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THE UNANIMOUS HEARTBEAT: CO-EXISTENCE AND SELF-IDENTITY IN VICENTE ALEIXANDRE'S "HISTORIA DEL CORAZÓN"

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EL CORAZÓN UNÁNIME: CO-EXISTENCIA E IDENTIDAD PROPIA EN «HISTORIA DEL CORAZÓN» DE VICENTE ALEIXANDRE

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS { Spanish poetry, Solidarity, Community, Identity }

The poetic works of Spanish writer Vicente Aleixandre (1898–1984) are extensive and varied, and readers of his poetry continually encounter suggestive imagery that evokes a yearning for solidarity. Aleixandre's 1954 collection of poems, *Historia del corazón*, constitutes his most direct discussion of the imperative need that human beings have for interaction with others. In poems such as "En la plaza," "El poeta canta por todos," and "Vagabundo continuo," Aleixandre (much like Walt Whitman and others) employs metaphors related to both urban geography and natural landmarks in order to underscore the importance of topics including community, co-existence, and identity. These poems demonstrate, further, that not only do humans require contact with others in order to integrate socially, but they also need this interaction in order to more fully actualize themselves and experience an enriched sense of

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life. This study offers close readings of poems from *Historia del corazón* and focuses on how the ethics and aesthetics of that collection provide a powerful treatise on living in a community, an issue that is ever-important in an increasingly globalized world.

RESUMEN

PALABRAS CLAVE { Poesía española, Solidaridad, Comunidad, Identidad }

La obra poética del escritor español Vicente Aleixandre (1898–1984) es extensa y variada, y los lectores de su poesía se encuentran continuamente ante imágenes que evocan un anhelo de solidaridad. El poemario aleixandrino de 1954, *Historia del corazón*, constituye su discurso más directo sobre la necesidad humana de interacción con otros. En poemas como «En la plaza", «El poeta canta por todos" y «Vagabundo continuo", Aleixandre (tal como Walt Whitman y otros) emplea metáforas vinculadas a la geografía urbana tanto como natural a fin de subrayar la importancia de la comunidad, la coexistencia y la identidad. Estos poemas demuestran, además, que los seres humanos requieren el contacto con otros no sólo para integrarse socialmente, sino también para desarrollarse como individuos y experimentar una vida más plena. El estudio presente ofrece una lectura profunda de algunos poemas de *Historia del corazón* y se enfoca en cómo la ética y estética de esta colección ofrece un tratado sobre cómo vivir en comunidades, un asunto de suma importancia en un mundo cada más globalizado.

"And that all the men ever born are also my
brothers.... and the women my sisters and lovers".
— Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (5:13)[1]

"There is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity
or alterity, but there is no democracy without the 'community of
friends' (*koína ta philōn*), without the calculation of majorities,
without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal".
— Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (22)

1. INTRODUCTION

Critics have long suggested that the desire for solidarity is a major driving force in the poetry of Spanish writer and 1977 Nobel Prize winner, Vicente Aleixandre (1898–1984). In his foundational study of Aleixandre's poetry, preeminent Aleixandre scholar Carlos Bousoño, for example, asserts that solidarity is, in fact, "la palabra que hemos de leer debajo de cualquier expresión aleixandrina; tal la fuerza primigenia que ha dado origen a toda la obra de nuestro autor" (46)[2]. While Aleixandre's poetic collections written prior to the Spanish Civil War issue a passionate contemplation on human interaction with nature—as in *Ámbito* (1928) and *La destrucción o el amor* (1935)—, in his 1945–1953 collection of poems, *Historia del corazón* (1954), Aleixandre offers a poetic treatise on humanity's solidarity with its own species. Many poems from that collection address the imperative need that human beings have for interaction with others. In these texts, Aleixandre

1. All in-text parenthetical documentation of poetry refers to poetic line numbers, or poem number and line number as in this case.

2. In addition to Bousoño's contributions to the understanding of Aleixandre's poetry, many others have also highlighted the tendency toward solidarity in the poet's work. The interested reader could refer to the writings of the following scholars referenced in the Works Cited: José Olivio Jiménez (265), Leopoldo de Luis (135), Kessel Schwartz (118–19), Ricardo Gullón (132–35), Fernando Lázaro Carreter (21–25), José Luis Cano (18–21), and more recently, Darío Villanueva (228, 235–36), H. L. Boudreau (15–16), Daniel Murphy (31–37), and Alejandro Duque Amusco (17–18).

(much like Walt Whitman and others before him) employs metaphors related to both urban geography and natural landscapes in order to underscore the importance of topics such as community, co-existence, cosmopolitanism, friendship, and identity. Additionally, these poems demonstrate that not only do humans require contact with others in order to integrate socially, but they also need this interaction in order to more fully realize themselves and experience an enriched sense of life.

The present study focuses on close readings of three representative poems from *Historia del corazón*, "En la plaza," "El poeta canta por todos," and "Vagabundo continuo," and addresses how the ethics and aesthetics of that collection provide a powerful discourse on living in a community, an issue that is ever-important in an increasingly globalized world. Vicente Aleixandre's poetic production is extensive and diverse. Collections from his earlier years reflect pantheistic yearnings for a fusion with nature, modernist endeavors that treat eroticism and violence with a surrealist flare, and love as a cosmic force that resists death. For Fernando Lázaro Carreter, "[s]us escenarios eran cósmicos, universales; sus ríos, cualquier río; su amor, el amor joven, pujante, enteramente jugador con los sentidos y el engaño de los hombres" (21). In *La destruccion o el amor*, for example, Aleixandre presents natural environments of raw animalistic aggression in poems like "Las águilas" and "Se querían" alongside texts such as "Unidad en ella," "Ven siempre, ven," and "A ti, viva" that use metaphors related to organic fusion to communicate amorous and erotic connections between the lyrical self and the beloved.

Written between 1945 and 1953, and part of what Bousoño and others after him call the start of Aleixandre's "segunda época" (45, 89), *Historia del corazón* contains five parts, each one devoted to topics such as love, togetherness, community, hope, childhood, and aging. Nearly all of the 48 poems contain long unmetered lines that communicate a flow of formal freedom as well as unbounded expression. Produced a decade into the Franco regime, Aleixandre's poetic orientation in this collection centers on democratic values underscored by humankind's integration into society. Critic José Luis

Campal Fernández connects the concerns of this volume not only to the immediate context of Aleixandre himself, that of the post-war period in Spain, but also to the universal community at large: "El poema de Aleixandre es una llamada a la convivencia pacífica sin distinciones, al vivir en plenitud el momento y calladamente, pero se canta no la vida en exclusiva de unos hombres y un país en particular, aunque el caso de España está muy presente, sino el de toda la humanidad" (11). In contrast to the cosmic nature and eroticism of Aleixandre's earlier collections, Lázaro Carreter writes that with *Historia del corazón*, "el poeta ha descubierto una especie de fraternidad universal, de participación colectiva en esa historia común de nacer, amor, envejecer y morir. Todos poseemos un mismo corazón, y Aleixandre, desde experiencias propias o no—averiguarlo carecería de interés—escribe la historia de ese corazón participado" (22). Further, these poems draw attention to the individual's place within the collective community and constitute what renowned Hispanist Andrew Debicki called Aleixandre's "most important book" (13), one that takes somewhat commonplace spaces and contexts (such as a plaza, or a group of people, a classroom, and standing in front of a mirror), and, through defamiliarization, brings the reader to an understanding of a reality that is connected to "larger visions" or "more significant (and unusual) patterns" (Debicki 14). Through the poems in this collection, Aleixandre hypothesizes that men and women must resist their closed-off nature and immerse themselves within the great expanse of togetherness. By doing this, human beings more fully engage one another; they also more deliberately become themselves. In short, *Historia del corazón* becomes what one scholar more recently declared as "a kind of poetic spiritual biography in terms of the ages of man" (Boudreau 16).

2. ***BEING-WITH*** IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Composed in late 1952, "En la plaza" constitutes one of the most recognized and illustrative poems of *Historia del corazón*. According

to Fernando Lázaro Carreter, "[n]ingún poema podría representar mejor que éste el ánimo de Aleixandre a la altura de 1954: Su fusión con los anhelos colectivos, su renuncia al solipsismo, al espejo que le devuelve una imagen muda, inútil para él mismo y para los demás" (25). The first lines of the poem draw attention to the sensual and subjective reactions that one experiences when in contact with others: "Hermoso es, hermosamente humilde y confiante, vivificador y profundo, / sentirse bajo el sol, entre los demás, impelido, / llevado, conducido, mezclado, rumorosamente arrastrado" (1–3).[3] This ambience under the sun is, for the lyrical I of Aleixandre's poem, beautiful, invigorating, and purifying. In addition to his employment of the verb "sentirse," which necessarily evokes the senses of the poetic subject, the participant here is impelled, carried, mixed with, and swept away by the others with whom it associates. Aleixandre uses a series of verbs in the past participle ("impelido," "llevado," "conducido," "mezclado," and "arrastrado") to indicate the effect that others have on the self, and that the self, once among the crowd, is acted upon, the recipient of the synergistic strength around him. As José Luis Cano suggests, this poem demonstrates at its core the common hope and freedom that is acquired through solidarity one with another: "En todo caso, plantea el conflicto interior del intelectual, del artista, ante un problema que está vivo: el de la solidaridad con los hombres que sufren o protestan contra algo que ellos creen injusto, o que caminan juntos llevados por una común esperanza en un futuro de justicia o libertad" (22).

This introduction based in sensuality and vitality is quickly contrasted through a sharp antithesis in the second stanza, a warning against resisting contact with others, and this is communicated through similes of objects that are cold, closed-off, and hard. In conjunction with the declaration in stanza one that it is beautiful to incorporate oneself with others, here the lyrical voice declares:

3. All references to Vicente Aleixandre's poetry in this study come from *Obras completes*, edited by Carlos Bousoño, Madrid: Aguilar, 1968.

"No es bueno / quedarse en la orilla / como el malecón o como el molusco que quiere calcáreamente imitar a la roca" (4–6). He or she who stays at the margins of social interaction is like the tightly-sealed shell fish that remains unopened, hard like the rock, and rigid like the strong ocean pier. In contrast to the vitality of stanza one, the images here are static and immobile. The second stanza continues the emotive claims that it is "puro y sereno arrastrarse en la dicha / de fluir y perderse" (7–8) and then suggests that one best finds himself through contact with their vibrant and inclusive ambience, "encontrándose en el movimiento con que el gran corazón de los hombres palpita extendido" (9). The mass of the community is depicted as a great collective heart whose beating connects the body of all humanity. In his book on Aleixandre, Kessel Schwartz acknowledges the connection between finding oneself and existing in conjunction with the rest of humankind when he states that "[t]he poet, in his search for light and love, with hope, with resolution, with faith, with fearful daring, is comforted at finding himself among men and knowing that he too is a man. He realizes that one exists only as part of humanity" (123). Like the majority of the poetic lines in the collection, Aleixandre's lines in this poem are lengthy and without rhyme, seemingly embodying the free-flowing sense of moving with others, and being lost and found amid the great masses of the public space.

"En la plaza" subsequently presents a "case study" for the type of interaction that the poem proposes in the initial lines. The third stanza refers to an undefined subject, "ese que vive ahí, ignoro en qué piso" (10). The anonymity of the subject suggests the universality of the claims of the poem, that is, that the subject referred to could just as well be anyone, and that the experience of entering the social space could be sensed by all those eager to claim it. The lyrical

> "I" bears witness to the scene in this way: "le he visto bajar por unas escaleras / y adentrarse valientemente entre la multitud y perderse" (11–12). In the final lines of the third stanza the reader gains a

> sense of the subject's intellectual engagement upon entering the plaza: "Allí, ¿quién lo reconocería? Allí con esperanza, con resolución o con fe, con temeroso denuedo, / con silenciosa humildad, allí él también / transcurría" (14–16). The poetic subject is hopeful, but also reluctant and humbled because it understands that by entering a plaza with others one becomes vulnerable. Yet he goes, paradoxically with both resolution and fearful daring. The repetitive use of the polysyndeton "con" in these lines—"con esperanza, con resolución o con fe, con temeroso denuedo, / con silenciosa humildad" (14–15)—underscores, according to Darío Villanueva, the thematic thrust of the poem centered on community and togetherness (232)

The plaza itself constitutes the central metaphor of Aleixandre's poem, a space of encounter, solidarity, community, and self-recognition. This is emphasized most poignantly in stanza four where the plaza becomes humanity itself, society, and the world. The poetic description of the plaza in this stanza employs imagery rooted in the senses, much like the poem's opening lines:

> Era una gran plaza abierta, y había olor de existencia.
> Un olor a gran sol descubierto, a viento rizándolo,
> un gran viento que sobre las cabezas pasaba su mano,
> su gran mano que rozaba las frentes unidas y las reconfortaba. (17–20)

Here the smells penetrate the individual and affect him to the core, as does the wind that strokes the individuals' hair as if a "gran mano" (20). Debicki insinuates that the sensorial element of this stanza "reinforces the reader's experience and the sense of participating in [the] life that has been unfolding from the very first lines on" (15). The sunshine, smells, and winds accomplish another important task in Aleixandre's poem: they create a sense of democratic unity among the crowd in the plaza because these elements winds reach all equally, never discriminating according to social class, race, or creed, but rather touching all the "frentes unidas" (20) at once.

In the second half of the poem, Aleixandre connects the topics of community and solidarity to self-identity and self-knowledge. It is in the space of the plaza, among other human beings, that the individual can "mirarse y puede alegrarse y puede reconocerse" (24). The usage of reflexive verbs draws attention to the self, but the fact that this is done among others sheds light on the importance that others have in helping individuals become themselves. Here Aleixandre proposes an ethical treatise on being oneself (and finding oneself) among others. In conjunction with Aleixandre's poetic investigation of the nature of ontology, Bousoño writes that "[s]ólo se *es* en cuanto se *es solidario* de los otros, y, por tanto, sólo se *reconoce* uno cuando se siente unido a la gente, cuando se va, como uno más, entre la muchedumbre humana" (102). Leopoldo de Luis elaborates this idea by underscoring the usage of the reflexive verb: "El verbo es el reflexivo *reconocerse*. El poeta *se reconoce*, esto es, se descubre a sí mismo, se posesiona de sí mismo, al verse en los demás. A diferencia del pensador existencialista francés [Sartre], para quien el enfrentamiento con 'el otro' supone una pérdida de su libertad anterior, Vicente Aleixandre sabe que el hombre se encuentra a sí mismo en los demás" (159).

With his conceptualization of identity based on one's proximity to the Other, Aleixandre aligns himself with 20th century intellectuals who also understood the construction of identity in terms of the complexities of time, space, coexistence, and community. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger, for example, framed ontology in terms of one's *being-with* others, whereas later French thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida theorized Being more in terms of responsibility and cosmopolitanism. In his 1927 volume, *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that "[t]he world of Da-sein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* others. The innerworldly being-in-itself of others is *Mitda-sein*. [...] One's own Da-sein, like the *Mitda-sein* of others, is encountered, initially and for the most part, in terms of the world-together in the surrounding world taken care of" (112, 118). In *Otherwise than Being*, and building on Heidegger's ideas, Levinas discusses ontology as being

"despite me, for-another" and as having an incommensurable "responsibility for the other" (11, 15), what Jacques Derrida would later envision in *Politics of Friendship* as "[f]riendship, the being-friend" (8). Against a solipsistic vision of the subject, the poetic voice in Aleixandre's poem suggests that to find oneself, the subject need not "bus[carse] en el espejo" (27), but should rather "baja[r], baja[r] despacio y búscate entre los otros. / Allí están todos, y tú entre ellos. / Oh, desnúdate y fúndete, y reconócete" (30–32). This type of encounter leads to what Concha Zardoya calls "una sublimación del vivir, una exaltación del *ser-total* [...] una espiritualidad que dimana horizontalmente: *hacia* las cosas y los hombres, y *desde* ellos" (473). This assimilation with the community occurs after one has stripped themselves of their prejudices ("desnúdate") and has fully immersed themselves within the collective whole.

In its final stanzas, the poem presents an additional series of similes and metaphors, this time maritime in nature, in order to reinforce the strength of the plaza metaphor that bears up the entire text. In the eighth stanza, Aleixandre borrows Whitmanesque imagery as he paints the picture of a sunbather entering the water, giving added texture to the America poet's declaration, "You sea! I resign myself to you" (22: 451). For Aleixandre, this scene is connected to the previous metaphor of entering the plaza-society and the invigoration and self-understanding that comes from such a process. In his recent volume, *Vicente Aleixandre's Stream of Lyric Consciousness*, Daniel Murphy writes that these metaphors demonstrate the "most powerful example of Aleixandre's communal vision […], an ode in which the poet exhorts this anonymous addressee to bathe in the swirling sea of humanity" (36). In "En la plaza," the poetic voice urges the listener to enter slowly, but with purpose and courage:

> Entra despacio, como el bañista que, temeroso, con mucho amor y recelo al agua,
> introduce primero sus pies en la espuma,
> y siente el agua subirle, y ya se atreve, y casi ya se decide.
> Y ahora con el agua en la cintura todavía no se confía.

> Pero él extiende sus brazos, abre al fin sus dos brazos y se entrega completo.
> Y allí fuerte se reconoce, y se crece y se lanza,
> y avanza y levanta espumas, y salta y confía,
> y hiende y late en las aguas vivas, y canta, y es joven.
> Así, entra con pies desnudos. (33-41)

The process may be tempered, and the swimmer may be timid at first, but Aleixandre shows that the results of the process are vital for the subject. Once he commits completely, he recognizes himself, he is confident, young, and reborn. He enters the water vulnerably, with "pies desnudos" (41) and finds himself by reaching out to others. The usage of polysyndeton with the conjunction "y" accelerates the movement of the self toward the water–plaza–society, and represents this movement as an ongoing and active process of rejuvenation. Kessel Schwartz elaborates on the importance of Aleixandre's sunbather simile in this stanza by suggesting that "[t]he sea, a recurring symbol or archetype which integrates all his poetry, represents primitive, instinctive life, truer values lost by modern civilized man and maintained by simple sea creatures, a constant interplay between Thanatos and Eros, and a variety of sensual, erotic states involving repressed sexuality" (60–61). After an initial hesitancy, the subject experiences the ecstatic renewal and self-understanding that come when one resists a closed-off existence and "offers himself completely" to the community.

In "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass*, a text that was inspirational for many poets of the Generation of 1927, Walt Whitman highlights the idea of solidarity and universal coexistence by stating, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (1:1–3). Whitman thus understands the self through an experience of community. In his reading of similar topics of solidarity and democracy in the poetry of Whitman, North American critic Jay Parini proposes that,

> [a] radical sense of democracy underlies such a position, with its communal view of body and soul. Whitman will allow no boun-

> daries between "me" and "you," between "mine" and "yours". In singing himself, he sings everyone else. [...] We cannot divide ourselves into "us" and "them" but should muck together in the great experience of life. And we must not neglect those in need, those who suffer at the margins of society, the poor, the enslaved, the wounded, the jailed, the dying. (122–23)

Whitman's poem, like Aleixandre's, goes one step further than just proposing that humans should find connection with one another. The subject is constituted not solely through its solidarity with others, but also through its connection to its natural environment. Whitman's text continues: "The atmosphere is not a perfume [...] / I am mad for it to be in contact with me" (2: 9, 12). The subject desires a connection with others to be sure, but this is mediated by a contact with one's surroundings, nature or the city in Whitman's case, the plaza or sea for Aleixandre. Further, it is important to recognize that even as the self integrates with those around it, this does not require a loss of self. Rather, as Whitman suggests, notwithstanding the sense of community, there is "[a]lways a knit of identity . . . . always distinction . . . . always a breed of life" (3: 39). And in Aleixandre's poem, the self continues to "se[r] tú mismo" (42) even though it mingles with others in the plaza, or slowly enters the waters of the sea and experiences an enhanced embodiment of itself.

The last stanza in "En la plaza" presents a final instructive metonym—that of the heart—, and in this image Aleixandre connects the poem to the title of the collection, *Historia del corazón*. In the poem's last two lines, the lyrical subject invokes both the heart and the reader in this way: "¡Oh pequeño corazón diminuto, corazón que quiere latir / para ser él también el unánime corazón que le alcanza!" (43-44). The heart of the individual is associated with the feelings and desires of the self, and the "pequeño corazón diminuto" (43) reflects the isolation and limited nature of the subject when alone. But when the self reaches out to others, as has been discussed throughout the poem, it acquires a connection with the much greater "unánime corazón" (44) of the communi-

ty (Villanueva 232).[4] As José Luis Campal Fernández summarizes with regards to this poem, "el hombre no es completamente humano hasta que no se fusiona con sus prójimos semejantes, adquiriendo, entonces, una humanidad más humana" (17). Indeed, the poem reflects how hearts become knit together, a story or history of the condition of the heart both particular and collective.

3. A VOICE AND HEART FOR ALL

The themes of community, inter-dependence, and self-knowledge are persistent topics of interest for Aleixandre and are manifest in other poems from *Historia del corazón*, including "El poeta canta por todos" and "Vagabundo continuo". In the three-part poem, "El poeta canta por todos," the reader notes that the assimilation with a group creates solidarity, enables one to find their voice and self-identity, and aids in the establishment of community. Kessel Schwartz outlines the thrust of this poem and its interest in solidarity notwithstanding the uncertainties of the modern world in these terms: "The poet, a man, becomes all men, destined like him to live and die, without the assurance of Paradise or eternal life, in a world where death is always with us. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to live desperate solitary times, the poet exclaims with tenderness and optimism, as he sings for all mankind of fleeting time, social love, and human solidarity" (119). In part one, and in similar fashion to "En la plaza," Aleixandre presents a tentative male poetic subject among a mass of people. Although the lyrical subject desires to join with the crowd, it is hesitant to do so. The poetic "I" of the text apostrophically invokes the "tú" of the text in the initial lines: "Allí están todos, y tú los estás mirando pasar. / ¡Ah, sí, allí, cómo quisieras mezclarte y reconocerte!" (1–2). The individual senses a

4. Darío Villanueva discusses Aleixandre's tendency towards *unanimismo* in *Historia del corazón*. The interested reader could refer to his study of "En la plaza" where he writes of this "nueva unidad colectiva, cuyo nombre procede de la fusión entre las nociones de *unité* and *âme*: el unánime (235).

"furioso torbellino dentro del corazón" (3) that urges him to join the others, but that force is countered by the "mudas paredes interiores de carne" (5). Aleixandre emphasizes this antithesis in line five with the word "contra," that is, the body and soul are at odds with one another as desire is tempered by fear. But the strength of the heart finally overcomes the safety of solitude. This tension is elaborated in the poem's second stanza:

> Y entonces en un último esfuerzo te decides. Sí, pasan.
> Todos están pasando. Hay niños, mujeres. Hombres serios.
> [Luto cierto, miradas.
> Y una masa sola, un único ser, reconcentradamente desfila.
> Y tú, con el corazón apretado, convulso de tu solitario dolor, en un
> [último esfuerzo te sumes.
> Sí, al fin, ¡cómo te encuentras y hallas!
> Allí serenamente en la ola te entregas. (6–11)

Upon recognizing the collective body passing by, the poetic "I" ultimately decides to integrate himself into the singular "masa" composed of men, women, and children, "todos". And with the repetition of the words "en un último esfuerzo" (6, 9) Aleixandre insinuates that there is some spiritual force from within that compels the subject to act and participate with the community. Carlos Bousoño notes also that in this poem the body of people is connected to the heavens since, "[e]n la pieza titulada 'El poeta canta por todos' se nos cuenta cómo, al sumirse en la multitud, el poeta expresa los sentimientos generales, y cómo entonces el cielo, al devolver el eco del humano coro, resulta 'completamente existente'" (101). What is more, "El poeta canta por todos" elaborates on imagery from "En la plaza," such as the metaphor of the sea as well as the image of "offering oneself" to the community. As in "En la plaza," Aleixandre uses the verb "entregarse" in this poem, underscoring anew the self-offering to the community, along with the motif of the wave that carries one together with the sea of people.

Also important in these lines from the first section of the poem is the focus on selfidentification. In the first 11 lines, there are six usages

of reflexive verbs, which highlights the development of the subject itself as a central focus of consideration for Aleixandre. From the beginning of the poem, Aleixandre writes that one finds himself in connection with and through others. Only with this communion will the individual be able to fully "reconocer[se]" (2) and "enc[o]ntra[rse]" (10). The initial section of "El poeta canta por todos" also demonstrates (again by way of antithesis) that the heart is the primordial site of tension between assimilation and solipsism. This further evokes the title of the collection, *Historia del corazón*, and connects this poem to the motivations of "En la plaza," where the "unánime corazón" (44) of humanity overcomes the "pequeño corazón diminuto" (43) of the self. The lyrical voice in "El poeta canta por todos" feels the whirlwind of nerves in the "torbellino dentro del corazón" (3) and has his "corazón apretado" (9) as he considers merging with the group. The final line of section one, further, demonstrates the effect that integration has on the heart of the individual: "Son miles de corazones que hacen un único corazón que te lleva" (14). Here the reader notes that the multitude of hearts are knit together in one, joint in both their elements of commonality as well as in their inherent difference.

If in the first part of the poem the lyrical subject overcomes the fear of immersion into the group—but subsequently finds their strength, identity, and place within the community—, the second part of the poem further develops the idea of gaining self-awareness through contact with others. This section commences where the first part left off, with the "único corazón que te lleva" (15), and continues the contrasts between the heart of the collective and the solitary one:

> Abdica de tu propio dolor. Distiende tu propio corazón contraído.
> Un único corazón te recorre, un único latido sube a tus ojos,
> poderosamente invade tu cuerpo, levanta tu pecho, te hace agitar
> las manos cuando ahora avanzas. (16–18)

It is clear from these lines that the unity that the self feels with those around him creates a change within his own being. The lyrical "I" of the poem urges the other to let go of its individual pain and

solitary heart by turning itself over to the universal force around it. Regarding this act of unification, José Luis Cano writes that the individual must "olvidar el dolor individual, parece decirnos el poeta, para unirnos al dolor colectivo. Unirse a los miles de corazones que sufren, para formar con ellos un inmenso y solo corazón. La voz del poeta puede entonces cantar por todos, ser una voz colectiva que expresa la voz del pueblo" (23). The heart, previously "apretado" (9) and "contraído" (16), now finds a connection to the unified life force of the community. The joint heartbeat now infiltrates the lyrical subject's vision, body, and chest, and causes him to raise his hands triumphantly as he walks.

In this process of recognizing oneself by way of a connection to a force larger than oneself, the subject also finds his own voice, and he simultaneously joins his voice to that of the collective: "es la voz de los que te llevan, la voz verdadera y alzada / donde tú puedes escucharte, donde tú, con asombro, te reconoces" (23–24). The voice of those that "carry" the poetic self resonates with his own and furthers his ability to develop his own identity and express himself. A fundamental aspect of Aleixandre's ethical thrust here focuses on the reality that the self does not lose its uniqueness as it assimilates with the group, a tendency that is indicated in the imagery of the "voz que por tu garganta, desde todos los corazones esparcidos, / se alza limpiamente en el aire" (25–26). Along these lines Hortensia Campanella asserts that "[a]un en los momentos de apoteosis de lo colectivo, como ocurre en este poema, nunca la fusión será total. El poeta se reserva en parte y será testigo hasta de su propia voz que 'canta por todos'" (455). That is, while the hearts of the community beat as one, they are also "spread out," each one unique in its indivuality and able to give utterance in the open air.

Once the poetic subject finds his own voice, part three of "El poeta canta por todos" details the responsibility this reborn individual (or poet himself) now has in singing for the masses. Like the lyrical "I" of Whitman's poem who declares that "I am the poet of the woman the same as the man" (21: 426), Aleixandre's

subjects also hear their own voices in the song of the poet: "Y para todos los oídos. Sí. Mírales cómo te oyen. / Se están escuchando a sí mismos.

Están escuchando una única voz que los canta" (27–28). Aleixandre's poem declares that the voice of the lyrical "I" rises up "como una montaña" (35), and with this simile, and with the momentum that is created in the final lines of the poem by way of the polysyndeton repetition of "y," the poet demonstrates the collective excitement and strength that are acquired when individuals form together in communities. In this sense, the poet becomes the mouthpiece of the people, "literalmente 'el que lleva la voz', del mismo modo que el olímpico porta la antorcha con el fuego sagrado. También él ilumina con su palabra a los hombres y les guía en medio del largo éxodo que es la vida. Da voz a quien no la tiene" (Duque Amusco 18).

With this inclination toward co-existence, the lyrical "I" in "El poeta canta por todos" gains a newfound sense of influence and purpose. As Kessel Schwartz writes, the poet
"conceives of the poetic mission as allowing humanity to express itself through him, while at the same time he recognizes himself in others, […] [t]he solitary poet joins the wave of mankind, feels their common flow of blood, and finds new hope and love, and joyfully a part of the collective voice" (124). In the final lines of this poem, the reader witnesses the appearance of the collective voice and the undiscriminating sunshine that touches the whole of humanity as they sing in unison:

> Y asciende hasta el pico claro. Y el sol se abre sobre las frentes.
> Y en la cumbre, con su grandeza, están todos ya cantando.
> Y es tu voz la que les expresa. Tu voz colectiva y alzada.
> Y un cielo de poderío, completamente existente,
> hace ahora con majestad el eco entero del hombre. (36-40)

With an ascending movement of singing, and with the growing volume of the voices, the poem declares that all are henceforth creating and chanting the unified song of humankind. Not only does

this poem emphasize the way that an individual receives strength from the group through solidarity (and then gives back to the group), but it also suggests that the poet, or poetry in general, is integral to this process. In the poem, the poet assimilates with the community as they join their hearts together, he gains confidence and strength from the group, and finally offers his voice as a mouthpiece for the collective song of all involved. Daniel Murphy recognizes that in this poem "poetry is now thematized as having a vital function. […] Aleixandre portrays his poetry as a hymn through which the eternal spirit sings itself" (31). "El poeta canta por todos," at once a text of compassion, solidarity, and community, demonstrates that societies must resist the easy path of individualistic interests in favor of coming together for the common good. Poetry and the role of the poet in society are integral to this process.

4. THE TOILSOME JOURNEY OF LIFE

While in "En la plaza" and "El poeta canta por todos" Aleixandre uses metaphors, similes, and other rhetorical devices to communicate the themes of solidarity, community, and expressing oneself, in "Vagabundo continuo" the poet employs the metaphor of the journey to create a different type of connection among human beings.[5] In this four-stanza poem, each one with differing numbers of lengthy irregular lines, Aleixandre elaborates on the journey metaphor as it relates to life, the tribulations of mortality, and

5. The metaphor of the journey, the quest, or exile as a mode of speaking about the processes and patterns of life is not new in literary expression. From ancient Greek epic poems such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer to more contemporary incarnations of the voyage (such as Constantine Cavafy's 1911 poem "Ithaca"), writers have long discussed the insight gained by traveling or wandering. For examples of this trope in works more immediate to Aleixandre's context, the interested could refer to Hispanic texts such as Antonio Machado's "Caminante, son tus huellas" poem (1912), Federico Garcia Lorca's "Vuelta de paseo" (1929), Pablo Neruda's "Walking around" (1933), or Luis Cernuda's "Peregrino" (1961).

the hope and determination that can help one persevere. Throughout the course of "Vagabundo continuo" the reader notes the development of an ethos of solidarity as "the poet recalls the remote origins of man's journey through life, [and] his arrival at the settlement of humanity, white and black, men and women, old and young" (Schwartz 124). It is in this space of common struggle that we find, according to José Luis Cano, "una serie de símbolos que representan ese largo y a veces doloroso esfuerzo que es la vida" (21).

The tone of this text, however, is more subdued than others in the collection. Whereas the previous two poems analyzed here demonstrate optimism in human potential based on individuals' connection in public spaces, this poem discusses the community of determined suffers: "Hemos andado despacio, sin acabar nunca. / Salimos una madrugada, hace mucho, oh sí, hace muchísimo" (1–2). These initial two lines establish the slow and ongoing struggle of life, the journey without end, and the lengthy history of human toil. The lines that follow amplify the difficulty of life's path:

> Hemos andado caminos, estepas, trochas, llanazos.
> Las sienes grises avanzan azotadas por vientos largos. Los cabellos
> [enredados en el polvo, en espinas, en ramas, a veces en flores.
> Oímos el bramar de las fieras, en las noches, cuando dormíamos
> [junto al fuego serenador. (3–5)

Whereas the lyrical voice in the previous poems used apostrophe to direct the poetic utterance to an individual "tú," in "Vagabundo continuo" we see an immediate identification of subjects in a collective "we," with first-person plural verb forms such as "Hemos andado" (1, 3), "Salimos" (2), and "Oímos" (5). The poetic "I" is one of many who have struggled, continuing along the rocky, windy, dark path of life. Aleixandre's text underscores the physical toil that the journey of life effects on the body. The synecdochal gray brows advance against the wind and their disheveled hair bears witness of the difficulty of their voyage. But there is comfort in knowing

that the toilsome journey in life is not taken alone, at times among "flores" (4), at times "serenador" (5). At its core, "Vagabundo continuo" urges the reader to "contempla[r] la soledad, el desamparo y el dolor de los demás" with the attempt to elucidate "el gran tema de la solidaridad humana" (Cano 21). Solidarity here is understood as compassion rather than as having a common purpose.

The lengthy drudgery "sin acabar nunca" of the journey explained in line one is enacted throughout the poem in long poetic lines (some containing over 20 words), in addition to the usage of anaphora and polysyndeton with the repetition of the word "y" at the beginning of 11 of the poem's 25 lines. These lines, in part, give the sensation that the journey is a long feat in continual process and a persistent encounter with new challenges:

> Y en los amaneceres goteantes oímos a los pájaros gritadores.
> Y vimos gruesas serpientes dibujar su pregunta, arrastrándose
> [sobre el polvo.
> Y la larga y lejana respuesta de la manada de los elefantes.
> Búfalos y bisontes, anchos, estúpidos hipopótamos, coriáceos
> [caimanes, débiles
> colibríes.
> Y las enormes cataratas donde un cuerpo humano caería como una
> [hoja.
> Y el orear de una brisa increíble.
> Y el cuchillo en la selva, y los blancos colmillos, y la enorme avenida
> [de las fieras
> y de sus víctimas huyendo de las enllamecidas devastaciones. (6–12)

These lines connect the whole of humanity with the natural world, both the animal kingdom and the environment, which are experienced (seen and heard) by the collective "we". The natural aspects of the journey of life are demonstrated with terminology majestic and sublime, as well as destructive and violent, thus suggesting that the experience of life is much like the paradoxical forces of the surrounding environment.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of the path, the final two stanzas urge the individual (both the subject invoked in the poem and

the reader as well), to persevere in their journey. In this sense, the poem establishes a sense of co-existence amidst tribulations. The lyrical "I" proclaims:

> Y luego seguir. La salida, la estepa. Otro cielo, otros climas.
> Hombre de caminar que en tus ojos lo llevas.
> Hombre que de madrugada, hace mucho, hace casi infinito, saliste.
> Adelantaste tu pie, pie primero, pie desnudo. ¿Te acuerdas?
> Y, ahora un momento inmóvil, parece que rememoras.
> Mas sigue… (20–25)

Aleixandre's poem recognizes the difficulty of the journey, yet with the usage of the verb "seguir" in lines 20 and 25, the poet offers encouragement to the "hombre de caminar" (21). For Leopoldo de Luis, these lines demonstrate "una masa humana en penosa marcha hacia la esperanza. La colectividad aquí tiene un nombre singular: es el 'vagabundo continuo', pero a él se incorporan hombres de todas las razas. El dolor y la muerte van haciendo su poda en el cuerpo múltiple del vagabundo, 'mas sigue'" (162). Certainly the path will reveal more challenges, for it is "casi infinito" (22), but it will also offer "[o]tro cielo, otros climas" (20), and new opportunities. The walker, wanderer, or "vagabundo" of the title, started the journey just one step at a time, and did so vulnerably with the "pie desnudo" (23). The lengthy "camino" studied in this poem will certainly continue, as suggested by the final ellipsis and by the title itself, but at least the subject is among others along the arduous path of life.

5. CONCLUSION

The poems from Vicente Aleixandre's 1954 poetic collection *Historia del corazón* examined here highlight some of the ethical cornerstones of the poet's oeuvre: solidarity, coexistence, compassion, and togetherness. Aleixandre envisions this impulse toward an understanding of what it means to live in a community through poetic imagery focused on public spaces like the central squa-

re and the ocean, but also through textual spaces and expressive states such as poetry itself and the toil of everyday living. In each case, these poems offer a hopeful "story of the heart," one of self-identification, strength, and friendship. In his insightful summary of the "central concerns" and "cosmic force of love" in Aleixandre's work, H. L. Boudreau writes that "[t]hree things will never disappear from Aleixandre's work: love, solidarity, and quality, but love and solidarity evolve to include man and everyday circumstantial life in ways not too different from those of other early postwar poets" (16). Indeed, if contact with others is a defining characteristic of becoming more actualized as human beings and an integral facet of learning to live more compassionately in our communities, then Aleixandre's poetry offers powerful metaphors that help outline the necessary relationship between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the self and the other.

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