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Manuel Altolaguirre: Between Exile and Spain

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Historical generalities about Spanish writers and intellectuals who went into exile at the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) reveal almost nothing of the attitudes before the conflict, the terrible awakening during the battles, nor the human costs of coming to grips with the realities of a displaced person just before, during, and after the all-consuming conflagration of the Second World War (1939-1945). A sense of the true dimensions of this exile may come more clearly through consideration of the experience of one such writer, the poet Manuel Altolaguirre. This article attempts to demonstrate that the great “Spanish exile” really consisted of many smaller exiles, not only physically as these people searched for new homes and means of supporting themselves and their families, but also politically as ever-shifting events in the world continued to leave any future return to Spain very much uncertain.

Born in Málaga in 1905, Altolaguirre is perhaps the youngest member of the *grupo poético del 27*—usually rendered in English as the Generation of ‘27.¹ Its most famous members are undoubtedly poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, painter Salvador Dalí, and filmmaker Luis Buñuel, though the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda is often included in the lists.² The group’s designation derives from a series of homages in 1927 paid to Spanish Golden Age poet Luis de Góngora on the 300th anniversary of his death. The mostly young avant-garde poets admired Góngora for his extravagant, daring, and occasionally outrageous metaphors. Radically innovative language was one of the tools—or weapons—of the avant-garde, in accord with the military origin of the term itself. As Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had already declared in a Futurist manifesto: “Poetry must be an uninterrupted sequence of new images” (Blum 46). José Ortega y Gasset, writing in 1925 as the voice of this generation, hailed avant-garde poetry as the

advanced algebra of the metaphor; the phrase itself is an example of an avant-garde metaphor (73).³ In their use of metaphor, these Spanish poets unmistakably identified with the broader international upheaval of the isms. Altolaguirre, however, came to see the Generation of '27 less as an avant-garde movement or even as an association of like-minded writers and artists. Rather, to him it was a group of friends, many of whom met in their late teens and early twenties on the Mediterranean beaches at Málaga or a little later at the Residencia de Estudiantes, a kind of freewheeling university in Madrid which several of them attended (2006 37).

These writers and artists came of age in the waning years of Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, which ended in 1930, and then flourished in the commotion, censorship, and increasing violence of the Second Republic. One of them, Juan Gil-Albert, described how they saw themselves as the true elite of their day, although none dared to confess it, even to one another (178).⁴ In the end, of course, they would become the generation of war and exile, but at the time they had no clue.

The Great War had ended in 1918—Altolaguirre was only thirteen—and Spain, playing on its neutrality, enriched itself considerably (Carr 497). At first there was more than enough to go around, affording economic security to many writers, intellectuals, and artists who were already the sons of rich families (Tussell 541). Altolaguirre was among the few of this elite Generation of '27 who actually had to work for a living. At age 19, he and fellow poet Emilio Prados launched a printing press in Málaga, publishing some of the seminal books of the Spanish avant-garde, as well as the influential journal *Litoral*. In 1926 he designed, set type for, and published his first book of poems, *Las islas invitadas* [Invited islands], and a year later contributed his second collection, *Poema del agua*

[Water poem], to the special edition of *Litoral* in Góngora's honor, one of the events in 1927 that helped name the entire group.

Altolaguirre enjoyed some success. Writing in the *Mediodía* newspaper of Seville in 1926, reviewer Joaquín Romero y Murube commented to the effect that a new name—Altolaguirre's—must now be added to the already dense phalanx of contemporary lyrical poetry of Southern Spain (14). A designation without the slightest irony, as no critic could have foreseen that within seven years José Antonio Primo de Rivera—son of the dictator and himself an occasional poet—would launch the proudly fascist *Falange Española* [Spanish Phalanx] movement, another step towards the civil war that would cost Altolaguirre nearly everything.

A year after the crash of 1929, Spanish gold reserves remained largely untouched, and except for tenant farmers, miners, and factory workers, for whom a living wage never kept up with realty, people remained optimistic, young urban people especially so (Hernández de Trelles 25). For those who considered themselves the cultural elite at the forefront of modern art, following in the bold footsteps of Pablo Picasso and Juan Ramón Jiménez, pioneers born some twenty years earlier, the horizon seemed full of promise (Gil-Albert 180). Then the peseta was devalued, the dictatorship fell, and in the midst of economic and political upheavals, the king abdicated in 1931 and the Second Republic began its struggle for legitimacy.

The artistic aim of the Generation of '27 was to change Spanish literature by opening it up to European modernity without giving up its own traditions, its Spanishness; in other words, to create a synthesis of two seemingly opposing values: conservative tradition and unstable avant-garde (Romojaro 28). Whether or not such lofty ambitions

were even possible, there was often a disconnect between what these young elites said they wanted to do in art and the texts they in fact produced.

A number of avant-garde poets—Rafael Alberti, César Vallejo, Pablo Neruda, Miguel Hernández—became committed leftists: socialists, communists, Marxists; the borders between ideological currents remained fluid. Identification with the *people*, real or devoutly to be desired, tended to mitigate their earlier experimentation. Other members of the Spanish avant-garde soon overcame the excesses and abuses found in the various European isms—for instance, the determination to achieve originality at all costs; incoherence and impenetrability; the ludic triviality of art objects; a deliberate and even transgressive anti-popularity—in favor of what came to be known as *neopopularismo* [neo-popularism], especially among Andalusian poets of the Generation of '27: Altolaguirre, García Lorca, Prados, and Alberti, among others (Cirre 71-72).⁵ In part a reaction to the dehumanization and hermetic aloofness of the period, *neopopularismo* favored the use of traditional, popular poetic forms—the *romance* ballad, assonant rhyme, songlike rhythms, the lack of epic and declamation—yet with a decidedly avant-garde sense of freedom and a transgressive concern for what may be styled low culture if not para-culture: the gypsies, tramps, and thieves of romanticism joined by the Chaplinesque tramps of silent movies.⁶ This approach led to some surprising results, such as the fact that Lorca's *Romancero gitano* [Gypsy ballad collection]—a series of dreamlike poems featuring gypsies of southern Spain—became a multi-edition bestseller in 1928.

To give an example of the neopopular in Altolaguirre's case, the poem "La playa" (The beach)—dedicated to García Lorca, as it happens—exhibits several aspects found in traditional Spanish song and poetry: eight-syllable verses, assonant rhyme, the use of

refrain, and quick postcard-like tableaus. Nevertheless, the poem would never be confused with a truly popular text, because the author reveals simply too much awareness of the text itself, of the poem as object:

Las barcas de dos en dos,
como sandalias del viento
puestas a secar al sol.

Yo y mi sombra, ángulo recto.
Yo y mi sombra, libro abierto.

Sobre la arena tendido
como despojo del mar
se encuentra un niño dormido.

Yo y mi sombra, ángulo recto.
Yo y mi sombra, libro abierto.

Y más allá, pescadores
tirando de las maromas
amarillas y salobres.

Yo y mi sombra, ángulo recto.
Yo y mi sombra, libro abierto.

(1999 106-107)

[Boats two by two, like the wind's sandals, set out to dry in the sun. My shadow and I, a right angle. My shadow and I, an open book. Laid out on the sand, like plunder from the sea, a boy is found asleep. My shadow and

I, a right angle. My shadow and I, an open book. And farther down, fishermen hauling ropes, yellow and salty. My shadow and I, a right angle. My shadow and I, an open book.]

As the 1930s approached, ideology trumped aesthetics. Andre Breton repudiated his own 1924 manifesto to place surrealism at the service of Marxist revolution, extolling the supremacy of matter over mind, and the supremacy of scientific materialism in particular (Blanco Aguinaga 41). The increasingly violent confrontations of the Second Republic made it hard not to choose sides. The future of civilization seemed to be at stake (Dennis 10). Altolaguirre, working side by side with men who printed books but had little desire to write them or even to read them, grew keenly aware of their separate worlds, and what he saw as the obligations of an intellectual elite to better the world he lived in (Valender 1989 45). He became a “committed” intellectual even before the war, an avant-garde revolutionary with responsibilities to the economically, pedagogically, intellectually, socially—in a word, culturally—less fortunate. This attitude of artistic *noblesse oblige* situates Altolaguirre squarely in the mindset of the movers and shakers of the Second Republic, with its *Misiones Pedagógicas*—its Teaching Missions—running around the countryside in canvas-back trucks to educate peasants and small-town provincials in what, exactly?, showing them handmade copies of masterpieces from the Prado Museum or playing scratchy 78 RPM recordings of unfamiliar poetry, or putting on bits and pieces of Golden Age dramas together with the latest avant-garde theater (Gil-Albert 180-181). It must have been much like the hardworking folks of rural Georgia during the Great Depression waking up to the conceptual joys of Dada performance art or John Cage’s four and a half minutes of silence. As evidence of their solidarity, the Teaching Missions elite put on the same blue overalls, the traditional *mono azul*, that porters, mechanics, and other workers wore.

Altolaguirre routinely wore the *mono azul* working side by side with his employees in a printing press he ran out of the basement of his home in Madrid, which today would be found back to back with the Sorolla Museum. He was working there the night of July 17-18, 1936, putting the finishing touches on a special number for the journal *Caballo Verde para la Poesía* [Green horse for poetry]—the stated aim of which was a poetry without purity, like human beings and the things they make (Neruda 7)—when several military commanders led yet another rebellion against the Spanish government (Santonja 20). By the following month, two of Altolaguirre's poet friends had been executed: Federico García Lorca by Nationals outside Granada, and José María Hinojosa by Republicans in Málaga.⁷ As the Spanish people split between two extremes, Altolaguirre remained true to his leftist ideals and loyal to the crumbling Republic.

The outbreak of war, according to poet Luis Cernuda, took him and his Generation of '27 by surprise—though, given recent history, they might have expected it; they were simply deceived by appearances (2002 243). Undoubtedly the deception continued for a time, though the harsh realities of wartime Spain should have been enough to burst the group's bubble of an elite at play, especially for a poet accustomed to working with his hands, who now had a wife and small child. But a series of photos from that first summer of war shows Altolaguirre, dressed this time in his good suit rather than his *mono azul*, in the company of fellow poets Rafael Alberti and José Bergamín, holding a rifle above his head and giggling (Valender 2012 180). At this same time the famous poet Antonio Machado, member of the earlier Generation of '98, called his fellow poets to arms at the outbreak of war: "Today we are at the disposal of the Ministry of Public Instruction, as militiamen of the democratic and republican Spanish state of the people" (Gibson 615).

The poet as militiaman, the pen as a weapon, and the printing press as artillery. Much of Altolaguirre's wartime involvement consisted of printing and handing out propaganda as he moved from Madrid to Barcelona to Valencia. Worsening events knocked his literary illusions down a notch at a time, as when he was swept up in a dragnet while sitting at an outdoor café. He had forgotten to carry his documents, and when he gave his name, the militia leader said it sounded familiar. I'm not surprised, Altolaguirre replied; I am a writer. But the *miliciano* thought instead that the name might have appeared on an arrest warrant (Altolaguirre 2006 27).

Neither one of the literary elite, nor one of the true militia, Altolaguirre was finally drafted in 1938, but instead of handing him a rifle the unit put him to good use at its printing press in a bombed-out house near the Pyrenees (Méndez 103). The war would only last another six months. Barcelona fell in January. In the evacuation of hundreds of thousands fleeing for the French frontier, friends and entire families were separated. After the cold, hunger, disease, suicides, and relentless bombardments, what waited on the other side of the snow-covered mountains in France, were concentration camps (Blanco Aguinaga 51). A few fortunate government officials, like Antonio Machado, were put up in a hotel outside the camps; Machado soon died there at age 63 (Gibson 682). Other refugees, like Manuel Altolaguirre, were found wandering in the cold, starving and in shock, unable to speak, and ended up confined to an asylum. In early 1939 the number of Spanish refugees in the camps was estimated at half a million (Smith 207).

Altolaguirre was ultimately located by the Association of Antifascist Writers (AEA) and sent by train to Paris, where he reunited with his wife and daughter. Concha Méndez was not only his wife since 1932, but a poet of the same Generation of '27 and his partner

at the printing press. As she would write in her memoirs, their exile began that spring in Paris, whether they realized it or not (108). Their hope—a return to Spain, following the intervention of Western democracies and the fall of the Franco regime before it ever took hold—did not then seem impossible. They were not so much exiled, she thought at the time, as temporarily displaced by events. The Spanish Embassy in Paris, still loyal to the extinct Republic, issued necessary documents, found Altolaquirre medical help, and advised the family on travel procedures. At the generous and unexpected invitation of French surrealist poet Paul Eluard, whom they had never even met, the three went to stay at his home. There they entertained other writers and artists, catching up on the last gasps of the international avant-garde. It felt almost like a vacation in Paris, of all places, and who could really mind that, even after a war?

It is important to note that “the majority of intellectuals who chose exile did so not out of support for one side or the other, but because their lives were not safe under the Republic” (Kamen 272). On the opposing side, the Law of Political Responsibilities promulgated by the National government threatened punishment for anyone who had contributed actively or passively to the establishment of the “Red subversion” (i.e., the Second Republic), retroactive to 1934, and thus a distinguished group of intellectuals and scientists escaped jail by going into exile just in time (Eslava Galán 22). With some notable exceptions, ties that seemed to bind so tightly during the Second Republic and the war years quickly unraveled in the aftermath.

After some weeks in Paris the Altolaquirre family traveled to Bordeaux and set sail for Mexico on March 10, 1939, thanks to the financial aid of avant-garde artists Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, and others. They could afford passage in steerage for Concha and

Paloma, while Altolaguirre himself slept in a deck chair (Valender 2012 211-212). Mexico was the Spanish-speaking country that “most generously opened its doors to the mass of Republican refugees” (Crispin 93). The stump Republican government would eventually relocate to Mexico, as well as a sizeable community of Spanish exiles, and therefore the country offered some likelihood of support.

Unfortunately, while on board Paloma—who had just turned four—came down with the measles, and the family was put off the ship at Santiago de Cuba, in perhaps the Spanish-speaking country least happy to open its doors to the mass of refugees, at least to the poor ones (Domingo 8). The forty days of quarantine turned into four years, and hard years at that, beginning with the family’s arrest for having entered Cuba illegally (Méndez 109).

A question that remains unanswered is why the family left for Mexico when they did. Although a foregone conclusion from our vantage point, Madrid would not fall for weeks, the war being officially declared over on April 1, 1939. As Juan Rejano documents in his own travel memoir, some 1500 fellow exiles—well-heeled artists, bureaucrats, businessmen, singers and dancers, craftspeople—waited until late May-early June to make the crossing with him (27). Manuel Azaña, president of the Republic, if in name only, never left France. Despite the shock of defeat, Spanish republicans had not given up hope in ultimate vindication (Faber 40). This hope was renewed, paradoxically enough, by the outbreak of World War 2, exactly six months after Francisco Franco declared victory in the Spanish Civil War. The Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939—so the exiles believed—would surely lead the Allies (Britain and France at the time) to crush

Franco's Spain after defeating Hitler's Germany. This in turn would resurrect the Second Republic.

The war did not, however, produce a quick Allied victory; in fact, the following summer France itself fell to German troops, trapping many Spanish exiles in place. Franco did not bow to Hitler's urging to join Spain to the Axis powers. Apart from a crippling blockade, the Allies never punished Franco directly in an effort to overthrow his regime. On the contrary, with the coming of the Cold War the Allies embraced him, first through the Pact of Madrid in 1953, establishing U.S. military bases in Spain as a bulwark against the spread of communism, and then in 1955 through normalization with the United Nations. The Spanish exiles found themselves abandoned by history. In a sense, their anticipation and disappointment created a series of exiles, one after another after another, for fifteen years.

The aim of solidarity with the proletariat, so pronounced during the Civil War, did away with the last vestiges of a radical Spanish avant-garde (Harris 10). The Generation of '27 ceased to exist in the war years: When the war ended, their sense of being a group disappeared, and they themselves limit their generational activity to the year 1936 (Lama 19). Those who left Spain, like Altolaguirre, felt broken off from the common stem; those who survived the war and remained in the country—Dámaso Alonso, Gerardo Diego, Vicente Aleixandre, among others—found it difficult to keep in touch with poets who had left, and began what Leopoldo de Luis calls their own internal exile (24). They all continued to make poetry, inside and outside Spain, but in what Paul Ilie has termed “a mutual deafness” (36). They tried to read each other's work when possible, tried to correspond and even to mail books, but styles reflected little or no interaction. Not

surprisingly, one aspect they did share, whether in exile or in Spain, was a reflection on the death all around them.

Like other Spanish exiles, Altolaguirre struggled to come to terms with his new reality. If exile is viewed as a historical construct— “a political, social, or linguistic pattern”— then the experience, along with its literary expression, often seems to shift between two polarities, which Claudio Guillén categorizes as exile and counter-exile (271-272). The first extreme, exile, not only becomes its own subject matter, but presupposes nostalgia for the lost world. As Paolo Bartoloni notes:

In enforced exile, all the senses, and the language employed to articulate them, appear to be capable of nothing other than a continuous struggle to reclaim possession of the senses and languages of others; in a word, to reconnect and be subsumed again by the language and the senses of the individual's lost community. (82)

In 1939 Altolaguirre was still very much on a mental war footing, writing one elegy to Federico García Lorca and another to Saturnino Ruiz.⁸ The latter was a printer at Altolaguirre's press in Madrid who had set type for Lorca's *Primeras canciones* [Early songs] in 1936, and soon after was killed on the battlefield. The note of nostalgia—what Guillén describes as the exercise of memory “and its ability to heal the wounds of separation in space and time” (274)—is obvious in the poetry of this time.

The death of Federico García Lorca in front of a firing squad inspired a great number of elegies, beginning with Antonio Machado's “El crimen fue en Granada” [The murder was in Granada], which was first read in 1936 at a political rally to support the Republic at war and published the following year (Gibson 618). The extent to which Lorca

was politicized by events, transformed from a dead apolitical poet to a living symbol of atrocities inflicted on the Second Republic—the martyr par excellence of the cause—will never be known (Castro 96). For the survivors of the Generation of '27, this group of friends as Altolaguirre calls it, the loss was personal. Exile sharpened all their elegies, every nostalgic grasp for the past. As Altolaguirre realizes in his elegy to Lorca, he has literally become the grave of his dead, saying in part:

Me olvido de vivir si te recuerdo,

Me reconozco polvo de la tierra

Y te incorporo a mí, como lo hace

La parte más cercana de tu tumba,

Esa tierra insensible que suplanta

El amoroso afán de tus amigos.

(1999 257)

[I forget to live if I remember you, I recognize myself as dust of the earth and I add you to myself, as does the closest part of your grave, that unfeeling earth displacing the love and affection of your friends.]

He finds himself physically cut off from the Spanish earth and uses poetry to bridge the distance, to fill the grave, so to speak. But as Sigmund Freud notes about the living's attempt to reconcile themselves to such loss: "No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it still remains something else," rather than what was taken away (386). A poem may seem a poor substitute, as the elegy implies. Salvatore J. Poeta sees in Altolaguirre's elegy for Lorca a retreat from the outside world, a typical psychological defense against the devastating impact of death (44).

Yet from the beginning Altolaguirre reacted to death with what Margarita Smerdou sees as avoidance of the present time through a search for himself in childhood (12). In “Nunca más” [Nevermore] from prewar 1936, for example, he already writes images suggestive of graves:

Las ausencias,
los grandes huecos,
el enorme vacío dibujado
por los recuerdos insistentes,
todo está aquí
como cenizas de un gran fuego.
(1999 252)

[The absences, the great holes, the enormous space drawn by insistent memories, everything is here like ashes from a great fire.]

To see something of the effect of Altolaguirre’s exile experience, it is helpful to contrast a prewar elegy with the one dedicated to Lorca. The “Epitafio” [Epitaph] from 1931, on the death of Fernando Villalón—an Andalusian count, poet, stockbreeder, and founder of the short-lived avant-garde journal *Papel de Aleluyas*—brings together elements that will reappear in Lorca’s elegy, but the entire tone is rather conventional for such a theme, striking the reader as boilerplate, despite an attempt at personal warmth and pathos:

Lejano amigo mío:
tan distante estás ya,
que tu reflejo en mí
no puede ser más hondo.
Tu recuerdo es profundo,

como grande es tu ausencia,
y tan largo el camino
que has andado en la muerte
como el que recorriste
traspasando mi alma
al subir a tu gloria.

(1999 191)

[Faraway intimate friend: so distant are you now that your reflection cannot be any deeper in me. Your memory is profound, as is your absence great, and the road you have gone in death as long as the one you took passing through my soul when you went up to your glory.]

The images become more commonplace when compared to the language of mourning in the Lorca elegy, not only the opening lines cited above, but the grieving isolation expressed in the closing lines:

Te escribe estas palabras separado
del cotidiano sueño de mi vida,
desde un astro lejano en donde sufro
tu irreparable pérdida llorando.

(1999 258-259)

[I write you these words being separated from the everyday dream of my life, from a faraway star where I suffer your irreparable loss in tears.]

As much as Altolaquirre might have wished to avoid the pain of present exile—to continue with Smerdou's concept—the force of economic circumstance cut off the possibility of any true retreat from the outside world. In Havana, ever at work on his hand press, he published slender editions of works, by himself and others, with nostalgic names like *Aires de mi España* [Airs from my Spain] and *Antología de España en el Recuerdo*

[Anthology of Spain in the memory]. He also produced two numbers of a tiny journal—paper and ink cost money—titled *Atenta/mente*,⁹ consisting of his memoirs or *confesiones* [confessions], as he styled them, of the early days of his exile in France, starting with his mental breakdown. The family was so destitute that his wife went door to door trying to sell the publication for ten cents apiece. By the end of three years the family was going hungry, the electricity and water had been shut off and the furniture repossessed (Altolaguirre 2005 432).

Finally, in 1943, the family managed to reach Mexico and the welcoming arms of the Spanish exile community. It was there in the capital where Altolaguirre may be said to pass into counter-exile as described by Francie Cate-Arries: “the stage in which the initial separation [from the homeland] is transcended” (134). The first phase of transcending the separation is evidenced, painfully, by separation from his Spanish wife of fourteen years, Concha Méndez. His thematic book of poetry about the marital breakup is *Fin de un amor* [End of a love] published in 1949, closing the circle of love poems to or about his first wife that started with *Soledades juntas* [Solitudes joined together] in 1931. The divorce cost him the goodwill of a number of old friends from the Generation of '27. Cernuda would comment in a letter that he now hardly recognized his old friend and collaborator: “Manolo Altolaguirre, busy producing movies, is no longer Manolo Altolaguirre” (Cano 93). Later he would write about the toll that Altolaguirre’s exile had taken on him:

I would like to remember him just as he was when I met him in 1927, thirty years ago: lighthearted, charming, generous, quick to give of what he had to others, even to someone he had just met, with no indication at all of his

later terrible impatience (I don't know whether it was a sign of unhappiness with himself) that I found in him around 1950, after eleven years without seeing him. An impatience that, without a moment's reflection, would lead him to get mixed up in matters and projects foreign to him, who was first and foremost a poet, a great poet [...] (Cernuda 2002 842).

In exile Altolaguirre wrote less and less and recycled more and more, producing two additional incarnations of his first book, *Las islas invitadas*, which brought the total to four.¹⁰ In an uneven mix of his Spanish past and his Mexican present, the texts of *Poemas en América* [Poems in America] would become his last published collection in 1955. Over the previous ten years the civil war receded gradually, though never completely, from his work. In fact—as Cernuda's comments reveal—he chose to transcend nostalgia by generally abandoning poetry, literature, wife, and printing press altogether: in short, by giving up his past. He joined himself, like fellow exile Luis Buñuel, to Mexican cinema, first as screenwriter and eventually as director of a few low-budget films.

His ultimate transcendence of exile came about with a return to Spain in 1959, twenty years after running for the border. He was seeking funds to finish his first movie in full color, *Cantar de los cantares* [Song of Songs], at an international film festival in San Sebastián. What Altolaguirre actually thought as he returned from exile is uncertain. As Bartoloni poignantly points out:

The foreignness of those who return is compounded by those traits they still share with the category of 'home,' including people, food, light, language. And yet their language is different, the people have changed. Being the same and yet different is a mark unlikely to be forgotten or forgiven, not only

by others but also, and more importantly, by the very individuals who return.

There is no going home, simply because there is no home. (86)

Everything was different: Altolaguirre had left at the end of a chaotic war and now returned to a land of regimented peace; he had left as a poet-printer and returned as a (small-time) cinematic auteur; he had left as the husband of Concha Méndez and now returned as the husband of María Luisa Gómez, a Cuban; most importantly, he had left as a young man, a committed intellectual, one of the elite, and now returned in middle age, hollowed out by exile, and strapped for cash.

Directly after the presentation of the parts of his film already shot, he and his second wife left in a car for Madrid. The ultimate destination was Málaga, where Altolaguirre was born and raised (Cernuda 2003 777). It was night. The car left the road and overturned. His wife died almost instantly; Altolaguirre was taken to a clinic in Burgos and died three days later at age 54. His remains were buried in Madrid on July 28, 1959. He had come at last to the end of his exile, or perhaps rather to the beginning of a greater one.

Having abandoned Spain, writers of the avant-garde felt intuitively the truth of Bartolini's cultural theory of exile, namely that the home they left behind had ceased to be, and so would no longer be there, even if they did go back. In that sense going back was impossible. Those who were offered a chance to return—like Rafael Alberti—refused, except in nostalgic verse. The few who eventually did return—like José Ortega y Gasset in 1948—found themselves in an intellectual climate that now considered the avant-garde passé, which for *vanguardistas* and their need to be ever new and original, must have been a condition worse than exile. The great majority—like Altolaguirre's first

wife Concha Méndez and friends Luis Cernuda and Emilio Prados—never returned, never were offered a chance to return. The second generation would come to see themselves as Mexicans, or Argentineans, or in a few cases the sons and daughters of Canada or the United States, as much as descendants of Spain. Whether Guillén's idea of exile and counter-exile, whether from Domingo's view of one catastrophic exile or Méndez's perspective of a series of smaller exiles over the course of years, or a combination, the Generation of '27 suggest that the experience may be transcended, certainly endured, but never reversed. As Altolaguirre expressed in a number of poems, more than a cemetery filled with his dead, he became a ghost that had outlived himself, for example in one of his last poems: *Puedo / ser yo pero soy el que fui* [I may be I but am the one I was] (1999 338). Or again going back to Bartolini, perhaps the real ghost was his Spain of the 1920s and 1930s, while he went on living as someone else.

Notas

¹ Altolaguirre is the youngest in the “canonical” group. A few scholars would also place Miguel Hernández within this generation, in which case Hernández—born in 1910—would obviously be the youngest.

² Holding a minor diplomatic post at the Chilean embassy Neruda lived in Madrid from 1934 to 1937, actively participating in the cultural life of the Generation of '27. There he published the first edition of his famous *Residencia en la Tierra* [Home on Earth]. (Loyola 21-23)

³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁴ The designation was an open secret. Kamen titles his chapter on this moment in history “The Elite Diaspora of 1936-1939,” acknowledging the self-identification of writers and artists with the mindset of cultural, moral, and intellectual superiority visible at least since Hispanic Modernism and particularly obvious in the agenda of the avant-garde. Speaking of the elite’s involvement in the Second Republic he writes: “Never before in European history had ‘intellectuals,’ who since 1898 considered themselves potential saviours [sic] of the country, been given the opportunity to put their words into action” (261).

⁵ “Beginning in the 1930’s, when literature reorients itself towards ideals of collectivity and solidarity, can it not be stated that the isms have died, or have rather been transformed into something distinct from what Ortega y Gasset described [in the *Dehumanization of Art*]? My translation of Dorca (364). Durán as well notes in Lorca the presence of the traditional and the popular in his formal aspects, particularly in the

romances (767), though he may disagree about the rupture between these poets and Ortega's dehumanizing program.

⁶ This incorporation of comedians from silent movies is especially keen in Alberti, who beginning in 1929 creates poems about Charlie Chaplin, Howard Lloyd, Buster Keaton and other down-on-their-luck clowns of the silver screen. In the U.S. of the same period Chaplin also makes an appearance in the work of poets such as Carl Sandburg ("Without the Cane and the Derby (for C.C.)," 1922) and Hart Crane ("Chaplinesque," 1926).

⁷ Hinojosa died alongside one of Altolaguirre's brothers, their uncle, and forty-four neighbors. A second brother, Federico, would be executed several months later.

⁸ The Lorca poem appears in *Nube temporal* (1939), while the Ruiz poem will not be published in book form until 1944, in *Poemas de Las islas invitadas*.

⁹ The title is a play on words: *atentamente*, is simply a way of signing off a letter, much like the English *yours truly*; the lexical value is minimal. Dividing between *atenta* and *mente*, however, suggests a thoughtful or attentive mind. As Altolaguirre made his first attempt at publishing an autobiography in *Atenta/mente*, the title may appear apt, harkening back to avant-garde polysemy; yet it raises the specter of Altolaguirre's thinking—perhaps—of "signing off," that is, of suicide. In any event, his later book of memoirs would be titled instead *El caballo griego: Reflexiones y recuerdos (1927-1958)* [The Greek horse: Reflections and memories].

¹⁰ Each version of *Las islas invitadas* presents new material along with the old, and Altolaguirre no doubt recycled in the hope of quickly obtaining money, as was the case with Rubén Darío and any number of poets before and since.

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