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**From Xibalbá to Twenty-First-Century Honduras: *Transrealista* Sketches of Power and Marginalization in Carlos Humberto Santos's *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma***

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Lamentablemente, ya no caminamos al encuentro de  
estos animales sagrados,  
y es por eso que hoy los muertos merodean sin rumbo en  
nuestras calles  
¡Bienvenidos al Xibalbá!— *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma*

**Abstract**

Examined through a *transrealista* lens, the “sketches” left by the poet traveler in Carlos Humberto Santos's *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma* (*Esquisses d'un corps sans forme/Sketches of a shapeless body*, 2018) testify to the expanse, depth, and contours of power and marginalization across time and space. Descending to the Mayan underworld of Xibalbá in a journey that recalls that of Dante Alighieri's pilgrim through Hell in *La divina commedia*, the poet traveler moves through overlapping layers of time—pre-colonial, colonial, and neocolonial/contemporary—and in-between spaces of human diasporas and other geographies of oppression. Upon the layers of “sketches” created by other artists to represent places of death, fear, and torment on the “cuerpo” of the oppressed, Santos's *Bocetos* leaves testament to the dynamics of marginalization and power in twenty-first-century Honduras.

**Keywords:** Dante Alighieri, arte comprometido, Sergio Badilla Castillo, censorship, colonialism, dystopia, Hell, marginalization, oppression, Popol Vuh, Carlos Humberto Santos, Roberto Sosa, testimonio, transrealismo, trasrealism, trauma, utopia, Anarella Vélez Osejo, Xibalbá.

Whether scrambling to establish connections to find venues to read or publish their work, poets across the world, particularly in the Global South, encounter obstacles in making their art known in the public sphere. This task is particularly daunting if their poetry questions dominant narratives in a militarized and anti-democratic context. In these circumstances, poets along with other artists who seek to publicly voice dissent, must find ways to bypass attempts to silence their work. These artists also face the possibility that they—or their family, friends, or colleagues—will suffer repercussions for their efforts to “crear conciencia.” With Guatemala's prolonged civil war (1960-1996) as a point of departure in “Neither Hades nor Hell: Problems of Allusion in the Translation of Central American Poetry,” Jo Anne Engelbert describes the use of allusion in poetry as “a game of life and

death” (57) in the context of repression and violence. Engelbert introduces her essay with a quote from Guatemalan poet Julio Fausto Aguilera’s (1928-2018) *La patria es una casa* (1983): “Vivir es ir a Xibalbá / y jugar dignamente la pelota” (qtd. in Engelbert 57). She explains that Xibalbá refers to “the Mayan underworld, where the twin heroes of Ixbalanqué and Hunhunapú defeated the enemies of mankind in a magical ballgame, proving that the valor of the weak can vanquish the mighty” (57). Engelbert adds that “allusion, as its etymology suggests, has ever been a form of play,” and that in Central America, “the game has often been, like the ritual ballgame of ancient times, a game of life and death. In this fragile bridge between worlds, poetry has been a dangerous activity since pre-Colombian times, and allusion has often provided the only means of speaking the truth” (57). Like Ixbalanqué’s and Hunhunapú’s descent into Xibalbá recounted in the *Popol Vuh* (ca. 1554-1558), and in the above poem by Aguilera, endeavoring to “vanquish the mighty” from a position of weakness continues to require valor in twenty-first-century Latin America. With today’s Honduras as point of departure, in *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma* (*Esquisses d’un corps sans forme/Sketches of a shapeless body*, 2018), Carlos Humberto Santos Chinchilla mixes his voice with those of others that have dared to speak truth. As announced in the introductory poems of the collection, the “I” in *Bocetos* celebrates the sacrifice of the self, the poet traveler, moving through space and time in a journey to engage with forces and structures of power and oppression. Santos derisively welcomes the arrival of the poet traveler to this dystopian *chronos* and *topos* announcing, “¡Bienvenidos al Xibalbá!” (10).

When taken as a whole, *Bocetos* superimposes space—the streets of contemporary Honduras, the in-between spaces of human diasporas and other geographies of oppression. It simultaneously evidences an overlapping of periods of time—pre-colonial, colonial, and neocolonial/contemporary—as well as some of the cultural, political, and spiritual paradigms through which humans have organized and explained existence. Santos identifies the originating point of the superimposed geographies of the collection as the Mayan underworld of Xibalbá. As Dennis Tedlock notes, the K’iche Maya people recognize Xibalbá as “a place of fright,” that is, “located below the face of the earth (*unach uleu*) but at the same time conceptualized as being accessible by way of a road that descends . . . probably in the general direction of the lowlands that lie to the Atlantic side of the Guatemalan Highlands” (369). The rings and layers of Xibalbá in *Bocetos* also intersect with those crossed by Dante Alighieri’s pilgrim through Hell as described in “Inferno.” Upon the layers of “sketches” created by other artists across time and space through music, voice, ink, paint, stone, and pixels to represent places of death, fear, and torment on the “cuerpo” of the oppressed, Santos’s

*Bocetos* leaves testament to the dynamics of marginalization and power in twenty-first-century Honduras.

The first of these sketches is an epigraph from Pablo Neruda's 1971 Nobel Prize lecture: "Sólo con una ardiente paciencia conquistaremos la espléndida ciudad que dará luz, justicia y dignidad a todos los hombres. Así la poesía no habrá cantado en vano" (xv). By placing this quote at the beginning of the collection, Santos points to the transformative role of art, in this case poetry, to foster a more enlightened and just world. The epigraph also constitutes the first in a series of direct and indirect references to other cultural artifacts/texts including the *Popol Vuh*, Dante Alighieri's *La divina commedia* (originally titled *La commedia*; 1308-21), Vicente Huidobro's "Arte Poética" (*El espejo de agua*, 1916), Miguel Ángel Asturias's *El señor presidente* (1946), and Roberto Sosa's "Los Pobres" (1969), among others. Playing on alliteration and the combined meaning of the words "posibles" and "poesía," historian, poet, co-founder of Ediciones Librería Paradiso and director of Paradiso, Librería-Café-Galería,<sup>1</sup> Anarella Vélez Osejo affirms, in her prologue to the collection, that Santos "incorpor[a] todas las influencias *poesibles*" (*my emphasis* iix). Vélez Osejo highlights that, in addition to registering echoes of "la vanguardia" and "la posmodernidad," one finds the imprint of "el transrealismo," noting that *Bocetos* "está cruzada por una multiplicidad de contextos, en la que el uso de planos superpuestos y pluridimensionales aportan textura al poema" (viii). It is worthy to note that by framing *Bocetos* as *transrealista*, Vélez Osejo does not specify whether she refers to the Spanish paradigm *transrealismo*, as defined by Roger Hickin regarding the work of Chilean poet Sergio Badilla Castillo, or to *transrealism* as articulated by Rudy Rucker in "A Transrealist Manifesto" (1983), or to pieces of both.<sup>2</sup> Because *Bocetos* is a collection of poetry written in Spanish, this essay focuses primarily on *transrealismo*. As with *transrealismo*, *Bocetos* registers mythical and non-linear conceptualizations of time and "un lenguaje profético o chamánico dotado de facultades sobrenaturales" (Vélez Osejo ix). Crossing multiple planes of reality and time, the *transrealista* poet traveler "throws himself into perilous journeys to report back on the chaos at the heart of things" ("Special: Roger Hickin on Sergio Badilla Castillo") to secure "luz, justicia y dignidad" for all (Neruda qtd. in Santos xv).

### **Truth and Change: Transrealismo, Transrealism, and Dystopia**

From a theoretical standpoint, *Bocetos* lends itself to multiple points of entry. Among these, this essay parts from the intertwined roots of *transrealismo*, *transrealism*, and utopian/dystopian discourse. While the Spanish *transrealismo* and English *transrealism* hold distinct meanings, origins, and modes of expression, one could argue that their "trans" movement across time and space provides texture and

a more expansive view of reality. Through an overlap of these theoretical paradigms, with an emphasis on *transrealismo*, the *transrealista* poet traveler in *Bocetos* crisscrosses myth and reality in an intersection and shifting of spatial and temporal dimensions. In this multidimensional journey marked by confusion, chaos, and trauma, the poet traveler searches for truth on the identity and expanse of power and marginalization. Furthermore, due to the collection's references to Xibalbá and other constructs of an underworld of fear, and the author's articulation of a desire to approximate their opposite to a place of freedom, security, peace, and connectedness, this analysis will necessarily discuss the work through the prism of utopian/dystopian discourse and artistic expression. Highlighting the persistent yet changeable identity of "places of fright" over time (*u-chronos*), and engaging in a textual dialogue with other artists and traditions that have left testament to similar travels, *Bocetos* places twenty-first-century Honduras and "la omnipresencia invisible" of "los miserables" of "las calles de nuestra América [y] las calles de nuestro mundo" (25) within the geography (*topos*) of dystopian discourse.

As noted above, because *Bocetos* is a collection of poetry—not prose as in Rucker's transrealism—written in Spanish with referents that center on Latin America from pre-Columbian times to the present, this analysis centers on *el transrealismo* associated with the work of Sergio Badilla Castillo. The latter is identified with Chile's "La voz de los 80," also known as "Generación N.N.," a group of "poetas que comenzaron a escribir y publicar después del golpe de Estado de 1973" (T. Calderón, L. Calderón, and Harris). Andrés Morales notes that this group is also denominated "Generación del 80," "Generación del 87," and "Generación de la Dictadura" and includes authors whose early literary production coincides with Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship (1973-1990) ("La Poesía de la Generación de los 80") Poet, collaborator, and translator for Badilla Castillo's *La cabeza de Medusa/Medusa's Head* (2012), Hickin articulates the *raison d'être* of "poetas transrealistas," a designation with which Badilla Castillo identifies:

On a deeper level, he is a latter-day shaman who throws himself into perilous journeys to report back on the chaos at the heart of things, transmuting his observations and experiences, jostling and blending reality and myth, certainty and uncertainty, beauty and horror, in hallucinatory, "transreal" poems that disrupt the linear coherence of past, present and future, encompassing multiple dimensions and temporalities in a single parachronic glance, whose aim is ultimately the "uchronic" (cf. "utopian") release from the tyranny of time as the salt-grain of the lyric "I" disperses with all else into the waters of eternity. ("Special: Roger Hickin on Sergio Badilla Castillo")

In “Sergio Badilla: El viajero de la transrealidad” (2003), Omar Pérez Santiago asserts that

la Transrealidad apela a la interculturalidad derivada de mitos y mitologías divergentes, a la desarticulación de arquetipos y se sustenta además en un pluralismo hibridizante donde los opuestos transfieren o trastocan su identidad y contenidos para dar validez a universos múltiples, a veces fragmentarios. (Pérez Santiago)

Time in Badilla Castillo’s poetry, Pérez Santiago notes, shatters diachrony, rendering it “circunstancial y aleatorio” (Pérez Santiago).

*Bocetos* also evinces characteristics of transrealism as defined by Rudy Rucker in “A Transrealist Manifesto” (1983). Anchored in science fiction (SF) and narrative, transrealism registers “immediate perceptions in a fantastic way.” As stated earlier, the journey of Badilla Castillo’s *transrealista* poet through dimensions of time, space, and perceptions of reality toward knowledge is primarily articulated through myth. In the case of transrealism, this exploration is expressed through the “tools of fantasy and SF.” While this analysis of *Bocetos* leans toward *transrealismo*, in part due to this distinction (myth vs. fantasy/science fiction), Rucker argues “the familiar tools of SF—time travel, antigravity, alternate worlds, telepathy, etc.—are in fact symbolic of archetypal modes of perception” (*Collected Essays*). Considered in this manner, “time travel is memory, flight is enlightenment, alternate worlds symbolize the great variety of individual world-views, and telepathy stands for the ability to communicate fully” (*Collected Essays*). Like the *transrealista* poet’s dangerous odyssey in search of truth, transrealist narrative, as defined by Rucker, explores dimensions—often dystopian, fantastic, and otherworldly—to “[break] down consensus reality” (*Collected Essays*). Adding to Rucker’s definition of transrealism, in *Transrealist Fiction: Writing in the Slipstream of Science* (2000), Damien Broderick explains that it is “a blend of speculative fantasy and bitter psychological truth telling” (37).

Both *trasrealismo* and transrealism register a utopian/dystopian dialectic that underlines the desire for a world in which things would be different. In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [*The Principle of Hope*] (published in three volumes in 1952, 1954, and 1959), renowned utopian thinker, Ernst Bloch, argues that art has the potential to “sharpen” reality through aesthetic anticipatory illumination (73). In “Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination,” the introduction to *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, Jack Zipes writes that for Bloch “it is decisive for a work of art to have an Überschuss or surplus for it to be truly Utopian. Literally translated, Überschuss means overshoot” (xxxvi). Art is utopian when it outlines the distance between how one wishes life could be and the reality of life as it is. This “surplus” or “overshoot” reveals that “something’s missing,” a phrase that

Bloch takes from Bertolt Brecht's "Mahagonny" (Zipes xxiii and Bloch 15). In "Transrealism: In Pursuit of Social Change and Collective Justice in Huxley's *Brave New World*" (2018), Vafa Nadernia maintains that transrealist narrative "works as an interplay between dream and reality in which the writer shapes his/her own immediate perceptions in a fantastic way" (71). It is through this interplay that transrealist narrative—and I would add *transrealista* poetry—traces the contours of what Bloch identifies as "what is missing" in reality to underscore the necessity "for social change and collective justice" (Nadernia 80). Of course, the production of cultural artifacts that critique reality and call for praxis to confront injustice, human suffering, the abuse of power, and inequity are not new in Latin America. In the second half of the twentieth century, for example, the region came to be closely allied to "el arte *comprometido*" and "el testimonio," and the spectrum of modes in which they are expressed in oral and written narrative, poetry, music, performance, as well as plastic and visual arts. As explored below, the "truth-telling" imprint of "el arte *comprometido*" and "el testimonio" and their utopian impulse, are also present in *Bocetos*, and the parameters Santos sketches to define "the reality of life as it is," are distinctly dystopian.

### **"A History that Repeats Itself:" Limitations to the Freedom of Expression**

*Bocetos* often reveals the passage of time as a series of repetitions of oppression and marginalization. Interconnected relationships of power persist in a continuous loop. Marginalized people, be they from nineteenth-century France or twenty-first-century Central America, migrate to other spaces to escape misery. Efforts to suppress the freedom of expression also repeat themselves over time. In "Una muy mala comedia," a poem explored in greater depth in the final part of this essay, Santos nods to Dante as well as to Asturias's subtle and chilling representation of a Central American dictatorship in *El señor presidente*. While the literary references in "Una muy mala comedia" point to medieval Florence and mid-twentieth-century Guatemala, in the context of the collection, the poem offers an oblique and sardonic critique of the insidious repetition of the abuse of power, and the manipulation of truth across time and space, including that of Honduras since its 2009 illegal military coup d'état. Santos, like other Honduran artists, human rights defenders, and their allies, identify the coup d'état as a watershed moment in the modern history of Central America. While doing so, they also identify the circularity of structures of power and oppression as key to understanding the coup d'état and its consequences. Leticia Salomón explains in "Honduras: A History That Repeats Itself," that the coup:

halted the progress of democracy and knocked the country back into the past ... entrepreneurs, clergy, military, and conservative politicians who supported the 2009 coup imposed their private interests on the general public ... and after three decades of democracy, many Hondurans found themselves without representation, unable to exercise their civil rights. (59)

Honduras's return to its "authoritarian past" in 2009 (61) exacerbated existing inequities and put a twenty-first-century spin on persistent vestiges of (neo)colonialism, corruption, violence, impunity, patriarchy, censorship, and the unevenness of power. Moreover, today the act of articulating truth and countering dominant narratives is regularly met with violence and censure. Journalist, human rights defender, and one of Honduras's intellectual leaders at the vanguard of resistance, Dina Meza, describes this reality in *Kidnapped: Censorship in Honduras* (2015), noting that "freedom of expression has been kidnapped by censorship in all its forms" (9) since the coup and that "[t]he arts and journalism are the focus of censorship" (6). Meza explains that the Honduran state has instituted "subtle, indirect or direct" mechanisms to "prevent writers publishing their books, or to persecute those who seek to express their ideas, particularly if they challenge the status quo" (7). Whether expressed through music, radio, spoken or written word, paint, graffiti, theater, or performance art, Honduran artists that express dissent face a real possibility of retaliation.<sup>3</sup> Despite the high statistical probability of suffering retribution for articulating dissent, Honduran artists continue to defy intimidation, and, as poet and scholar, Lety Elvir explains in the preface to her edited collection *Honduras: Golpe y pluma: Antología de poesía resistente escrita por mujeres* (2013), Honduras has experienced a "primavera artística" since 2009 (30). *Bocetos* testifies to the continuation of Honduras's artistic renaissance and dissent a decade after the coup.

### **Conjuring New Realities in the Twenty-First Century: The Continuity of "El Arte Comprometido"**

Analyzing *Bocetos* through a *trasrealista* lens reveals the continuity of el "arte comprometido" to engage with society on the nature of power and marginalization. Just as the coup recalls dizzying echoes of twentieth-century conflicts in Central America, particularly in the waning years of the Cold War, the response to repression by many Honduran artists, including that of Santos over the past decade, constitutes a continuation in the trajectory of el "arte comprometido." With reference to Central America, the term, "literatura comprometida," refers to a spectrum of modes of expression and overlaps with "el testimonio" in its various forms. Quoted on the back cover of a compilation of his



poetry, (*Poesía Total 1959-2004*), Roberto Sosa (1930-2011), Honduras's most recognized poet and winner of the Casa de las Américas prize (1971), anchored the meaning of *arte comprometido* in the economic and social realities in which he lived:

Soy un poeta (trabajo me ha costado admitirlo) nacido y criado en el Tercero y Cuarto Mundo, lo que impone el deber ineludible de tomar conciencia de esa circunstancia social y humana y considerarla punto de ida y vuelta en términos de un arte comprometido con la calidad estética y atado indisolublemente a los secretos más secretos del pueblo de mi patria, Honduras. (Cover copy)

Through direct references to Latin American authors such as Sosa and Neruda, as well as allusions to Asturias, Santos places his work in the sphere of Latin America's "literatura comprometida." Vélez Osejo's introduction to the collection traces a line between Santos and other contemporary Honduran poets, including herself, for their shared "visión del mundo y el de ésta Honduras que quisiéramos re-construir con justicia, paz y equidad" (viii). It is in this sense that the collection is "totalmente enmarcada en el siglo XXI" and provides:

una visión crítica de la desventurada Honduras de hoy [y] se enfrenta a nuestra propia historia, con sus formas lúgubres de organización social, el progreso arbitrario porque solo alcanza a unos pocos, los avances de la tecnología y la manera cómo estos transforman la vida social. ("Acerca de *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma*")

In the *Popol V'ub*, Ixbalanqué and Hunhunapú must defy trickery and death at *Cahib xalcat be* (the "Crossroads") to continue traveling on the road to Xibalbá (Tedlock 334). Dante's medieval pilgrim must pass through gates inscribed with the cautionary words, "Abandon All Hope All Ye Who Enter Here" ["Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate" (Canto 3, line 12)] to descend to Hell. Retracing the steps taken by others in pre-Columbian, Western classical, European medieval, and modern Latin American articulations of the "hero's journey," Santos's poet traveler descends to Xibalbá to, as Aguilera described in the context of Guatemala's civil war, "jugar dignamente la pelota" (qtd. in Engelbert 57). In addition to crossing dimensions and engaging with fear and power, this voyage necessitates the poet's own transformation. In Santos's "El hechicero," this transformation affords the poet the ability to mediate and redefine the intersection between the tangible and intangible spheres of human experience.

Con un sacrificio de inmortalidad,  
surge un hombre con barba de bosque y ojos de noche  
que juega con las palabras como un niño contando las estrellas.

Es capaz de desarmarlas y volverlas a armar,  
como si fueran partes de juguetes;  
las junta y las destruye con risas y amor,  
y las deja ser libres así como deberían ser.

Vuelan esas palabras, con gracioso esplendor,  
Entre nuestras cabezas, sembrando sueños  
o terribles pesadillas que nos llenan de terror.

Ése es el hechicero, un mago de lo oculto,  
que hace aparecer seres de otro mundo  
con el simple hecho de pronunciar unas cuantas palabras.  
Ése es el hechicero, un domador de bestias infernales  
con poderes imposibles para nuestra humanidad.

Ése es el hechicero: un poeta. (4)

A century prior to the publication of “El hechicero,” Chilean poet Huidobro made a similar declaration in “Arte Poética” (1916) celebrating the adamic power of the poet to create and transform existence: “Que el verso sea como una llave / Que abra mil puertas ... Por qué cantáis la rosa, ¡oh Poetas! / Hacedla florecer en el poema / Sólo para nosotros / Viven todas las cosas bajo el Sol. / El Poeta es un pequeño Dios” (13). Like Huidobro’s “pequeño Dios,” Santos’s “hechicero” holds “poderes imposibles” to redefine the contours of human experience and “conjure” a desired reality. Viewed through the lens of “committed poetry” or “testimonial poetry,” the poet possesses the ability to make “words fly”—crossing the blurry line between a traumatic reality and a dreamed, but not yet accessible future, in a way that recalls Bloch’s anticipatory illumination of liberation (*Principal of Hope* 1954). In Santos’s poem, testimonial literature and *transrealismo* intersect and underscore the power of the poet to intercede in the “real” world, by testifying to what they have witnessed in their travels. “El hechicero” possesses a power that, in the context of censorship in post-coup Honduras, seems magical; he can allow words to be “libres así como deberían ser” (4).

### **Chronos: Transrealista Journeys Across Fractures and Layers in Time**

Time, as revealed in the journey of *Bocetos's* poet traveler, is disorientating and multilayered. Moving through intersecting modes of time—linear, non-linear, mythical, fragmented, and those forged by trauma—the poet traveler sketches the dynamics of power and marginalization by reporting his observations of Xibalbá and situating “immediate reality [in] the higher reality in which life is embedded” (Rucker). In reference to Badilla Castillo, Hickin explains that the journey of the *transrealista* poet is grounded in a “parachronic gaze” and an ability to navigate nonlinear and spiritual conceptualizations of time. Achim Landwehr and Tobias Winnerling in, “Chronisms: On the past and Future of the Relation of times,” define the term “parachronism” as the “action ... of artificially bringing something temporally closer to oneself, of reducing or shortening the temporal relation between observer and an event or item.” (450) They clarify that some parachronisms are rooted in a “traumatic past [that is] brought as close as possible to the present ... Especially wars, civil wars, genocides and similar violent events ... just as if they simply do not want to pass.” (450) However, Landwehr and Winnerling specify that, “usually parachronistic chronoferences are seen in a much friendlier light. The pasts that are to be drawn into a present are the more idealized golden times” (450). As with utopian discourse which centers on space (*topos*), chronoferences such as parachronisms “do not work only in the past,” as they also articulate “[p]otential, expected, longed for or feared futures” (Landwehr and Winnerling 450). The work of the *transrealista* poet, Hickins explains, is to navigate a temporal landscape where “reality and myth, certainty and uncertainty, beauty and horror” are “jostl[ed] and blend[ed]” and the “linear coherence of past, present and future” are “disrupt[ed]” (“Special: Roger Hickin on Sergio Badilla Castillo”).

*Bocetos's* toggling between space and time disorientates one's ability to identify the geographic and temporal limits of the poet traveler's journey. Nonetheless, the first four poems of the collection, “Sacrificio maya,” “El hechicero,” “Guacamaya,” and “El Murciélago y la Serpiente,” appear to anchor this journey in a Mayan cosmovision of time, space, and purpose. The poet traveler outlines the parameters of the sacred in the first three stanzas of “El Murciélago y la Serpiente” as those of “los tiempos de antes,” when time and space were defined by cosmology, according to which “era inevitable, [que] todos debíamos entrar y ofrendar los / restos de nuestra vida” (10). The fourth stanza of “El Murciélago y la Serpiente” announces that an alteration to this delineation of time has occurred: “Lamentablemente, ya no caminamos al encuentro de / estos animales sagrados, / y es por eso que hoy los muertos merodean sin rumbo en nuestras calles . . . / ¡Bienvenidos al Xibalbá!” (10). Santos signals and laments a fracture and departure from a sacred time, “los tiempos de antes,” and

the present, “ya no.” Lines demarcating space and tradition have been blurred as death and chaos spread to twenty-first-century Honduras and across a global landscape.

“Tempestad,” the poem that immediately follows “El Murciélago y la Serpiente” and its mocking welcome to “a place of fright,” reflect a hinge point in time and space. In contrast to the ritual character of blood in the preceding poems, that of “Tempestad” is marked by disruptions that trigger a storm of repeating and chaotic cycles of non-sacred death, abuse of power, and misery. The four verses of the poem read: “Vivir con la miseria, la muerte, / y la sangre que corre / inundando todas nuestras calles, / nuestros bosques, nuestro tiempo (13). Analyzed as a stand-alone work and in the absence of *Bocetos*’s multiple cultural references, “Tempestad” renders the space, time, and context of trauma as ambiguous. The title of the poem, however, suggests a postcolonial dialogue with William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* (1611), and responses to it by Latin American authors such as José Enrique Rodó (*Ariel*, 1900), fellow Honduran poet Roberto Sosa (“La Tempestad,” *Muros* 1966), and Roberto Fernández Retamar (*Calibán, y otros ensayos*, 1971). Santos’s poem does not directly address the conquest and colonization of the Americas. However, its title inserts the realities of twenty-first-century Honduras in an existing corpus of works that recognize colonialism as a critical juncture in human history that produced a disorientating restructuring of power and trauma. Santos’s “Tempestad” traces the legacy of colonization in a dantesque hell of urban cement and environmental devastation where blood, death, and misery are ubiquitous. Viewed through the prism of *transrealismo*, the poet traveler’s journey through time—non-linear, mythical, repeating, and traumatic—reveals colonialism as a traumatic fracture in mythical and sacred time. This break in time was brought about legacies of colonial tempests, whose torturous looping of oppression and trauma persist across time and space.

### **An Amorphous Topos of Fear and Oppression: Crossing Rings, Layers, and Borders**

In addition to journeying through nonlinear dimensions of time, the poet traveler in *Bocetos* explores the identity and expanse of power and marginalization in space. Looking through a *transrealista* lens that superimposes and transects “chronos” and “topos,” Santos’s parachronic gaze renders a “cuerpo sin forma” that is expansive and amorphous. Like the *Popol Vuh* and *Comedia*, the traveler in *Bocetos* crosses layers, rings, and borders to explore the identities and mechanisms of power and oppression. Echoing and intersecting “otherworldly” representations of the contours of Hell, Xibalbá, and other “places of fright,” the terrestrial body of *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma* is that of a twenty-first-century

Global South, that bears the imprint of (neo)colonialism, migrations, diasporas, environmental destruction, and the othering and ambivalence of globalization.

“Escaparse,” “Peligro,” and “Calles del infierno,” the poems that immediately follow “Tempestad,” humanize this space as one that resonates the trauma of Central America’s twentieth-century past, and the scars of 2009 post-coup Honduras. In the frequently cited prologue to *Testimonio y literatura* (eds. Jara and Vidal 1986), René Jara explains that testimonial literature “surge casi siempre de una atmósfera de represión, ansiedad y angustia” and that it “proyect[a] la inmediatez de su inscripción” (2). Decades after the publication of Jara’s essay, “Escaparse,” “Peligro,” and “Calles del infierno” manifest the longevity and relevance of “el testimonio” in contemporary places of conflict in parts of Central America and elsewhere. The voice that animates the topos of “Escaparse,” shouts in an effort to guide others to security in a place characterized by fear, the threat of violence, and chaos: “¡Corré! ¡Corré! / Nos están persiguiendo. / Logro identificarlos, con sus uniformes que simulan espectros, / son escuadrones de la muerte ... ¡Corré! No tengás miedo. / La muerte, terrible y vestida de azul policiaco y verde militar, / Persigue a toda la gente que se confunde en la huida” (16). The use of the *voseo*, a grammatical form which employs the “vos” as the second person singular, prevalent in parts of Central America (as well as the Southern Cone of South America), in combination with cultural and historical references in “Escaparse,” points to the region of Central America as the place from which the “I” / traveler must escape. With the impulse for justice and transparency of testimonial narratives, the “I” in this poem testifies to the identity of the ghosts of militarism—“escuadrones de la muerte”—in parts of Central America in the 1970s and 1980s, as those that wear the colors of police and military uniforms in today’s Honduras.

*Transrealismo* and “el testimonio” intersect in Santos’s collection in the expression of a necessity to share a truth learned from the experience of trauma. With urgency, a word linked to Jara’s conceptualization of “el testimonio” (1), the poems in *Bocetos* testify to lived experiences of trauma—its what, when, and where—while voicing the visceral and intangible consequences of militarization and repression in an unnamed twentieth and twenty-first-century space in the Global South. The *transrealista* overlapping of dimensions in “Peligro” and “Calles del infierno” centers on the topos of the human psyche and the disorientating and blurry lines between the netherworld of sleep, memory, and myth, and the lived experience of trauma. The “yo” in “Peligro” slides between nightmare and memory to protest the consequences of injustice at the intersection of the psychological and physical spheres:

Dormitaba esperando escuchar tu dulce voz.

Pero en vez de vos, me llegó un grito de hambre,  
 otro de analfabetismo, de inseguridad,  
 y finalmente, ése de las mayorías de salud.  
 Sumergido en esos gritos de muerte, en esos pillajes,  
 en esos mares de calles, llenas de serpientes marinas,  
 viajando en nuestro barquito, un camión nos atropella.

Intento salvarte, pero no hay medicinas,  
 comida, escuelas y seguridad ... ¡No hay nada!  
 —¿Acaso no hay nada en este país?- me pregunto al borde  
 del delirio.  
 —¡Sí! Hay pobres, algunos ricos, armas y muertos.- me  
 responde alguien.  
 —¿Nada más?!

\*

Me despierto de la pesadilla esperando aún tu dulce voz,  
 y me doy cuenta de que no vas a regresar jamás, que es  
 inútil seguir esperándote.  
 Porque, sin salud, sin seguridad, sin escuelas y sin comida,  
 no pude salvarte. (19)

The poem's subject testifies to the presence of multiple dangers in this nightmare that echo contemporary lexicon of development (health, education, food, and security). These words, in combination with references to a stark urban landscape, lack, violence, inequity, and "pillaje" (a word that critics of Honduras's 2009 coup d'état regularly employ to refer to the massive concession of national resources to private entities following the coup), also call to mind spaces of oppression in a twenty-first-century global space. Scrambling contemporary and classical Greek mythical referents, the poem's traveler journeys in a boat reminiscent of that Charon that ferries the souls of the dead to Hades, later revisited in Dante's "Inferno." Like Charon's boat, that of "Peligro" crosses from one dimension to another, which according to the sequence of *Bocetos's* poems, leads to "Calles del Infierno." In the hazy sleepscape of "Peligro," mythical waters and a lattice of urban concrete overlap. Santos's "barquito" traverses "mares de calles, llenas de serpientes marinas" in search of safety only to be hit by a truck. In "Calles del infierno," myth and twenty-first-century Honduran reality also

intersect as the streets of Hell extend upwards to a bloodied sidewalk where monsters “nos están rodeando” and “sacan cuchillos, pistolas y miseria . . . / Nos separan” (22). Perhaps acknowledging the roots of gang allegiance in Central America and elsewhere—extreme poverty, survival, and the need for companionship—Santos asserts that these monsters, “son víctimas ellos también, víctimas” (22). As in “Escaparse,” the line between myth and reality and sleep and being awake is blurred as “un abismo se despliega en todas nuestras calles. / No era pesadilla, es nuestra realidad” (22). Culminating with “Calles del infierno” this triad of poems sketches the limits of the topos of power and oppression as hazy and fluid. This place of amorphous boundaries also bears the scars of (neo)colonialism, globalization, and militarization. Slipping between nightmare, myth, and reality, the poet-traveler leaves testament to the experience of political repression, economic and physical violence, and psychological trauma in an unidentified contemporary place that resembles Honduras, but could equally, and sadly, be many of a number of places across the world where human rights are not respected.

### **“Les Misérables:” Giving Form to the Expanse of Marginalization Across Time and Space**

Tracing the expansiveness of the experience of fear and misery on a global scale and across time, the journeys of the Santos’s *transrealista* poet-traveler suggest that the topos and chronos of marginalization in *Bocetos* are not limited to Latin America, nor the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although constructed with simple words, the title of the collection *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma*, is elusive and ambiguous, and defies attempts to arrive at concrete interpretation. To what body does the poet refer? Why is it without form? Why is it represented as tentative or rough? How do additional layers of script alter the meaning of this sketch? How do these layers dialogue with existing layers of the sketch? Written “[e]n honor a Víctor Hugo y su novela *Les Misérables*” (25), Santos’s poem by the same name in Spanish provides a glimpse of a concrete “form” to which he refers. Like *Commedia* and *El señor presidente*, scribed by their respective authors in times of discord as they straddled life in and outside of their place of origin, Santos’s “Los miserables” and other poems in *Bocetos*, reflect the vantage point of someone whose gaze contemplates home from afar. In fact, it is through a global *transrealista* lens that Santos seems to view Honduras, Latin America, and the world, and expand the temporal and geographic scope of the lived experience of fear and misery (25). The poet’s gaze registers an insidious consequence of the erasure of sacred time and place—the global reach of Xibalbá and Hell beyond Honduras’s twenty-first-century sidewalks. Building on a what appears to be a reference to Cuban poet and essayist José Martí’s *Nuestra América* (1891), Santos

asserts that, in addition to running “En las calles de Nuestra América,” a global and marginalized “we,” run in fear “en las calles de nuestro mundo” (25). Time and space in “Los miserables” are not limited to twenty-first-century Central America, nor nineteenth-century France or Latin America, as generations of “miserables, sus hijos, y sus nietos” seek to escape their circumstances, secure liberation, and define their own lives.

Santos also articulates the expansiveness and interconnectedness of structures of power, thereby complicating oppressed/oppressor binaries. As noted above, the emancipatory impulse in Neruda’s poetry, perhaps most notably in *Canto general*, figures prominently in *Bocetos*. Undoubtedly, *Canto general* communicates an assumed position of power by the author to speak for and on behalf of “the other.” With that in mind, Neruda’s “Llegan al mar de México (1519)” provides context to assess the socioeconomic circumstances of some individuals that left Spain and came to be known by the collective term, “conquistadores.” In Neruda’s poem, this “viento asesino” seeks freedom from the rigid economic, religious, and social structures that contributed to the “hambre antigua de Europa” in the 15th and 16th centuries:

Arias, Reyes, Rojas, Maldonados, / hijos del desamparo castellano, / conocedores  
del hambre en invierno / y de los piojos en los mesones ... No salieron de los  
puertos del Sur / a poner las manos sobre el pueblo / en el saqueo y en la muerte: /  
ellos ven verdes, libertades, cadenas rotas. (147-48)

Articulated within the framework of Marxism, Neruda’s poem blurs the binaries of “us and them” across time, space, and changing paradigms and geographies of power from 1492 to the Cold War along an axis of “oppressor” vs. “oppressed.” Santos’s “Los miserables” also calibrates dynamics of power and oppression to include points of intersection between Hugo’s nineteenth-century France and a twenty-first-century global space:

Son perseguidos por bestias asesinas, por riquezas y poder inmundo ...  
Tratan de escapar de mil maneras, pero no pueden, están  
acorralados.  
Saltan barreras y fronteras,  
huyen al Norte,  
cruzan el mar, el río y la muerte,  
pero no ya escapatoria.  
Pobres hombres y mujeres. (25)



Harkening back to *Bocetos's* ambiguous title, Santos sketches another layer upon existing artistic representations of marginalized people, nameless and remembered as archetypes—Arias, Reyes, Cosette, and Jean Valjean. Altering directionality, the nameless “miserables” in Santos’s poem seek liberation along an ever-globalized and more North-South orientated present reality.

Moreover, “Los Miserables” captures a glimpse of the expanse and scale of marginalization to render it superlative. Echoing Gabriel García Márquez’s observation that for Latin American artists, “el desafío mayor . . . ha sido la insuficiencia de los recursos convencionales para hacer creíble nuestra vida” (“La soledad de América Latina”), Santos’s sequence of comparative statements underscores the impossibility of communicating, and making comprehensible, the expanse and invisibility of the oppressed in the twenty-first century. Following his assertion that “Los miserables son tantos que llenan océanos y continentes”, Santos repeats this comparative (“Los miserables son tantos que”) in the subsequent verses:

Los miserables son tantos que logran volar entre las  
líneas de una novela.  
Los miserables son tantos que logran colmar los  
versos de un poeta.  
Los miserables son tantos que es imposible cantarlos.  
Los miserables son tantos que los pinceles apenas logran  
esbozarlos. (25)

Art barely captures a whisper or hint of the magnitude and experiences of the world’s oppressed. Representing the number of “los miserables” proves to be an impossible task, and their numbers test the limits and spill over the contours of artistic expression. The poet traveler includes himself among an unseen yet geographically expansive “miserables” declaring: “¡Nosotros, los Miserables, somos la omnipresencia invisible! / Jean Valjean y Cosette están por todas partes” (25).

Adding another layer to Santos’s exploration of the invisibility, expanse, and movement of the oppressed in “Los Miserables,” “Punta” highlights the Garifuna people’s histories of diaspora and persistence to maintain their cultural memory and traditions. The Garifuna’s multifaceted history and present are often dismissed, erased, essentialized, or unknown in the nation states where they have lived for centuries. The language, dance, and music of the Garifuna are included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) registry of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The ICH website notes:

A population of mixed origin incorporating cultural elements of indigenous Caribbean and African groups, the Garifuna settled along the Atlantic coast of Central America after being forced to flee from the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent in the eighteenth century. Today, Garifuna communities mainly live in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Belize. (ich.unesco)

Susan Cashion explains that the *punta* tradition is “a social dance of joy and festivity,” as well as “an emblem of cultural survival.” It represents:

a ceremony for the dead, a celebratory send-off to a better life in the next world. A poignant moment in the dance occurs when a dancer shuffles through the sand in the direction of the Atlantic Ocean and Africa and leaves two markers for the path the spirit must follow to return home to its ancestors. (“Latin American Dance”)

With echoes of Nicolás Guillén’s “La canción del bongó” (*Sóngoro Cosongo* 1931) and “Balada de los abuelos” (*West Indies, Ltd.* 1934) and Nancy Morejón’s “Mujer Negra” (1975), “Punta” testifies to the centuries-long legacy of trauma of the slave trade to the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas. Santos’s poem also identifies the Americas as home to people that forge new identities.

Se escucha su son  
 en el bum de los tambores.  
 Se escucha su voz en el canto de sus amores.

Pueblo ancestral perdido y arraigado;  
 pueblo Garífuna encontrado y maltratado.

Pueblo negro, hijo de África;  
 pueblo negro, amante de América. (28)

With “Punta,” the outlines of Santos’s sketches of the oppressed are further altered to capture an expression of cultural survival and affirmation of the Garifuna people. While intangible and ephemeral, the sounds of *punta*’s drums and song persist and “se escucha[n].” With “Los miserables,” and sketching a line between the oppressed of nineteenth-century France and Garifuna people living on the Atlantic coast of Central America in the twenty-first century, Santos’s *transrealista* poet traveler humanizes and gives concreteness to experiences of marginalization and invisibility on a more global scale and across time.

### A Triptych of Power

Parallel to this exploration of the breadth of the experience of marginalization, *Bocetos* addresses the intersection and persistence of structures of power and oppression. On the whole, since the European conquest and colonization of the space known today as Latin America, religious, economic, and political hegemony has revolved around the conservative branch of the Catholic Church, the wealthy, and those that hold political and/or military power. Santos registers an acerbic critique of this triad of power in a series of poems (“La misa profana,” “Los corruptos,” and “Una muy mala comedia”), situating those that abuse positions of power in the strata of Xibalbá and Hell. As previously noted, *Bocetos*’s organization, scope, and referents, highlight an intersection of Mayan and Dantean conceptualizations of space. While this essay limits itself to the first half of Santos’s collection, the spectrum of poems in *Bocetos* suggest a movement toward middle and upper worlds. When examined from a distance, *Bocetos*, *La divina commedia/La commedia*, and Mayan cosmology organize space according to a vertical orientation of layers in which the lowest strata is identified with fear and/or death, and serves as a key didactic point of departure to communicate their respective worldviews. The poems that occupy the deepest layers of Santos’s underworld, “La misa profana,” “Los corruptos,” and “Una muy mala comedia,” function as a sequence of pieces that, within the context of the collection’s references to Dante’s medieval epic, lend themselves to be examined according to the artistic tradition of the triptych. As with *transrealismo*, triptychs, particularly in their painted and carved form, are characterized by multidimensionality, changeability, and perspective. Connected by hinges, the triptych’s panels can be folded, unfolded, and positioned in varying angles, allowing the piece to be viewed in a continuum of optics. Recalling Santos’s exploration of the expansiveness of marginalization and invisibility analyzed above, Santos’s poetic triptych situates twenty-first-century iterations of power and hierarchy in a larger geographic and historical context. The three panels of this triptych critique the insidious reach and interconnectedness of religious, economic, and governmental systems that abuse their power and further entrench inequity in places such as Honduras. The organizing theme of the triptych is a failure in leadership in the religious, economic, and political sphere.

The first panel in this triptych “La misa profana” (31), mocks and lays bare the empty rhetoric, pomp and circumstance, hypocrisy, and abuse of power by the conservative branch of the Catholic Church and its relationship to the poor. As such, the poem registers central tenets of Liberation Theology. In “Re-legitimizing the State in Honduras: *Sendero en resistencia*: Poetry's Reclamation of Communication, Justice, and Truth in Post-coup Honduras” (2015), I discuss Ricardo Bueso's “Oro

y barro.” My introduction to Buesos’s poem also helps to contextualize Santos’s “La misa profana:” “In modern history, the emergence of Liberation Theology sparked one of the fiercest debates in identifying how the Roman Catholic Church should confront poverty and injustice in Latin America” (“Re-legitimizing the State” 12). Bueso’s poem “denounces the role of the Roman Catholic hierarchy ... during the crisis” for its public expression of support for the coup d’état, particularly by an unnamed cardinal that would be identifiable by Hondurans with access to digital, print, and social media (12).<sup>4</sup> “La misa profana” reveals that little has changed with respect to the actions, affiliations, concerns, and rhetoric of the hierarchy of Honduras’s Catholic Church since the publication of Bueso’s poem. A cardinal, again unnamed, occupies a position of power and material wealth, and makes a mockery of a space and rites identified as sacred by the Catholic Church. Like Bueso’s “Oro y Barro,” Santos’s poem “register[s] Liberation Theology’s emphasis on interpreting Christianity from a concrete economic, social and political perspective” (13-14). In both poems, space—material and metaphoric—communicates “proximity or distance from Liberation Theology’s ideals of justice, ethics and praxis define the priests’ moral and spiritual authenticity” (12). The cardinal in Santos’s “La misa profana” preaches in a space adjacent to “las primeras filas [donde] posan los poderosos, / mientras que atrás y en los suelos / se sientan los mares del pueblo” (31). Reflective of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s critique of the enduring rhetoric of the conservative branch of the Catholic Church (*Teología de liberación: perspectivas* [1971]) that directs the poor to “aceptar la pobreza, porque más tarde esa injusticia será compensada en el Reino de Dios” (367), the cardinal in Santos’s poem instructs the poor to live according to the dictate of “la resignación cristiana” (“Re-legitimizing the State” 31).

The poem’s title (“La misa profana”) underscores the dissonance between Catholicism’s sacred rite of mass and multiple, intersecting meanings of the word, “profana/o:” 1. [“Que no es sagrado ni sirve a usos sagrados, sino puramente secular,” 2. “Que carece el respeto debido a las cosas sagradas,” 3. “muy dado a cosas del mundo,” and “Inmodesto, deshonesto en el atavío o compostura” (RAE). Expressed in the present and/or historical present tense, and in the absence of explicit historical referential markers, readers might find “La misa profana” disorientating and ask themselves if it refers to colonial or twenty-first-century Latin America.

La misa profana comienza siempre  
 con un espíritu que reza mentiras  
 y con un payaso que proclama una muerte  
 pintada de miserias, gritos y carcajadas.  
 Se espera la llegada del Cardenal y su jauría de lobos,

acompañados de un canto hipócrita de alabanza.  
 En las primeras filas posan los poderosos,  
 mientras que atrás y en los suelos  
 se sientan los mares del pueblo.

Da inicio el espectáculo macabro  
 en la voz estrepitosa de su máximo representante:  
 bestia hilarante de la riqueza  
 y asesino salvaje de los miserables.

Y se exclama, hablando a los pobres de la resignación cristiana,  
 mientras le regala la hostia a los demonios y ladrones.  
 Y canta los salmos y evangelios de nuestro pueblo descalzo,  
 mientras se viste de lujosas prendas y de corrupción,  
 robando, mintiendo, matando sin descanso (31)

Recalling the rhetoric and symbiotic relationship of familiar protagonists—Catholic hierarchy and “los poderosos” across time and political systems—“La misa profana” suggests that the hegemony of the conservative branch of the Catholic Church in Latin America has not diminished in the twenty-first century. The persistence of structures of power and oppression appear inevitable and impossible to alter until the final verses in “La misa profana.” As with “Los Miserables,” “Punta,” and “Los Corruptos,” these verses articulate a counterpoint liberational discourse that signals the need for action and to interrupt this “narrative of an expectation of endless sacrifice and suffering” (“Re-legitimizing the State” 14). Before exploring the final verses of “La misa profana,” it is important to note that, in addition to liberation theology, in the historical context of twentieth and twenty-first-century Latin America, the words “liberation from suffering” recall other paradigms and efforts to dismantle social, economic, and political inequalities and suffering. During the Cold War and into the early 1990’s, the urgency for change as “liberation,” perhaps was experienced most acutely on a material level in left-wing military operations which, by and large and for a number of reasons, did not succeed in realizing their objectives. *Bocetos* does not point to military action as a form to liberate people from suffering, however, it does manifest the imprint of nonviolent liberational discourse, paradigms, and modes and practices to “raise consciousness” associated with liberation theology in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (1970), and the act of “*dar testimonio*.”

In the concise final verses of “La misa profana,” Santos frames his denunciation of the centuries-long allegiance between the conservative branch of the Catholic church with “los poderosos” of the secular sphere in nonviolent liberational discourse. The first of these verses pleads for the liberation of Honduras’s patron saint, Suyapa: “¡Que suelte a la Suyapa que ha manchado de sangre!” (31). Officially identified as “Nuestra Señora de Suyapa” and “la Virgen de Suyapa” by the Catholic Church, “la Suyapa” came to be recognized as “capitana de la milicia hondureña” following Honduras’s 1969 war with El Salvador (“Virgen de Suyapa”). Similar to the iconography of the Virgen de Guadalupe, Suyapa is dark-skinned, cloaked in blue, and enveloped in stars. Known as “la Morenita” and identified in “Oración a la Virgen de Suyapa” as “morena de raza indígena,” Suyapa intercedes on behalf of the people: “rezas por el bien del pueblo, / que en tu protección confía” (“Oración”). Underscoring this liberational facet of Suyapa’s cultural identity, Santos’s poem demands that “el Cardenal” liberate her—and, by extension, the people she protects—from the institutions and dominant sectors of Honduran society that claim her as their own: “Que se vaya lejos con su terrible mando militar / lleno de odio y dinero... / ¡Que se vaya para siempre con su misa profana!” (31)<sup>5</sup>

In the sequence of this trio of poems that critique the abuse power, “Los Corruptos” occupies the triptych’s central panel. As with medieval triptychs, this panel highlights a core idea, in this case corruption, that dialogues with the content of its flanking panels, which, respectively, critique corruption and hypocrisy on the part of religious and governmental leadership. Registering refractions of the ubiquity of the oppressed in “Los miserables,” the central and thematically unifying poem of this triptych, asserts that “Los corruptos están por todas partes / por eso / estamos jodidos o muertos” (34). As noted in this essay’s introduction, Santos’s “Los Corruptos” is a “reescritura en honor a Roberto Sosa y su poema ‘Los Pobres’” (34). A *transrealista* superimposition of dimensions in “Los Corruptos” and “Los Pobres” render a parallax effect “by which the position of an object seems to change when it is looked at from different positions” (Cambridge). The subjects of both poems look at the same object, a building complex [“múltiples edificios” (Sosa) and “grandes cuartos de mármol” (Santos)]. “Los Pobres” and “Los Corruptos” also overlap in their formal organization and sequence of grammatical structures. Divergences between the poems hinge on the identity and positionality—physical, social, and economic—of their respective subjects. Santos’s twenty-first-century homage to Sosa’s work modifies the identity of the viewer, replacing “los pobres” with “los corruptos.” From a marginalized position, the poor in Sosa’s poem gaze outward and beyond their location in space with the aspiration of calling these “múltiples edificios” their home: “Seguramente

/ ven / en los amaneceres / múltiples edificios / donde ellos quisieran habitar con sus hijos” (88). The privileged in Santos’s piece view this same material space from within their opulent walls: “Seguramente / ven y sienten los amaneceres / grandes cuartos de mármol / y el dinero robado de los pobres” (34). A *transrealista* and parallax lens highlights a divergence in the significance the subjects in each poem assign these buildings/walls. The poor in Sosa’s poem “ven” this space as an aspirational home and space of security; the corrupt in Santos’s piece “ven” and “sienten” only their material splendor. The economic, political, and social position of “los corruptos” contributes to a myopia of privilege manifested in a lack of social consciousness and impunity. They can opt out of viewing reality beyond the walls of their home, decide if and when to enter, or leave this place and social interactions, to buy what they like, and escape justice “como si nada,” “sin molestarse” and “hasta el cansancio” (34).

With echoes of Neruda’s “La United Fruit Co.” (*Canto General* 1950), Eduardo Galeano’s *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1971), Sosa’s “Los Pobres,” and a spectrum of Latin American artists/intellectuals, the final verses of “Los Corruptos” underscore the persistence of colonial extractivism and the gaze of ambivalence by the powerful. In “La United Fruit Co.,” the working poor create wealth for others through the export of fruit (“bandejas de tesoro” 336), and exist only as a nameless other, “un cuerpo rueda, una cosa sin nombre, un número caído, un racimo de fruta muerta derramada en el pudridero” (336). In Sosa’s poem, the poor are also nameless and many. They are unaware of their own worth, and their existence is marked by cyclical entrances and exits of survival and death: “Pero desconociendo sus tesoros / entran y salen por espejos de sangre; / caminan y mueren despacio” (88). In his homage to Sosa, Santos identifies the poor as an exploited and bloodied “tesoro:” “Y explotando hasta la muerte nuestros tesoros / Salen en sus carros de oro y entran en baños de sangre; / porque caminan y viven por el águila asesina del Norte” (34). Recalling Neruda’s transition, “Mientras tanto,” and Sosa’s “Pero,” Santos’s “Y” highlights an ambivalence by the corrupt to the economic realities of the poor, and a myopia that impedes their recognition of the humanity of others. The final lines of “Los Corruptos” repeat a fragment from the beginning of the poem, “Por eso / estamos jodidos o muertos” (34). Nonetheless, Santos signals the necessity to disrupt this circular and seemingly inevitable dynamic of power/oppression in the final two words and subsequent ellipsis in the poem, “pero luchando” (34).

The final panel in Santos’s triptych of power, “Una muy mala comedia” (37), points to Dante’s *La divina commedia*/*La commedia* and Asturias’s *El señor presidente* as primary literary references. “Una muy mala comedia” also serves as a secular parallel to the religious false guides that promise

liberation in “La misa profana.” The simplicity and combination of the four words that comprise the title, belie the poem’s complex and multilayered critique of the absurd and brutal repetition of structures of power from medieval Europe to twenty-first-century Honduras. In grammatical terms, Santos’s rendering of the title of Dante’s work is subtle but significant. He flips the first word, “la,” with “una,” suggesting that the Honduran poet’s “comedia” is one among others that exist (“una” vs. “la”). Santos’s poem further alters the title of Dante’s epic poem replacing “divina” with the words, “muy mala.” Unique and divine in Dante’s work, the title of Santos’s poem of the poet traveler’s journey to paradise, describes its superlative opposite.

Like Santos’s Dantean referent, the poet traveler in “Una muy mala comedia” crosses layers of space and time to critique human conduct. Intersecting medieval Italy with twentieth and twenty-first-century Central America, Santos’s poem also highlights the insidious repetition of the abuse of political power. With a structure that leans toward narrative (Vélez Osejo ix) and calling upon an amalgam of chapters from *El señor presidente*—their content, dialogue, layout on the printed page, and tone of deadly absurdity—Santos’s twenty-first-century Honduran reconfiguration of Asturias’s dictator skillfully makes use of bureaucracy to exert power. Sitting at a desk overflowing with government documents, receipts, and bills, “El señor presidente está absorto leyéndolos; parece que se va a ahogar entre tantas hojas de papel” (37). Building on this examination on the power of writing and the misuse of political power, “Una muy mala comedia” addresses the dangerous work of journalists who provide public access and accurate testaments of their realities. Likely referring to investigative work of journalists to uncover the graft of millions of dollars from the Instituto Hondureño de Seguridad Social (IHSS) by high-ranking government officials, including president Juan Orlando Hernández, in “Una muy mala comedia” the “PERIODISTA” asks “SEÑOR PRESIDENTE” to explain “un descuido de la inversión social” following the coup. “SEÑOR PRESIDENTE” responds with a silence and demeanor that makes the journalist feel an urgency to leave. Reminiscent of the menacing silences of Asturias’s novel, the fate of the journalist in Santos’s poem is left unknown ending with the words, “*Se cierra el telón*” (37). Nonetheless, the fate of those that question Asturias’s dictator and the statistics concerning the superlative dangers faced by journalists in post-coup Honduras, suggest that the “PERIODISTA” and his yet-to-be published reports come to a predictable and sinister end.<sup>6</sup>



## Conclusion

“Una muy mala comedia” marks the end of the first half of *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma*. It also concludes the first portion of the poet traveler’s journey. Following “Una muy mala comedia” and like Dante’s pilgrim and the Mayan twin heroes, Ixbalanqué and Hunhunapú, the poet traveler passes from the darkness, suffering, and chaos of the underworld upwards toward light. On this continued journey he carries knowledge gained from a treacherous odyssey through Xibalbá’s “places of fright.” Viewed through the lens of *transrealismo*, Santos’s poet traveler crosses fragments of time and space, and webs of myth and reality. The poet traveler testifies to the knowledge gained in these travels in a series of poetic sketches that, when taken as a whole, reveal a complexity in the superimposition and interplay of their layers. Some sketches trace the expansiveness of suffering and marginalization and give form and concreteness to the “omnipresencia invisible” of “los miserables.” Others outline the corporal and psychological experience of trauma as well as the pervasiveness of structures of power that inflict harm on other humans and the natural world. Beyond the sphere of myth, *Bocetos* sketches a continuity in the urgency to escape misery on an axis that shifts over time toward a north-south direction. The poet traveler’s sketches also honor those expressed in the *Popol Vuh*, the Garifuna dance tradition of *la punta*, canonical works of literature like those of Hugo and Asturias, and *Testimonio*. Upon the sketches left by others that have ventured into the “chaos at the heart of things” (Hickin) to “jugar dignamente la pelota” (Aguilera qtd. in Engelbert 57) in contexts of danger and chaos to engage with power, *Bocetos’s* poet traveler adds a layer. This stratum bears the imprint of a twenty-first century Xibalbá that resembles modern Honduras, particularly since its illegal military coup in 2009. It also registers the optic of a poet traveler that, in words of fellow Honduran poet Roberto Sosas, writes from one of the edges of the periphery of “el Tercero y Cuarto Mundo” (*Poesía Total 1959-2004* Cover copy) to outline the gap between a dystopian reality (past/present and there/here) and the impulse for its opposite.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 1988 in Tegucigalpa by the late poet Rigoberto Paredes and Vélez-Osejo Librería Café Galería Paradiso has come to represent a “crisol del arte” in Honduras where artists and community members gather to share their work (“Café Paradiso: Crisol del Arte”). It is also affiliated with Ediciones Librería Paradiso which published *Bocetos*.

<sup>2</sup> While not created by Santos, the artwork by Rigoberto Paredes Vélez selected to appear on *Bocetos*'s cover suggests the possible imprint of Rucker's transrealism. The image, according to art historian Karen O'Day, recalls “ancient Maya regalia, especially headdresses, as depicted in ceramic paintings, stone sculptures, and greenstone regalia [in] the date range of 300 BCE” (email communication “Cover art on *Bocetos de un cuerpo sin forma*”). The figure in Paredes Vélez's work holds an alien-like orb that appears out of time that stands out for its distinct material composition as metallic, futuristic, and digital.

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Cuffee explains that, “after the 2009 coup, Honduras surged to the top of the list of the most dangerous countries for journalists in the first quarter of 2010, according to Reporters Without Borders.” Placing acts of repression against Honduran journalists in a global context, Cuffee writes that “[a] 2013 UNESCO report concluded that Honduras had the highest number of journalists assassinated per capita, ahead of Syria and Mexico. The country has since dropped down in the rankings, but Honduran journalists continue to be murdered” (Upsidedownworld May 5 2015). Hondurans that voice opposition to post-coup environmental policy also face repression. Global Witness reports that “nowhere are you more likely to be killed for standing up to companies that grab land and trash the environment than in Honduras [where] [m]ore than 120 people have died since 2010” [“Honduras: The Deadliest Country in the World for Environmental Activism” (2017)]. The marginalized status of LGBTQI, feminist, indigenous, campesino human rights and environmental defenders also put their lives at risk.

<sup>4</sup> In reference to Bueso's poem, I note: “In an article published during the heat of the coup, *El Mundo* explained that ‘la Iglesia se pone del lado de los golpistas’ and that when president Zelaya considered returning to Honduras following his forced exile, “el cardenal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez apareció en las televisiones y emisoras de radio para dar su respaldo a las nuevas autoridades y asegurar que los tres poderes del Estado, Ejecutivo, Legislativo y Judicial, están en vigor legal y democrático de acuerdo a la Constitución de la República” (“Re-legitimizing the State” 12).

<sup>5</sup> Future discussions of *Bocetos* might consider the figure of the Virgin of Suyapa through the lens of Dante's Beatrice in “La mujer que se viste de estrellas” (43) and Spanish mystics Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross in “Delirio” (70).

<sup>6</sup> On March 28 2019, a year after the publication of *Bocetos*, David Romero Ellner que “dio a conocer el descarado y millonario desfalco al Instituto Hondureño de Seguridad Social (IHSS) (“David Romero” *El Herald*) “fue detenido por agentes policiales en la radio emisora donde trabajaba, luego de haber sido condenado a 10 años y ocho meses por el delito de difamación y calumnias en perjuicio de la abogada Sonia Gálvez, esposa del exfiscal general adjunto Rigoberto Cuellar ... Romero Ellner fue uno de los periodistas que denunció varios actos de corrupción del actual gobierno de Honduras y según (Lidieth Díaz) su esposa ese fue el detonante para que lo encarcelaran.” During his incarceration, on July 18, 2020 Romero Ellner died due to complications of COVID-19 (Sandoval).

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