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* that he spent a few days retracing the exiled poet's steps and seeking out old editions of the *Rusticatio* (185). This interest would have made sense for Cardoza at the time given his own displacement from his homeland, though not considering himself in exile at that point. It was with his return to Guatemala during the Revolution that the struggles of exile became more pronounced and the need to work through the poetry of Landívar became prominent in his mind. Through this displacement, he implies in his poetic works from the 1940s and 1950s that any return to the homeland cannot be completed with Landívar still in exile. Inevitably, by the time Landívar's remains had been returned from Bologna in 1950 Cardoza would be only two years removed from returning to Mexico.

The pieces in *Pequeños poemas* present a presaging of his fate, with a recognition that his own future is to be found outside of the homeland. He writes the first poem of *Pequeños poemas*, "A Rafael Landívar," while in Antigua, his city of birth, but there he details a return home that can never be made complete:

Llamo y nadie responde.
Pregunto a la piedra y los árboles.
Canta un pájaro y me doy cuenta
de que las casas no tienen ventanas:
demasiado débiles para tumbas,
demasiado fuertes para moradas. (*Poesías completas* 179)⁵

It is telling within Cardoza's vision of the natural world that the only things suitable for asking are stones and trees, both of which would have vitality in his worldview.⁶ The significance of the land is awoken in his consciousness, and he anticipates a welcoming that would allow for a union with the homeland in definitive terms, only to find that such a union is impossible.

The notion of an incomplete or unsatisfactory return from exile is consistent with what Uruguayan poet and novelist Mario Benedetti would theorize nearly forty years later in his 1983 article "El desexilio." He indicates that "el *desexilio* será un problema casi tan arduo como en su momento lo fue el exilio, y hasta puede que más complejo" (39), due to the separation not only from the space of the homeland but also from its time. He writes of the many South American exiles who returned from Europe to find a distinct homeland from the one that was departed decades earlier, making the homeland unrecognizable and often unlivable. The change in that physical and cultural space over the subsequent years has passed by outside of the consciousness of the exiled individual. More often than not, the people who had once inhabited that space have likewise disappeared, through death, exile, or simply the changes of life. As such, it is no surprise for the poet Cardoza to find that the people whom he once knew in Antigua are no longer to be found. The homeland has become a space of personal loss and abandon, where the physical elements of the home have lost nearly all meaning and all he can find recognizable are elements of the natural world such as stones and trees.⁷

5 All citations from Cardoza's poetry are from *Poesías completas y algunas prosas*.

6 This scene recalls the creation of the world through the poetic voice in his surrealist prose-poem *Pequeña sinfonía del Nuevo Mundo*, written between 1929 and 1932 but published in 1948. Here the protagonist Dante creates the world around him by speaking the things he wishes to create, including a stone, a pine tree, and a spider. He speaks confidently of this piece in his exilic correspondence with Enrique Muñoz Meany, calling it the best work he has written (Cardoza y Aragón, Muñoz Meany and Arriola 131-132).

7 Cardoza would express his struggles to live in Antigua following his return further concretizing the distance from the space of his homeland, writing to fellow poet César Brañas in 1946: "Soy feliz en Guatemala cuando ando en los pueblos indígenas o permanezco en Antigua. Mas en Antigua, bellísima y queridísima, no se puede vivir. Es para mí insoportable y adorable" (Cardoza y Aragón, Muñoz Meany, and Arriola 89).

HISPANIC STUDIES

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The contradictory symbols and metaphors he presents in “A Rafael Landívar” are consistent with the struggle to find comfort in return, and it is unsurprising to find the same contradictions in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* when he claims that he can live forever in Guatemala and claim that he has never left, despite completing that work in Mexico. In the aforementioned poem he presents these same issues, writing: “¿Cómo llegar si nunca me he marchado? / ¿Qué hacer para quedarme si no he vuelto?” (180). The feeling of being pulled by two homelands is made manifest here, with the poet unable to feel accommodated whether in the homeland or away from it. The lack of any sense of anchoring to a specific place and establishing a sense of belonging in it helps to indicate the role that the titular Landívar plays here. The Colonial poet’s remains were at this point still in Bologna and yet the *Rusticatio* sings of the significance of Guatemala with no mention of a European context in which it is written. Cardoza’s poetic figure in “A Rafael Landívar” appears seeking this same ability to speak of the homeland as a means of return, and yet finds such a move untenable.

The nostalgic return in the poem is tempered with a dream-like logic that appears in many of the works in *Pequeños poemas*. He writes in address to a volcano: “muero / de no soñar juntos sobre la misma almohada,”⁸ and narrates: “Desperté, y yo, Deseo, ya no estaba. Había partido de nuevo en sueños” (179), recalling his reading of Landívar’s *Rusticatio* as a discovery of the “nocturno y submergido” of his homeland. The poetic subject shifts throughout this piece and provides the oneiric logic of a psychological return that is not in fact rooted in place. The influence of Surrealist imagery draws plainly from the poet’s past, yet indicates the impossibility of a totalized vision of the homeland, instead dividing it between conscious and unconscious or oneiric realms.

The work becomes more complicated with the introduction of the Prodigal Son, a figure who will later appear in the poem “Bienvenida, campana de la torre más alta” from five years later. In the poem’s antepenultimate stanza, he repeats the aforementioned line of awakening and presents the figure of metaphorical return:

Desperté, y yo, deseo, no estaba,
“Duerme y no reposa,” díjome el Hijo Pródigo.
“Deja lo que no tienes ni tendrás.
No hay casa, ni patria, ni mundo.
Somos de otra parte.
¡Al carajo!” (180)

Here the Prodigal Son reasserts what the poet has found upon returning, that there is no homeland that he can recognize, and that the “otra parte” from which both figures come might have once been Antigua, but there is no such Antigua any longer. The dreamlike imagery and diction of this passage then gives way to what appears a dream sequence, where the figurative prodigal son, the poet, is confronted by the biblical figure, concretizing the notion that no return to the home will be welcomed. His attempt to assert his place within the home will fall on deaf ears. He twice repeats the line “Soy el legítimo,” the first when awakening when he is recognized by the ring on his finger that marks him as the legitimate son. The second occurs when the biblical Prodigal Son appears before him, and he writes: “La voz del Hijo Pródigo era hermosa como el Deseo. / Vi el anillo de mi dedo. Soy el legítimo” (180), yet the marker of legitimacy is of no use

8 This line is directly reflected in the later *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* when he writes near the work’s opening, in one of its most poetic passages: “Mi aliento se impregna de olor de Guatemala: caoba y tierra mojada. Sobre el pecho, un haz de maíz y florecillas silvestres. Soñamos juntos sobre la misma almohada, estrella caída a mi lado. En ella nazco y desemboco. Soy la tierra misma de mi tierra” (25).

and he is left in the end to depart. Any concrete sense of his place within the home has now turned around on him, and it is he as the returned son who is untenable to those who remained within the home. Exile has not only changed the space of the homeland but the returned son as well, who is given no further claim to that space as his.

The first poem of the collection *Rafael Landívar*, “Bienvenida, campana de la torre más alta,” makes the connection between Cardoza and his forebear significantly clearer. The collection itself carries the subtitle “Llegan de Bolonia sus restos a Antigua, la ciudad natal,” a line that most explicitly refers to Landívar but which could likewise implicate Cardoza in an ironic manner. This poem leans quite heavily upon “A Rafael Landívar,” repeating the imagery of the Prodigal Son and including lines nearly verbatim from the earlier work. The mediation of the return home, however, is complicated by a rhetorical strategy that Cardoza would use in his heavily-surrealist *Pequeña sinfonía del Nuevo Mundo*, writing himself as guide to another poet as the two make their way through unknown landscapes. Whereas in that earlier work the figure of Luis guides the poet Dante (in a variance of the structure of the *Inferno*), in this work it is Luis el Antigüeno who guides Landívar as both of them return home. He explicitly offers to the earlier poet “Déjame que te guíe,” and poses questions that might just as well be directed to one or the other:

¿Reconoces tu Antigua sin la grana,
los cafetos nupciales,
el acuñado sol de los bananos?

¿Reconoces tus padres y los míos
charlando en los geranios?

¿Reconoces tu Antigua, ascua fría
entre fuentes, apagada luciérnaga,
en su nadir mudez ensimismada? (201)

Here Cardoza inverts the crisis of return displayed in “A Rafael Landívar,” where what he once saw as the absence of people he loved or the altered landscape now appears welcoming to both. The very fact that these concepts are posed through questions retains indicates the lack of clarity of both poets’ return, as Landívar might in fact not recognize these pieces of his past, yet Luis asks the questions in an affirmation of his own notion of the potential for such a return.

The conflation of Landívar’s era with Cardoza’s, synchronously collapsing the time of Colonial and Revolutionary Guatemala, likewise inverts the roles of poet and guide. Where it was Luis el Antigüeno leading Landívar back to his Guatemala, the comparison with “A Rafael Landívar” makes clear that this opening into a real Guatemala is only possible through the presence of the Colonial poet. In effect, Cardoza is attempting to lead Landívar back home, but any return home for Cardoza is only made possible due to the presence of the earlier figure. Cardoza cannot make the journey on his own; he must find the nature of Landívar’s Guatemala and see the inherent connection between the two epochs in order to fully mediate any sense of return, and the figure of the poet must become integral to this struggle. Tellingly, both of these closely related poems end on similar notes. In “A Rafael Landívar” the poet writes: “Y me marché por el portón trasero / para volver jamás” (180); in “Bienvenida, campana de la torre más alta,” the narrator Luis writes: “Y se marchó por el portón trasero / para volver jamás” (204). The departure of the two figures parallels with the change of subject, as in the latter work the notion of Luis el Antigüeno departing is indelibly tied to Landívar, a figure who must remain behind, yet who

will still accompany Luis out of the homeland, just as part of Luis will remain behind. The lack of clarity at the latter poem's close, complicated by the revelation that the still-present narrator Luis tells the reader that Landívar arrived already dead and has now been buried, forms a deliberate strategy of fully conflating both poets; either one is capable of departing or remaining in Guatemala now that both figures have made the journey together.

There is a political bent to the synchronicity of these time periods, as the Colonial Era is transposed with the context of pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary Guatemala, allowing Cardoza to draw Landívar forward to his time so that the mediation of return can be made for the 20th century poet and not only the earlier one. Following the questions cited above, he writes: "Rafael Landívar, hablas inglés, / ya no hay Capitanes generales / y el tetrarca es de oro y petróleo" (201). The linguistic displacement that he had earlier wished on Landívar is now a political form, indicating that for Landívar to fully comprehend the nature of present-day Guatemala he must understand the language of those who would wrest his country from him. He will further implicate a foreign and North American presence in the poem "Chichicastenango," from *Pequeños poemas*, writing of the arrival of "turistas gringos" who carry copies of the *Popol Vuh* as part of a fetishized vision of indigeneity and view the indigenous persons themselves in objectified form.⁹ By linking Landívar's time with Cardoza's, he implies a foreign involvement in Guatemala throughout its history, one which has continually sought to dispossess the indigenous population of its connection to the homeland.

Indigeneity marks the struggle of return throughout Cardoza's works from this period, indicating the necessity of constructing the poet's return with that of the displaced indigenous population. In "Bienvenida, campana de la torre más alta," he writes in the stanza prior to the series of questions cited above, addressing Landívar: "tus latines / como español nos cantan y el desterrado indígena / peregrino en su patria, sonrío en el maíz" (200). This image presents at once the displacement of the indigenous population and the integral connection it maintains with the land and the mythic origins of humans from corn, tying to the *Popol Vuh* and pieces of oral culture that treat the creation of humans by the gods. It likewise implies that the only manner of providing for the happiness of the indigenous population is through the restitution of the land and what it produces to its original inhabitants, linking all of these pieces to the Latin poetry of Landívar that can bind them together.

Ultimately, the poet is made key to this struggle, not as a matter of political praxis but rather as a means of tying poetry to the vital identity of the nation and its people. His treatment of *destierro* in these works is placed in poetically metaphorical terms for him, as he seeks to find the means to link the land to the indigenous such that that population might become once again the subject of its own nationalism, just as he seeks a way to ontologically identify himself as Guatemalan. The question of metaphor is key in his poetic worldview, and is an element that he would carry with him long after returning to Mexico. He writes in his 1986 autobiography, *El Río, novelas de caballería*, in a section titled "¿Qué es ser guatemalteco?": "el exilio es la divergencia entre la imagen y la realidad. Entonces, esa silenciosa confrontación pertinaz es lo esencial: y no

9 Chichicastenango, a city famous for its market (even to the present day, but very much during Cardoza's time), carries a heavily indigenous significance for Cardoza. During his return to Guatemala, he writes in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* of his arrival in that city, in the "tierra del *Popol Vuh*," and of its indelibly indigenous presence, but also of the places where indigenous persons took refuge during the arrival of Alvarado in 1524. It is in this chapter of the book that he first speaks of the temporal and spatial displacement of the indigenous population and the need to carry through with an agrarian reform that would restore land to the indigenous and thus the indigenous to their native Guatemala. As he indicates, prior to any reform "Se han quedado perdidos, desterrados en la propia patria, peregrinando dentro de las creencias arcaicas, amalgamadas con los actuales ritos" (90).

hay exilio puesto que vivimos una metáfora” (785).¹⁰ Tying the indigenous population to the poet is made possible through the question of displacement, and though the conditions of Cardoza and of the indigenous population are clearly divergent, he finds a mode of political discourse that enables him to stand in similar exclusion; as Rodríguez Cascante writes: “Lo que procura el texto... es superar las construcciones establecidas-oficiales del Estado oligárquico, que plantean la exclusión de las grandes mayorías en la representación de la cultura guatemalteca, donde una minoría ‘blanca’ (ladina) domina a las mayorías indígenas” (25). This revolutionary stance is not merely a reflection of Cardoza’s political opposition to the modern state, but also a function of his own link to the land and its people. Consistent with his claims in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, where he states “Soy la tierra misma de mi tierra” (25), the turn to the indigenous population provides him with both a means to give subjectivity to the indigenous Guatemalan and to attempt to totalize the nation in terms of *patria*, land, and subject. Neither the indigenous nor Cardoza himself can walk within a “Guatemala” that has stripped them of ownership of its land.

Cardoza’s poetics are in the end tied to a national ontology, though one that is distrustful of the political state and instead finds its identity through the indigenous population. For this reason, he is distrustful of the foreign presence in Chichicastenango, as the objectification of the indigenous population by a foreign presence is fully in line with the modernizing projects of the dictatorships that preceded and followed the Guatemalan Revolution (and which as well might be found in the “ideología del mestizaje asimilacionista”). This ontological threat extends as well to the poet, as Cardoza would later indicate in “¿Qué es ser guatemalteco?": “El problema es verse desde fuera. Como si de otro se tratase” (*El Río* 786). Cardoza brings himself into the ontology of the other, in an attempt to make both himself and the indigenous population a subject of their encounter. Tying Landívar into this construct not only has the effect of further totalizing the nation through poetry, but also of constructing himself in the role of the earlier poet, establishing a metaphor of poetic identity. Cardoza is no longer simply the exiled poet, but also a subject standing behind the metaphor of the other, just as Landívar might stand in for him, or the indigenous for either figure.

In the absence of a political system that enables the totality of the homeland to emerge through the union of the indigenous with the land, Cardoza builds his return through poetry as the only means of comprehending the lived reality of Guatemala. He closes the poem “Chichicastenango” with a mention of his return to Antigua: “Qué lejos yo, ¡tan cerca!” (187). This return is figurative, as he recounts in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* that he reached Antigua prior to visiting Chichicastenango. The temporal and spatial impossibility embedded within these poetic works in fact belies a mythic reality that is the only possibility open to the returning exile. He further implicates Landívar in this construction, writing in “Bienvenida, campana de la torre más alta”: “De aquí somos. La voz engendra hogar” (203). These lines are redolent of the creation of the world through the poetic word in *Pequeña sinfonía del Nuevo Mundo*, but here the fusion of poet and land is made even further manifest: both poets have the ability to construct

10 *El Río* is a fascinatingly questionable source of material on Cardoza, due to how it was composed. It presents a collage of texts, some written in the 1980s when he put the work together and others excerpted from work written decades prior. It is ultimately less dependable than the works written much closer to the events that he narrates, as is only natural. As one relevant example here, he claims in the autobiography that he returned to Mexico in 1953 (704), while his correspondence with Arévalo, written in 1954, indicates that the return took place in 1952 (Cardoza and Arévalo 81). As Boccanera writes of the autobiography: “No se trata de una evocación esclavizada por el fatuoso recuerdo de la evocación, sino aquella que emerge de las invenciones.... El recuerdo puede falsear, pero la imaginación es más segura” (30).

11 See Mario Roberto Morales, *La articulación de las diferencias o el síndrome de Maximón*, p. 46.

the homeland through their absence, one that is equally possible standing within the borders of Guatemala or outside of it. Later in the poem he will further develop the idea, stating: “Grito, abro los ojos y te palpo, / para verte y saber que estás allí, / en la patria del alma, la del canto” (204). Only poetry can establish bridge that allows the poet to find the homeland through his poetic mentor, and only Cardoza’s voice can ever truly bring Landívar home.

The invocation of the indigenous is likewise developed through this union of poetry, poet, and land, as Cardoza discovers the potential of poetry through his reading of the indigenous word. In an article titled “Poesía del *Popol Vuh*,” from 1940, he writes of that work’s “purísima poesía,” stating: “El Verbo actúa ante nosotros. El mundo se crea para nosotros cada vez que le leemos. Se crea de manera igual a como se creó para los antiguos pobladores de nuestra tierra” (538). This link between poetry and indigenous reality is in no way incidental in Cardoza’s writings, but rather central to the dialectic he constructs regarding the homeland. As he writes in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*, a true Guatemalan identity cannot exist without restoring the subjectivity of the indigenous population (“Cuando nos democratizamos y los indígenas sean de nuevo los protagonistas de la historia, Guatemala contará como nación” (384)). Poetry is central to this vision, as it constitutes the mediating element that seeks to resolve the tension between land and the indigenous, a link that has become severed through the arrival of Europeans and centuries of military dictatorships and foreign involvement, and economic projects that further divorced the indigenous from their lands. The Guatemalan Revolution, through which the presidencies of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Árbenz sought to restore land to the indigenous population,¹² became an opening for the return of the poetic voice to the *patria*, one which likewise welcomed Cardoza back to the land of his birth, only to once again lead to destitution for the indigenous and the concretization of exile for Cardoza.

The two poetry collections that bridge the period from Cardoza’s return until his ultimate departure are ultimately instructive in a nuanced form from what he provides in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano*. Whereas in that prose text he sought to discover a way to restore himself to the homeland that he has missed for over two decades, the end of the Revolution in 1954 created a rupture that is revealed within, where the text turns *in medias res* from the hope of return to cynicism and defeatism when the Revolution ended prior to his completion of the text. The poetry of this period, also tinged with currents of despair, overcomes the poet’s questioning and the bleak tone of his verses through the analogue of Rafael Landívar, whose return to Guatemala and eventually to Antigua provides a poetic restoration that survives Cardoza’s ultimate return to Mexico. While he could not speak of his time in the homeland without invoking his *desexilio* as another form of *exilio*, his departure from Guatemala in 1952 and gradual turn to other subjects in his poetry demonstrates how a sense of closure had grown now that he had traveled together with Landívar through the homeland, the two poets together asserting the value of both the land and the indigenous in perpetual union. With the voice of Landívar speaking through him, part of Cardoza could always remain in Antigua, enabling a Guatemala that had become a physical and political impossibility to survive through the poetry of both men.

¹² Decreto 900, also known as the Ley de Reforma Agraria, sought to take lands controlled by the United Fruit Company that were not in use and to distribute them to indigenous persons. The government of Arévalo, under which Cardoza worked as a diplomat, implemented several changes to the *latifundio* system in Guatemala, and Cardoza was largely in favor of these reforms. He had significantly greater misgivings about the implementation of the Reforma Agraria, which was signed into law by Árbenz in 1952. While it was successful in its aim of land distribution to the indigenous population, it also created significant friction among Guatemalan elites, and was more or less directly responsible for the Carlos Castillo Armas invasion of 1954, which overthrew the Árbenz government with the aid of the CIA. José Luis Valdés Ugalde’s *Estados Unidos: Intervención y poder mesiánico. La guerra fría en Guatemala, 1954* provides a detailed description of the involvement of the US in the Castillo Armas invasion.

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