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# POÉTICAS

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## OCTAVIO PAZ

### ARTÍCULOS

Marco Antonio Campos  
POEMAS DE APOLLINAIRE  
TRADUCIDOS  
POR OCTAVIO PAZ

Richard Berengarten  
OCTAVIO PAZ  
IN CAMBRIDGE, 1970.  
REFLECTIONS  
AND ITERATIONS

### ESTUDIOS

Xicoténcatl Martínez Ruiz  
OCTAVIO PAZ:  
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# «OCTAVIO PAZ IN CAMBRIDGE, 1970. REFLECTIONS AND ITERATIONS»<sup>1</sup>

—  
OCTAVIO PAZ EN CAMBRIDGE, 1970.  
REFLEJOS E ITERACIONES  
—

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## RESUMEN

PALABRAS CLAVE { Octavio Paz, Cambridge, Mundo Anglosajón, Poesía }

En este trabajo asistimos a una dimensión del mundo y la vida personal y cultural de Octavio Paz en ocasiones olvidada por los teóricos: la relación del poeta con el mundo anglosajón, y su estancia en Cambridge. A partir de los testimonios y la narración de una historia —íntima en el tono y la forma—, que, aunque se aleja de un tono estrictamente académico, no por ello deja de aportarnos información valiosa a este respecto; en el presente artículo nos adentramos de lleno en las experiencias, saberes y reflexiones que podemos extraer de este periodo de la vida de Octavio Paz, cuestionando temas siempre candentes como la dificultad de un escritor para educarse a un contexto lingüístico que no es el suyo, o cómo todas las literaturas —pese a las diferencias originarias de sus orígenes y la lejanía de sus proyecciones— son, en realidad, un todo que se asemeja mucho más de lo que en un primer momento pudiera parecernos.

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ABSTRACT

KEY WORDS { Octavio Paz, Cambridge, English-speaking World, Poetry }

In this work we witness a dimension of Octavio Paz's world and his personal and cultural life that is sometimes forgotten by theorists: the poet's relationship with the English-Speaking world, and his stay in Cambridge. From the testimonies and the narration of a story — intimate in tone and form — which, although it is far from a strictly academic tone, does not fail to provide us with valuable information in this regard; in the present article we enter fully into the experiences, knowledge and reflections that /we can extract from this period of Octavio Paz's life, questioning always burning issues such as the difficulty of a writer to educate himself in a linguistic context that is not his own, or how all literatures — despite the original differences in their origins and the remoteness of their projections — are, in reality, a whole that is much more similar than it might seem at first.

*a bundle of reflections*  
*left in my hands*                      *I walk without moving forward*  
*We never arrive*                      *Never reach where we are*  
*Not the past*                              *The present is untouchable*

\*

*With great difficulty, going forward millimetres as year, I am  
cutting a passage through the rock ...*

*... I have been spending the second  
Part of my life breaking the stones, penetrating the walls, boring  
Through the doors and pushing aside the obstacles that I had placed  
Between myself and the light during the first part of my life.*

\*

*Poetry does not attempt to discover what there is at the end of the road; it conceives of the text as a series of transparent strata within which the various parts — the different verbal and semantic currents — produce momentary configurations as they reflect each other or efface each other. Poetry contemplates itself, fuses with itself, and obliterates itself in the crystallizations of language.<sup>2</sup>*

\*

Of all the poets I have known personally, Octavio Paz has had the strongest and most lasting effect on me. For this reason it is a huge pleasure to have been invited to think about him again at this inspiring conference, to have the chance to record some personal memories, to say something about our friendship forty-five years ago, and about his influence on my writing since then. There are many poets around the world who are his direct heirs, including some of us here. I am proud to be counted among them.

I was introduced to Octavio and Marie-José Paz in Cambridge in 1970 by my friend and fellow-poet Anthony Rudolf. Tony and I had been undergraduates at Cambridge from 1961 to 1964. I have been grateful to him for that introduction ever since.

In 1970, Octavio was fifty-five years old and I was twenty-six. I was fascinated by him from the outset. I had never met a writer from the Spanish-speaking world before, let alone Mexico. I had studied English at Cambridge, and in the mid-to-late 1960s my poetic interests lay mainly in Italy and Greece. From 1964 to 1966 I had lived in Padua and Venice and, in 1967-78, in Thebes and Athens. In 1965, I translated poems by Cesare Pavese and Aldo Vianello, and in Venice I once half-met Ezra Pound. In Greece, I had been discovering the work of George Seferis, as well as other modern Greek poets, including Constantine Cavafy, Yannis Ritsos, Odysseus Elytis, and Nikos Gatsos; and since the 1967 *coup d'état*, I had been very much involved in the campaign to restore democracy to Greece.<sup>3</sup> These interests and preoccupations gave me little direct context in which to place Octavio. Nor did I know his work. If the-

re was any advantage in my ignorance, it was that I first met him as a man rather than as a writer.

He turned out to be very good company. With quick, quizzical and gentle eyes, cheerful, curious about everything and open to the ideas of others, he was courteous, a *bon vivant* and a relaxed and attentive conversationalist. My curiosity deepened quickly after our first conversation, when I discovered that he was entirely familiar with what I regarded as my own ground, and knew much of it in considerably greater breadth, depth and detail than I did. We began by talking about Pound. I presented an enthusiastic argument that in retrospect I see as naïve, even schoolboyish. I advocated Pound as a revolutionary innovator who had inaugurated a poetry based on living speech that stripped away the outmoded language of the English Victorians. I cited the direct colloquial language of Imagism. I spoke of his “breaking the hexameter” as “the first heave”,<sup>4</sup> and of the wide open spaces in the *Cantos*, in which everything was connected, somehow or other, by parataxis. And so on. I felt informed, confident and in my stride. Octavio was quick to take issue, modifying this simple (and very English) view by pointing out the contrived quality of the Imagist poems, the high artifice (and artificiality) of Pound’s reworkings of the troubadours, and above all his opening up of the huge domain of Chinese poetry to English and other Western literatures. He argued for a far subtler dialectic between tradition and innovation than I had proposed, redolent of Eliot’s classic essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’.<sup>5</sup>

From that point on, I began to listen to Octavio very attentively. For one thing, his perspectives were international and panoramic where mine, for all my cosmopolitan Jewishness (or rather *Judeity*)<sup>6</sup> and for all my widening, deepening sense of Europeanness, were still insular and narrow. For another, he thought of the history of poetry not as a series of developments that could ever be blithely metered by means of some facile notion of ‘progress’. As I read

later in the English edition of *Alternating Current*, “It is difficult – or even absurd– to believe that such a thing as progress exists in the realm of art.” And, in the same book: “Though it perpetually changes, poetry does not advance.” And again: “Poetry is our only recourse against rectilinear time – against progress.”<sup>7</sup> And then again, with his characteristically crisp turn of phrase, edging surreptitiously into epigram to mock attitudes among Mexican critics who liked to use “the word ‘underdevelopment’ to describe the situation in Hispano-American arts and letters”:

“Cavafy, Borges, Unamuno and Reyes cannot be labelled ‘underdeveloped’ writers, despite the marginal economic status of Greece, Spain, and Latin America. Moreover, the rush to ‘develop’ reminds me of nothing so much as a frantic race to arrive at the gates of hell ahead of everyone else.”<sup>8</sup>

\*

The first book of Octavio’s that I read was *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. I have a copy that he signed for me in Cambridge in 1970. At the end of the eighth of its nine chapters, this sentence occurs: “For the first time in our history we are contemporaries of all mankind.”<sup>9</sup> This struck me with all the heuristic force of unexpected recognition. I read his word “we” not just as *we Mexicans* but as *we humans*. That is, I took the statement to mean that the condition of the modern Mexican is a paradigm for the modern human: for all of us, all over the world, and for all time. So for me Octavio’s “we” included not only the collective posterity addressed by François Villon –“frères humains qui après nous vivez”<sup>10</sup>– but all human beings across the vast span of “time present and time past” and “time future” surveyed by Eliot in *Four Quartets*.<sup>11</sup> Equally, therefore, “all humanity” had to include not only all present and future generations but also those of the past. In this way, then, poems speak to and for the dead just as they do to and for the living and not-yet-born. In my second book and first long poem, *Avebury*,<sup>12</sup> written almost immediately after Octavio’s departure

and permeated by the influence of his *Sun Stone*, (*Piedra del Sol*),<sup>13</sup> this sentence of his became a key motif. I deployed it as an epigraph, along with a sentence from the Bible and another from Heraclitus. And I keep coming back to it. It has returned forty-one years later, as one of two epigraphs, along with a quotation from George Seferis, in a chapbook on poetics to which I have given the title *Imagens I*.<sup>14</sup> This single sentence of Octavio's has become a kind of talisman for me, imbued as it were with an ancient depth and timeless power. Seferis and Paz, my two twentieth-century models and masters.

\*

When Octavio engaged in discussion of a topic, he did so entertainingly and animatedly, usually incisively and passionately, and always on frank, equal terms. He could deliver insights with the force of mini-revelations, often in apparently casual asides. The breadth and boldness of his cross-cultural and pan-historical syntheses, which often came across in hints and implications of deeper connectivities than were apparent on the surface, were –to me as a young poet– fascinating and eye-opening. Now in retrospect, it's clear to me that most of those hints have opened or led to paths I hadn't yet noticed, let alone recognised, many of which I would start to travel later and am still unfolding and following now: a travelling consisting of a continuous and constantly repeated unfolding, following *and* returning, in a redoubling to-and-fro movement, typical of Octavio. And themes and patternings broached by him constantly recur. Recursion and iteration; cyclicity and spirality. Motion in stillness, stillness in motion. Chaos and order in a similar binary correlation. 'Notness' and 'isness' intertwined like lovers; eros and psyche interpenetrating and wound around each other like a caduceus – the universal dance that meshes being with not-being. And again and again, the theme of returning. And overall and always: wonder, discovery, delight. I quickly began to recognise that Octavio was a master with a vision of and for humanity and poetry that was as passionate as it was intelligent, and that



I was enormously lucky to have the chance not only to learn from him but to be his friend. I discovered, too, that in Octavio's world, lines drawn through and across the borders of contradiction tend to meet and merge in the centrality of paradox. And without the pleats and leaps of paradox, dialectics is two-dimensional, flat, a mug's game.

\*

Most poets I have known personally oscillate between introversion and extraversion, and Octavio was no exception. Perhaps it could even be said that while his poetry is deeply meditative and interiorised, however reflective much of his prose may often be, the latter also tends to be outward-going, witty, intellectually terse, and analytical, alert, politicised, flexed with rhetoric, supple in innuendo and irony, and packed with reference, information and history.

During his time in Cambridge, Octavio had plenty of privacy for his writing. He was working on the meditative book-length prose-poem *The Monkey Grammarian*.<sup>15</sup> Even so, he and Marie-Jo were far from being reclusive. Both relished company and thrived on it. Quickly and effortlessly, they began to gather around themselves a small entourage of Cambridge poets and their spouses, including Elaine Feinstein and her husband the biologist Arnold,<sup>16</sup> Ezra Pound's son Omar and his wife Elizabeth, and my first wife Kim and me. Charles and Brenda Tomlinson, who were old friends, visited from Bristol, as did Anthony Rudolf from London, together with Danny Weissbort and the French poet Michel Couturier.<sup>17</sup> Evenings with Octavio and Marie-Jo were relaxed and sparkling, with a sense of fun and vitality refreshingly remote from the usual intense, self-serious and relatively speaking morose atmosphere of typical Cambridge social intercourse. Now that I think back to those small, spontaneous gatherings, it seems to me that elective affinities had a lot to do with their warmth and energy.

At Churchill College, Octavio is likely to have come into contact with the literary critic and philosophical theorist George Steiner. They had much in common, not least their comparatist, multi-lingual frames of reference and their passionate interest in translation.<sup>18</sup> But I don't know how often Octavio met him, if at all, or whether he engaged in college social life, which then as now tended to revolve around lunches and dinners. I never had the impression that he was especially keen on mixing with Cambridge academics.

\*

As I was preparing to write this memoir, I came across a feature article that I had written just before Octavio's departure from Cambridge:

"In conversation, Paz ranges effortlessly and lightly over a great range of subjects – poetry, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, art, music. This Coleridgean range of knowledge comes over in his writing. His erudition is immense and he can switch from a witty discussion of the merits and limitations of concrete poetry (which he has written), to obscure literatures like Japanese (from which he has translated). After this he is likely to talk about Buddhism, or John Cage, or Cervantes, or Chomsky, or Cummings, or Wordsworth. His knowledge of Spanish and French literature is that of a specialist, and he has a deep understanding of English and American literature too, particularly of the modern movements. For Paz, the "central" modern poetic tradition in the west passes from Blake, Wordsworth and the English Romantics back to France, to Baudelaire and the French symbolists, and then through Dada to Surrealism. As a poet, he has always been interested and involved in the avant-garde, and he is quick to point out how the tradition of modernism in both Spanish and English poetry derives from the Symbolists."<sup>19</sup>

To amplify these comments: Octavio's conversation was far richer than I'd had space to explore in that journalistic piece, written forty-five years ago. As poet, traveller and former diplomat, man of

the world and man of interior depths, polyglot and polymath, he ranged over many topics, from Spanish and Latin American poets — for example, Lorca, Neruda, Borges, Huidobro and Vallejo, to the Surrealists, especially André Breton, whom he had known personally and respected highly.<sup>20</sup> Intellectually, while Octavio's range of interests was huge and varied, his main engagements were with French thinkers, and he was steeped in the contemporary Parisian world of ideas. At that time he was actively reading the then-current theorists of the *Tel Quel* group, whom he found intellectually stimulating but was quick to criticise on theoretical and political grounds, both for the narrowness of their Marxist dialectics and, as I remember, their lack of a 'sensuous' or tactile response to poetry. Though I had already read some Roland Barthes,<sup>21</sup> this was the first time I heard other names that soon would be on everyone's lips: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva. He often spoke of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose work he both admired and wrestled with, and on whom he had written a brilliantly incisive short study, *Claude Lévi-Strauss, An Introduction*.<sup>22</sup> And he talked excitedly about the Spanish-English-French-Italian *renga* that he had co-written in Paris in April in the previous year with Charles Tomlinson, Jacques Roubaud and Eduardo Sanguinetti: a brilliant experiment in multilingual poetry and of huge interest and relevance for a transcultural poetics.<sup>23</sup>

A repeatedly articulated theme in conversation was his falling out with Neruda, whom he could never forgive for the latter's insistence on continuing to support Communism despite the atrocities committed under Stalinism and in the Communist world. I don't personally remember Octavio talking about contemporary Mexican politics, or his resignation from his ambassadorship to India in opposition to the shooting of students demonstrating against the Olympic Games in Mexico in the previous year. Nor do I know if he talked of it with others. I think he saw his time in Cambridge as a respite, giving him a chance to distance himself quietly, interiorise, and establish new directions.

He spoke occasionally about how his experiences in India and exposure to Buddhist and Hindu practices and philosophy had affected him. In retrospect I see how thoroughly these eastern ways of being and thinking permeated his thought and poetry, as did Daoism and Zen. In Octavio's writings of that time, especially *The Monkey Grammarian*, Eastern themes and perspectives belong no less organically than Western ones. Their formulation and expression appear neither grafted nor transplanted, as they so often tend to do in the compensatory and appropriative North American and British counter-cultures of the 1960s. Rather, both frames of reference are subtly integrated and modulated, coalescing seamlessly with his deep sense of Mexican history, of himself as a modern Mexican man and poet of international modernity. For all his Europeanness, Octavio was never a European, and his forays into oriental culture are never those of the 'typical' westerner.

And here, as I plunge back into and out of the mists behind recall, it occurs me that there were other topics that I now no longer remember appearing in his conversations. Proust and Joyce, for example? I ask myself now, have I forgotten, or did he not refer to them?

\*

Very soon after meeting Octavio, I began to think of him as a mentor, even though nothing of the kind was ever stated between us, for there was never anything remotely condescending about his behaviour towards me or anyone else in Cambridge; and I think he would have abhorred any confession of that kind. At our last meeting on a chilly day in December 1970, when I had driven him back from somewhere-or-other to Churchill College, as we walked from the car park towards his apartment I risked an attempt to express my warm and affectionate feelings towards him. As if sensing what was about to come, Octavio quickly put a hand on my forearm, paused, moved his other hand over his chest, looked down

at the ground, and said out of the blue, “Richard, I think I have lost a button from my raincoat.” We both laughed.

\*

Experiment and originality in the arts excited Octavio. He often voiced his interest in Marcel Duchamp; and the English version of his book on the French artist appeared during his time in Cambridge.<sup>24</sup> Although he had rejected the ‘automatic writing’ advocated as a compositional strategy by André Breton, Octavio was still attracted by all kinds of aleatory methods of composition in poetry, music and painting: Dada and Surrealism, the work of Robert Rauschenberg and of John Cage, not to mention the *Oulipo* group, who included Jacques Roubaud, one of the four participants in the *Renga* project. Octavio’s characteristically crisply formulated comments on chance are particularly revealing. In his essay on Charles Tomlinson’s graphics, he writes: “Chance is never produced by chance. Chance possesses a logic – is a logic.” And then: “we ought to accept chance as we accept the appearance of an unsummoned rhyme.” And further: “What we call chance is nothing but the sudden revelation of relationships between things. Chance is an aspect of analogy. Its unexpected advent provokes the immediate response of analogy.”<sup>25</sup>

In 2014, I discovered from a short book on the history of *I Ching* that Octavio had been exploring the Chinese *Book of Changes* as early as 1958, and that much later, in 1976, he met John Cage, when the composer visited Mexico City.<sup>26</sup> He was a strong admirer of *Silence*, which in 1967 he called “one of the most poetic and stimulating books I have read in recent years”.<sup>27</sup> I had been fascinated by the *I Ching* ever since I first discovered it as a student in 1962, years before I had heard of Cage’s work or met Octavio. Curiously, it now turns out that I had been following similar explorative approaches into the *I Ching* in the early 1960s, but by independent routes. My book *Changing*,<sup>28</sup> a long poem rooted in the *I Ching*, explores coherences instantiated, revealed and sustained

by chance and analogy. It should be added here, too, that the “sudden revelation of relationships between things” that Octavio writes about in relation to Charles Tomlinson is not only the basis of the ‘correlative thinking’ that underpins the claims of the *I Ching* as a book of divination,<sup>29</sup> but also of Carl Gustav Jung’s theory of synchronicity,<sup>30</sup> of sympathetic magic in general (another area of interest of Octavio’s, once again following Breton),<sup>31</sup> and of the poetic experience itself, as articulated by Wordsworth:

“I mean to speak  
Of that interminable building rear’d  
By observation of affinities  
In objects where no brotherhood exists  
To passive minds.”<sup>32</sup>

To Octavio, then, what is called chance is just one of the modes through which our perception registers the inherent coherence and connectivity of things.

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Like the Egyptian-born French-Jewish poet Edmond Jabès, Octavio was also fascinated by the book, both as concept and in its materiality and texture: on the one hand, the idea of the world and time *as* Book — a theme both very ancient and very modern — and on the other, the endless potential that books contain in themselves for variation in design, format and typography. Shortly after leaving Cambridge, he sent me a signed copy of a beautifully printed edition of his poem *Blanco*.<sup>33</sup> This volume, when opened up, unfolds like a concertina as a single long sheet or scroll of paper between its two covers, implying continuity and cyclicity. I found and continue to find this playfulness delightful, elegant, challenging and fertile. Ever since then, partly inspired by Octavio, I have been trying out similar bondings and blendings of poetic text and experimental format. My *Book With No Back Cover*,<sup>34</sup> for example, has two beginnings, a middle, and no end – a challenge,

among other things, to Aristotle's convention of time in the *Poetics*; while *Changing*, referred to above, will consist of sixty-four folios gathered together in a box, like B. S. Johnson's experimental novel *The Unfortunates*.<sup>35</sup> The folios can be read in any order. In these ways, I have continued to learn from Octavio and to reapply and extend his themes. Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard.

\*

Octavio and Marie-Jo were magnanimous towards others and entered into the spirit of local literary events with gusto. On December 8, 1970, there was a poetry reading to celebrate the opening of the new auditorium at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, then known locally as 'the Tech'.<sup>36</sup> This involved six local poets, all of whom were teaching there: Miles Burrows, Elaine Feinstein, Marcus Grant, John James, Omar Pound, and myself. I have a vivid memory of Octavio and Marie-Jo sitting in the front row on the extreme left near the entrance. When I glanced at Octavio, he was smiling and appeared to be enjoying himself. Later, he ribbed me about an ironic little poem that I had read, a piece of quippery, which he said reminded me of Apollinaire, much to my delight, adding for good measure that the best poets in Cambridge were at the Tech, not in the university. He meant this, and perhaps he was right.

Despite the difference in generation between us, there were quieter and more intimate evenings too. Kim and I usually met up with Octavio and Marie-Jo in Cambridge itself or at their apartment at Churchill College, about half a mile from the centre. On November 5, 1970, I drove them out to our little three-up, two-down semi-detached house in Great Shelford, five miles out of Cambridge, for a meal and a Guy Fawkes Night bonfire and modest display of fireworks—mainly sparklers—in our back garden, which we were putting on for our two small children and children of friends.<sup>37</sup>

\*

As I have suggested, although Octavio was deeply read in English and American thought and literature, the historical and contemporary reference points that excited him, drew him out and motivated him most keenly, were far more to do with the Spanish and French speaking worlds than the Anglophone. “My classics are those of my language,” he writes in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “and I consider myself to be a descendent of Lope and Quevedo, as any Spanish writer would ... yet I am not a Spaniard.”<sup>38</sup> To him Paris was the centre of European intellectual and artistic ferment, not London. And certainly not Cambridge. On his visits to London in 1970, I don’t believe that Octavio was in contact with any writers considered — either by themselves or others — to be leading lights in the English literary Establishment of the time. Among most English poets, I don’t think he was yet known or appreciated, let alone widely read, other than by a few pioneers, like Anthony Rudolf and the young poet Donald Gardner, who had already made fine translations of his poems and of his book on Marcel Duchamp.

Clearly then, Octavio’s presence in England in 1970 preceded his reputation, not in the sense that he already had one, but because it had scarcely yet begun to form, let alone coalesce and expand into the fulness of international acclaim that would culminate twenty years later in the Nobel Prize (1990). It is true that he had already attended the first *Poetry International* festival in London in 1967, along with Pablo Neruda, and that *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, had been published in England by Allen Lane in that year, a considerable time after the 1961 American edition from Grove Press. But the bilingual London edition of his first ‘Selected Poems’ in English, entitled *Configurations*, came out from Jonathan Cape in 1971 – after his departure from Cambridge. The only British translator among the nine represented in that book was Charles Tomlinson, the others being from the United States, with one from India.<sup>39</sup> 1971 was also the year in which Pablo Neruda’s *Selected Poems* was issued by Cape, and in which *The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse* appeared.



\*

AN EXCURSUS

It isn't a simple matter to understand how a writer is received or perceived in another country, culture and language; and the still very recent historical perspective we now have on Octavio's *oeuvre* can only provide a relatively close-up view. Accounts of friends, inevitably, are subjective and biased. Even so, as an excursus here, it may be interesting to suggest some sort of preliminary sketch – even one that is partial and partisan– of some of the contradictory aspects of English poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. surrounding Octavio's year in Cambridge.

During that time, tendencies towards internationalism vied with 'Little Englandism', and both aspects could even appear in the same poet. Despite Al Alvarez's 'Beyond the Gentility Principle', which was first advocated in 1960 or 1961 in an article in the *Observer*, a xenophobic and prudish conservatism was still a force among the literary Establishment, strongly influenced by such morose figures as Philip Larkin and the poets of 'The Group' and 'The Movement'. These collective names (which are of course avoidances of names, masks intended to muffle rather than reveal anything interesting) indicate a very English tendency to suspect 'intellectuals' and 'ideas'; partly as a result of which, the *raisons d'être* and aspirations of these associations remained as deliberately vague, understated and miserly as the achievements of their members and proponents. In poetics, just as in politics, most of these insular attitudes still prevail today nearly half a century later, though considerably less overtly and sharply, since even the canons and deacons of the English Literary Establishment have had to adopt a new political correctness in order to allow for a more recent multiculturalism and ethnic diversity among younger English poets, and to admit increasing numbers of women poets, many of whom are articulate feminists.

What is less well-known, however, is that among many of the English poets who considered themselves radical or avant-garde in the 1960s, there was an equally chill undercurrent of linguistic xenophobia. For example, in Cambridge, the younger poets in the clique surrounding J. H. Prynne seemed to be predominately if not exclusively interested in their own friends and contemporaries. With their emphasis on open forms and disrupting syntax, their main and perhaps only affiliations outside the UK were with a select group of North American poets, especially the Objectivists, and Black Mountain poets such as Charles Olson and Ed Dorn, and a very few Europeans, for example Paul Celan. Younger English poets in Cambridge with these kinds of leanings took no interest in Octavio, even though many of his experiments in poetic form were far more interesting than theirs. They offered him no welcome or hospitality and, if anything, studiously ignored his presence, even though it was well known to them that he was spending a year in the city. Paradoxically, their set of exclusive attitudes and behaviours was not entirely dissimilar from some aspects of the Surrealist Movement, but trammelled up in a particularly English web of cerebrality, narrow-mindedness, understatement, suspicion of emotion, and insularity.

By contrast, since as early as 1950, tendencies to internationalism had begun to break through into post-war English poetry. Peter Russell's pioneering magazine *Nine*, with its Poundian ethos, introduced the first English translations of stories by Jorge Luis Borges: 'Death and the Compass' in summer 1950 and 'The Library of Babel' in the end of that year.<sup>40</sup> From 1959 on, *Agenda*, founded by William Cookson under Peter Russell's influence, sporadically published international poets, for example its issue dedicated to Giacomo Ungaretti in 1969.<sup>41</sup> By the mid-1960s, international tendencies had become unstoppable and the entire literary culture was flooded by wave on wave of translations. International events included the Beat *Poetry Incarnation* at the Albert Hall, organised by Michael Horovitz and others, in 1965; and the London *Poetry*

*International*, founded by Ted Hughes in 1967 – which, as mentioned above, Neruda and Octavio both attended in that year. *Modern Poetry in Translation* was also founded by Daniel Weissbort and Ted Hughes in 1967; and in 1968, Peter Jay launched Anvil Press Poetry with two books, one by Peter Levi and the other containing my translations of Aldo Vianello.<sup>42</sup> In 1969, with its title derived directly from Borges, Anthony Rudolf's occasional magazine of translated poems, *The Journals of Pierre Menard* appeared and evolved seamlessly into Menard Press, which also specialised in translated texts. Meanwhile, between 1967 and 1971, Cape Editions, edited by Nathaniel Tarn, published an astonishing array of short prose and poetic texts from many different languages, including translations from the Spanish of Ortega y Gasset, Nicanor Parra, Fidel Castro, and Pablo Neruda. The international movement of concrete, visual and sound poetry had strong proponents in England, especially Dom Sylvester Houédard and Bob Cobbing.

Even so, international orientations at that time tended to be directed more towards Western and Eastern Europe, including Russia, and the USA than the Spanish-speaking world. The hugely accessible and influential *Penguin European Poets* series by definition did not extend to Latin America.<sup>43</sup> While Penguin had already published Lorca in 1960, and Borges's volume of stories, *Labyrinths*, was first published in English in 1962, *The Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation*, edited by George Steiner, first appeared in 1966. But *The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse* did not appear until 1971, the same year in which Pablo Neruda's *Selected Poems* was published in London by Jonathan Cape – after Octavio's stay in England.

To this it should be added that Octavio's work was known and appreciated in France several years before he had any reputation at all in England. The fine book on his life and work by Claire Cécé in the *Poètes d'Aujourd'hui* series appeared in 1965, including eighty pages of translated poems and prose texts.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, eight

years later, in 1973, the prevailing English ignorance about Paz in England was commented on in a terse review of *Alternate Current* by Michael Kustow, director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, in one of London's newspapers:

“Say ‘Latin-American literature’ to your average intelligent British reader and Borges and Neruda is likely to be the reply. But a collection of essays by a poet and philosopher-critic at least as formidable as the Argentinian and the Chilean has recently appeared, scarcely noticed by insular British literati.

[...] In 1968 [Paz] resigned as ambassador in protest against his Government's slaughter of students demonstrating during the Olympic Games. He became an itinerant professor in Europe, spending a year at Cambridge, during which I met him: a compact dapper man with a dazzling smile and a mane of glossy black hair.

[...] His intelligence and his heart recognise the importance for our lives of both Marx and Rimbaud. And he can still affirm basic verities: “Language is what makes us human. [...] Poetry, which is the perfection of speech –language speaking to itself– is an invitation to enjoy the whole of life.”

The moral confidence of that statement is alien to our tetchy and difficult intellectual climate. Octavio Paz's writing speaks to our national heart failure with the conviction of a thoroughly modern spirit that has not cauterised its ancient roots. [...] What Paz says of Sartre applies to him: “Thinking and writing are not ceremonies but acts”.<sup>45</sup>

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When the definitive biography of Octavio Paz eventually gets written, I've no doubt that his time in Cambridge will come to be seen as one of relative quiet and recuperation, but not of total seclusion. As it was, Cambridge could never have held him for long. A year was enough. In the same feature article mentioned earlier, I wrote:

“In Cambridge, apart from giving regular seminars and lectures in the university, Paz has lived retiringly – studying, writing (“but just

prose, not poetry”) in his flat in Churchill College, occasionally entertaining or visiting friends with his wife Marie-José, and paying frequent visits to London. He has also made several flying trips to Paris, where he has many good friends from his days there after the war.

Intellectual life in Cambridge tends to be slow, sober and specialised, and Paz, who was born in Mexico City and has lived many years abroad –not just in France but also Spain, the USA, Japan and India– in a metropolitan by upbringing and a cosmopolitan by nature. He confesses that he has found life in Cambridge congenial, but dull. All the same, he is quick to praise the architectural beauty of the town, and the privacy he has enjoyed. Both he and his wife were sad to leave.<sup>46</sup>

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Speaking personally, I can't stress too strongly how fine were the times I spent in Octavio's and Marie-Jo's company. That whole year was vitalised by their presence. There was a spark, a sparkle, a *joie de vivre* about them both that was infectious. Marie-Jo contributed hugely to this. An exquisitely beautiful Corsican woman, with her delicate aquiline features, shoulder-length straight jet-black hair and elegant figure usually draped in floor-length skirts, she had a natural and elegant style and grace. Everything about and around her flowed. She was hospitable, interested in what we were doing, and often very funny. To all their friends in Cambridge, Octavio and Marie-Jo seemed perfectly matched as a couple. When he called out to her, whether across or from another room, “Marie-Jo,” in that particular crackly, affectionate tone of voice of his, it always implied that he needed to consult her opinion – urgently.<sup>47</sup> And while each of them came across as strong individual personalities, it was clear that they belonged completely to each other, and that he couldn't do without her.

When they left Cambridge, it seemed a much duller, drearier place.

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In 1972, Anthony Rudolf and I put together a small anthology, a chapbook in a limited edition of 350 copies, entitled *An Octave for Octavio Paz*. It contained short poems by eight poets who had known or met Octavio: Charles Tomlinson, Elaine Feinstein, Omar S. Pound, Miles Burrows, Daniel Weissbort, John James, Anthony Rudolf and myself.<sup>48</sup> The idea was to mark, as simply and quietly as possible, a tribute to Octavio's passing through England, like a breath of fire.

In the following year, sitting on top of a bus from Great Shelford to Cambridge, and shortly after Ezra Pound's death, I conceived of the idea of a large international poetry festival in Cambridge: a celebration of the Word and of words, a kind of poetic *fiesta* in the fullest Pazian sense. I was twenty-nine years old. I tried to dismiss the idea, but it refused to go away, it possessed me; and the first festival took place in April 1975, with over a hundred poets taking part from many different countries. For reasons that I no longer remember, Octavio and Marie-Jo weren't able to come. But let me affirm here that the international Cambridge Poetry Festival, which ran as a biennial *vento* until 1985, was a definite and palpable — even if indirect — part of Octavio's heritage in England. What I was trying to do in it, above all — and knew *then* that I was trying to do — was to restore or recreate at least something of the flare, the flair, that Octavio had brought to Cambridge.

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And so, back to elective affinities. As poets, I think we are both *given* and *find* our own ancestors, antecedents, masters. And we not only discover but choose and are chosen by our 'traditions'. In my case, Octavio's vision of poetry meshed entirely with the poetics that I was gradually shaping, formulating and testing in my late twenties and early thirties. His beliefs and practices, on and off the page, grounded and rooted mine and helped them grow. Here, I suggest four motifs and characteristics, both in Octavio's writings and in my memories of him as a man, which sustained me then, and still do.

First, I have taken on Octavio's understanding that the term 'modernism' has been curiously inadequate theoretically –as has the even more dubious term that has followed it, 'postmodernism'– in making much (if any) sense of the poetry, art and thought of our time. In his words: "Our age is the only one to have chosen a meaningless adjective to describe itself: modern. Since modern times will inevitably cease to be modern, this is tantamount to not having any name at all."<sup>49</sup> This preoccupation resurfaces in his writing two decades later: "Nor is it obvious what is meant by *modernity*. The first difficulty we encounter is the elusive and ever-changing nature of the word itself. What is 'modern' is inherently transitory. ... The Modern Age will soon be tomorrow's antiquity." And, later, in the same essay, "[T]o denote our own period, the expression 'postmodernist era' has been widely used. A label as ambivalent and contradictory as modernism itself. What comes after the modern cannot be anything but ultramodern: a modernity even more modern than yesterday's. ... To call ourselves 'postmodern' is merely a naïve way of saying that we are extremely modern."<sup>50</sup> And three years later, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he returns yet again to this theme, modifying it slightly to suggest that whatever is modern is at once protean, slippery, liquid: "Modernity is a word in search of its meaning. Is it an idea, a mirage or a movement of history? Are we the children of modernity or are we its creators? Nobody knows for sure. Nor does it matter much: we follow it, we pursue it." And he adds: "In recent years there has been much talk of 'postmodernism'. But what is postmodernism if not an even more modern modernity."<sup>51</sup>

Second, I share Octavio's belief that throughout the modern period, all literatures have necessarily and *de facto* become part of one literature, all poetries part of one poetry. I trace the beginning of that period to a precise place and date: 13 May, 1871 in Charleville, France, when the 16-year-old Arthur Rimbaud announced in a letter to his former teacher Georges Izambard, nicknamed Zanzibar: "*Je est un autre*."<sup>52</sup> Now I no longer even remember whether this idea was originally Octavio's or mine based on his.

Third: another return. I believe that at the precise mid-point of the twentieth century, with the first Mexican publication of *El Laberinto de la Soledad* in 1950 –and specifically with Octavio’s statement quoted earlier: “For the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all mankind”– an entirely *new* perspective unfolded for poetry. I regard this statement to be no less significant in the history of world poetry than Rimbaud’s. For since then, in both geopolitical and ecological frames of reference, it has made full sense to think and speak articulately of a ‘universal’ vision or understanding among all people of all cultures, not only poets. Similar remarks and implications are scattered through *Alternating Current*, first published in Mexico seventeen years later: “Today we all speak, if not the same tongue, the same *universal* language” (my emphasis, *RB*). And from his discussion of the literary achievement of Mexican poets since Rubén Darío: “These poets are part of the *universal* modern tradition and their works are no less important than those of Benn, Yeats, Michaux, Ungaretti, Montale” (again my emphasis, *RB*).<sup>53</sup>

What is more, the belief both in poetry’s universality and in the necessity of poetry to humanity, which runs as a constantly intertwining thread through Octavio’s writing, surfaces again into explicit brilliance in the essay ‘The Other Voice’, written in 1989, nine years before his death:

“Since the Paleolithic, poetry has been a part of the life of *all human societies* (emphasis mine, *RB*); no society exists that has not known one form of poetry or another. But although tied to a specific soil and a specific history, poetry has always been open, in each and every one of its manifestations, to a transhistorical beyond. I do not mean a religious beyond. I am speaking of the *other side* of reality. That perception is common to all men in all periods: it is an experience that seems to me *prior* to all religions and philosophies.”<sup>54</sup>

Here the prose takes on a clarity no less intense than Wordsworth’s affirmation in his ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads* and a tone no less



exalted than Shelley's celebration in his 'Defence of Poetry'.<sup>55</sup> The entire essay ends on a note of triumphant universalism, deepened by yet another Pazian "return" – in this case, to universal human origins, but tempered by a modern warning expressing the millennarian doubts and fears of the nuclear age:

"The first hunters and gatherers looked at themselves in astonishment one day, for an interminable instant, in the still waters of a poem. Since that moment, people have not stopped looking at themselves in this mirror. And they have seen themselves, at one and the same time, as creators of images and images of their creations. For that reason, I can say with a modicum of certainty, that so long as there are people, there will be poetry. The relationship, however, may be broken. Born of the human imagination, it may die if imagination dies or is corrupted. If human beings forget poetry, they will forget themselves. And return to original chaos."<sup>56</sup>

From these passages, and specifically from the phrase "tied to a specific soil and a specific history", I think it is clear that Paz's universalism implies no kind of imperialism, colonialism or oppression, but on the contrary, a poetics wrought and written with full respect to (and in full cognizance of) the vast array of particulars, differences and othernesses that are indelibly inscribed –even if in an ink that may not always be easily visible– into the locations, landscapes, vistas, dialects, tribes, peoples, nations, religions, histories, ideologies, complexes and double-binds that make up the individual lives of all human beings. Octavio's work always remains fully and completely Mexican. I also think that, as such, this universalism belongs in a poetic context that is wholly consonant with the uniquenesses of phenomenal instantiations that William Blake called the "minute particulars" and for which Gerard Manley Hopkins coined the term "instress" and "inscape". It has always been the joyful burden of poetry to register these singular instantiations in time, and to transmit them across time and for all time. Furthermore, these expressions of *thisness* (*haecceittas*), which in the first and last resort are not only 'Romantic' but intricately

linked to religious and mystical experience, correlate directly with the ancient Kabbalistic idea of the *Shekhinah*, which means both ‘dwelling place’ and transient presence of ‘glory’ or ‘splendour’.

But if it is so old, at least as old as the Paleolithic, how then is Paz’s universalism *new*? The answer, I think, is that his statement about universal contemporaneity *contains its own affirmation of itself* precisely *because* it belongs to “all humanity”, not just to the adherents of this or that national, ethnic or religious group. To belong to all humanity involves a worldview that privileges no-one and nobody (no one and no body) above any other (any Other). Inherently democratic, it democratises everybody. Which is to say: insofar as every other person is Other to each one of us, otherness is inherent in the irreducible and ineradicable belonging — *and longing*— of every human being. Being and becoming: longing and belonging. What is more, I believe that Octavio’s poetics of universalism has an urgency that is rooted in the moral and humane issues born (and borne) out of the ashes of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Formulated in the immediate wake of the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, his idea that “we are contemporaries of all humanity” encapsulates the integral poetics and morality of that Declaration. Here, then, is a universalism that is simultaneously extremely ancient and entirely new — and doubly imperative for being both.

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To contemplate Eros from any angle involves the presence of the little death and prescience of the greater. “Living well means dying well. We must learn how to look death in the face,” Octavio writes in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and adds, in a trope typical of him, the simple question and double answer: “What do we know about the present? Nothing or almost nothing. Yet the poets do know one thing: the present is the source of presences.”<sup>57</sup>

The next time I saw Octavio and Marie-Jo, in 1996, they had returned to England for a reading with Charles Tomlinson at the

Queen Elizabeth Hall in London. This was six years after the Nobel Prize award. The audience was packed. I met up with them again afterwards with other friends for the first time in twenty-five years. It was also the last time. In that year, Octavio published *The Double Flame*, the English translation of yet another major *tour de force*, his final passionately and intelligently argued affirmation of eros.<sup>58</sup> And this brings me to my fourth point in praise of Octavio. Rooted in vision, taste and touch, in intellect and intuition, in passion and compassion, this extraordinary late prose text of his hardly reads as the work of an old man at all. Far from it conceding to any hint of Yeats's anguish that "an aged man is but a paltry thing,"<sup>59</sup> Pound's oscillation between regret and defiance in the last *Cantos*, or Eliot's plea for quietude in *Four Quartets*, Octavio iterates the joyful necessity of defending and celebrating Eros in the face of Thanatos. The book ends with another question — reminiscent of Goethe's address to the moment, the *Augenblick* or eye-blink, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön" — and a rapturous answer:

"What does the couple see in the space of an instant, a blink of the eye? The equation of appearance and disappearance, the truth of the body and the non-body, the vision of the presence that dissolves into splendour: pure vitality, a heartbeat of time."<sup>60</sup>

Like Seferis, my other great twentieth-century poetic master, in *The Double Flame* Paz presents a model of hope and clarity. Neither of these poets is puritan or dualistic. Every line both of them write is simultaneously sensuous, sensual, erotic, sacred, *fleshed*. And on the front cover of *The Double Flame*, a phrase by Carlos Fuentes describes Octavio as "[t]he greatest living Mexican writer, great renovator of the Spanish language, great universal poet and essayist."

Again, that word: *universal*. Today, modernism is dead, postmodernism stillborn, and a universalist poetry, envisaged by Paz, scintillates fragmented through countless small and imperfect mirrors. Yet through such poems, however flawed, in moments that are

not moments but utterly still and transparent, we may well believe we glimpse the unseeable and touch the untouchable presence of the present.

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Writing: waves and waves and waves in waves. There is always more to come. Last night, late, I thought that this set of notes had completed itself, written itself thoroughly through and out of me. But waking this morning, 18 April 2015, I started re-reading *The Monkey Grammarian* and, after two pages, it occurred to me that something still remains to be said here, something I've missed.

This something is mainly to do with the combination of *compassion*, *magnanimity* and *modesty* in Octavio's writing.

First, *compassion*, *sympathy*, *withness*: this is of a most curious kind. It enables me in reading Octavio to believe that as author he is *with* me, fully present in the experience (act, process, commission, submission) of reading that I find myself engaged in; even to the extent that the roles of reader and writer break down, blend, merge, become one, as I read; so that the reading itself becomes a writing and the writing a reading. I have the odd sense, then, that I am not only a reader of a text by Octavio, but that in and by reading it, I am also its co-writer.

Second, *magnanimity*, greatness of soul (*megalopsychía*, *velikodušnost*). In the act and process of reading Octavio, whether his prose or verse, my experience is that I am breathed on by a larger, more oxygenated air, so that whatever may be the othernesses that constitute my 'I' (subliminal, hidden, unnoticed, potential, dormant, discarded, dismayed, disarrayed ...) which, together with my 'I', compose the multiple folia of my Self itself – these all get gathered and re-gathered into an opening of lungs and horizons, into a fuller, richer and more acute alertness of the senses to harmonies and dissonances; to the unique minutiae tucked and pleated

throughout panoramas and the panoramas resident and resonant in minutiae. And to return to a previous suggestion: this opening, which is also a series of reopenings, incorporates and incarnates the *minute particulars* and the *inscapes* and *instresses* through which gleam, glisten and glow the radiances of the *Shekhinah*. If my language strains here it does so because it finds itself at its own edge.

And third, overlapping the other two, modesty: the sense of the allness-and-nothingness of the moment, and of our minuteness in the overall sum and span of things, combined with grand amazement and wonder, grace and inspiration, in the face of that knowing.

When all is said and done, isn't this what poetry is about?

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Then, almost immediately following these thoughts, on yet another wave, yet another thought: that there is no modern poet in English other than the T. S. Eliot of *Four Quartets* who comes close to Octavio in the acutely intelligent and devotedly persistent meditative exploration of the human condition with respect to the passage of time: or, more specifically, of the mysteriousness of *the present* and of *presence* within the unimaginable immensity of space-time. Consider how Eliot's themes get gathered and re-gathered in Octavio's writing, for example, from filigree lines such as these:

“What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present<sup>61</sup>  
and  
Only through time time is conquered  
and  
Quick now here, now, always”

For Octavio, the present is simultaneously our only dwelling place and “untouchable”. In the *now* resides the core of both *never* and *always*.

And while this *now* recognisably is and consists of a non-existent point that is is than a nothing, it is nonetheless filled equally by the most perfect Pythagorean harmonies and by “le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis” that terrified Pascal.<sup>62</sup> In Octavio’s writing, “the still point of the turning world ... the point, the still point” and “the dance ... and there is only one dance” that Eliot distinguishes are *one and the same*. Could it not be said, then, that the heart of Octavio beats in response to Eliot; that his perspectives are commentaries on Eliot’s; that his vision takes over from where Eliot ends?

In a book-length study published in 1976, Jason Wilson appears to have already arrived at this idea, at least in part: he clarifies that Octavio’s writing needs to be placed not only in a Mexican context but also “as a body of work reverberating between his *masters*, T. S. Eliot and André Breton” (emphasis mine, RB).<sup>63</sup> But then he goes on to say that “the *mood*” in the early Paz “is dominated by the crushing presence of T. S. Eliot’s urban poetics”; that “he rebels against this derivative, alienated voice”; that “he seeks to belong (religion), to find his roots (tree)”; and that “he believes in redemption”.<sup>64</sup> In Jason Wilson’s interpretation, then, the “master” against whom Paz is reacting is the Eliot of *The Waste Land*, not of *Four Quartets*, whose main theme, it could be surely be argued, *is* redemption; just as it could equally be said that in *Four Quartets* Eliot himself is reacting against his own earlier poetics.

If there is a glimmer of truth in my suggestion that Octavio’s mature and late work may be read as a ‘response’ to *Four Quartets*, the difference, I think, is that Eliot’s repeated quiet registrations of the present — in such presences as, for example, as those of “the lotus rose”, the “heart of light”, and “the door / Into the rose garden” — keep getting lost in pain, regret, memory, doubt, unfulfilled desire, and the intricacies of the rational mind’s insistent and sometimes querulous probings. That is to say, they get lost in loss itself. Eliot’s poetic when all is said and done, is ineluctably that of a Protestant Christian, and irreducibly dualist insofar as, in his

poems, flesh and spirit rarely if ever merge. The poetry –and its strength, delicacy and power– reside in (and result from) Eliot’s minutely detailed explorations of the tensions between flesh and spirit, expressed as the dislocation between sudden occasional gifts of presence that transcend time and those long, dreary, flat times between and after such epiphanies. But what happens in Octavio’s writing could not be further from the kind of probing and often painful self-inquiry that Eliot brings to bear upon some of the profoundest questions of being and becoming. On the contrary, in the Mexican poet’s finest writing, the dialectics between transience and visionary stillness are integrated and subsumed in a rapture that, time and time again and in countless overlapping ‘zones’ (eros, writing, contemplation and meditation, magical and religious ritual, fiesta ...), merge all time into presence. Compare, for example, the passages quoted above from the greatest English poem of the twentieth century with Octavio’s no less vivid and vital description of a slow procession of Indian pilgrims towards a shrine, in one of the ‘core’ passages in *The Monkey Grammarian*:

“The devout were slowly ascending the steep path. It was a peaceful crowd, at once fervent and good-humored. They were united by a common desire: simply to get where they were going, to see, to touch.”

A pause here, to interpolate further lines from *Four Quartets*:

“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”

“To get where they were going” and “to arrive where we started.” Here similar themes and similar approaches to themes occur: the pilgrimage to a *now* that is the beginning of all things, and to a beginning that is always *now*. Then, as Octavio’s meditative mind enters into the scene, playing upon it and within it, his prose enters the deeper dimensions of time that encapsulate this *particular* now:

“Will and its tensions and contradictions played no part in that impersonal, passive, fluid, flowing desire. The joy of total trust: they felt like children in the hands of infinitely powerful and infinitely beneficent forces. The act that they were performing was inscribed upon the calendar of the ages, it was one of the spokes of one of the wheels of the chariot of time. They were walking to the sanctuary as past generations had done and as those to come would do. Walking with their relatives, their neighbors, and their friends and acquaintances, they were also walking with the dead and with those not yet born: the visible multitude was part of an invisible multitude. They were all walking through the centuries by way of the same path, the path that cancels out the distinction between one time and another and unites the living with the dead. Following this path we leave tomorrow and arrive yesterday: today.”<sup>65</sup>

In this prose there is no hesitation or doubt, no hint of protest or regret. Its clarity is Heraclitan. We are *here* neither merely nor ultimately “as on a darkling (darkening) plain”;<sup>66</sup> and we are not committed ultimately or merely to a senescent quietude or patience. Nor is the present isolated from the vast continuum of space-time; nor are we alienated within or from it; and nor are the living separated from the dead. Rather, with and among the vast multitudes of pilgrims across history, we are co-involved in the lucid (ludic) vision of an inspired philosophical poet who traverses religions, attuned to the mystical immersion of *now* in *always*, *always* in *now*: in radiance.

#### NOTAS DEL ARTÍCULO DE RICHARD BERENGARTEN

1. Expanded from a presentation at the conference organised by the Mexican Embassy, entitled ‘Octavio Paz and the United Kingdom’, at the British Library, London, April 13, 2015.
2. The first of these epigraphs is the close of the poem ‘Return’, which Octavio Paz sent me as an offprint after his departure from England (tr. Eliot Weinberger, *Hudson Review*, 1972). The second, presented as the first-person fictional account of an ancient Mexican builder in stone, is part of a short allegorical piece, ‘The Poet’s Work’, which was



published during his time in Cambridge (tr. Donald Gardner, *Times Literary Supplement*, September 18, 1970: 1021). The third is taken from the last chapter of *The Monkey Grammarian* (tr. Helen Lane, London, Peter Owen, 1974: 155). Between them, these three extracts indicate a good deal of the character and interiorised depth and power of his writing during this period.

3. Democracy was not restored to Greece until 1974.
4. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*, LXXXI, London, Faber & Faber, 1964: 553.
5. At the end of 1970, Octavio left Cambridge, England, for Harvard, which he described as “Cambridge (el otro)”. Some of his most lucent perspectives on the roles of Pound and Eliot in international modernism occur in his Charles Eliot Norton lectures there, published as *Children of the Mire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974: 123-129. See especially: “The (eighteenth-century) Jesuits thought a Christian China would be a world model: Pound dreamed of a Confucianized United States. ... Pound talks about the world but thinks always about his country, a world-wide country. The nationalism of Whitman was a universalism; the universalism of Pound a nationalism.” (124-5).
6. See Albert Memmi, ‘Negritude and Judeity’, *European Judaism*, Vol. 3, No, 2, 1968-9: 4-12.
7. *Alternating Current*, tr. Helen R. Lane, New York, Viking Press, 1973: 20 and 67. Octavio sent me a signed copy of this book from Mexico in March 1973. The Spanish version was published in 1967. These dates wrap neatly around his time in Cambridge.
8. *Ibid*: 19.
9. *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, tr. Lysander Kemp, London, Allen Lane, 1967: 181, first published in Mexico by Cuadernos Americanos, 1950.
10. François Villon, ‘Ballade des pendus’ (‘Ballad of the Hanged’).
11. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, London, Faber & Faber, 1944. The reference is to the first lines of the poem: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past. / If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable”.

12. *Avebury*, London, Anvil Press with Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972. Reprinted in *For the Living: Selected Longer Poems 1965-2000*, Exeter, Shearsman Books, 2011: 23-50.
13. *Sun stone: Piedra de sol*, tr. Muriel Rukeyser. New York, New Directions, 1962; reprinted in *Configurations*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1971: 2-35.
14. *Imagems I*, Bristol, Shearsman Books, 2013.
15. *The Monkey Grammarian*, tr. Helen R. Lane, London, Peter Owen, 1989; first edition, New York, Grove Press, 1981.
16. Their son, Adam, then aged eight, remembers Octavio visiting his parents' house in Cambridge. Adam, now the author of a biography on Neruda, was in the audience of the London seminar on April 13, 2015. See Adam Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life*, London, Bloomsbury, 2004.
17. In Cambridge, Michel Couturier and Anthony Rudolf conducted a joint interview with Octavio in French. Michel Couturier's version, 'Octavio Paz: "La poésie occidentale est une"' appeared in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1-15 March, 1971, pp. 14-15. Anthony Rudolf's version 'Octavio Paz: an Interview', appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, Autumn 1971, and in *Octavio Paz: Homage to the Poet*, ed. Kosrof Chantikian, San Francisco, Kosmos, 1980, pp 159-165.
18. Steiner taught me for the Tragedy paper for the Cambridge English Tripos in 1964. His *Penguin Book of Modern Verse Translation* was published in 1966. During his time in Cambridge, Octavio published an essay on translation entitled 'The literal and the literary', *Times Literary Supplement*, September 18, 1970, pp. 1019-1021. Spliced into it is the poem 'The Poet's Work', lines from which serve as the second epigraph to this memoir.
19. RB, 'A Poet in Cambridge', *Times Educational Supplement*, 1 January 1971.
20. See Octavio Paz, 'André Breton or the Quest of the Beginning', *Alternating Current*, tr. Helen R. Lane, New York, The Viking Press, 1967: 47-59; retranslated as 'André Breton or the Search for the Beginning', *On Poets and Others*, tr. Michael Schmidt, New York, Seaver Books, 1986: 66-78.

21. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, tr. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, London, Jonathan Cape, Cape editions, 1967.
22. *Claude Lévi-Strauss, An Introduction*, tr. J. S. Bernstein and Maxine Bernstein, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1970. This book was not published in England until the following year, shortly after Octavio's departure from Cambridge, as the fifty-first volume in the Cape Editions series. This is one of Octavio's most difficult and concentrated prose books. It is as much a 'Defence of Poetry' and an excursus on Marxism and Buddhism as it is any kind of 'introduction' to the French anthropologist. Its original title is far more interesting: *Claude Lévi-Strauss o el nuevo festín de Esopo* ('Claude Lévi-Strauss and the New Fiesta of Aesop'; Mexico, Joaquín Mortiz, 1967). Written in Delhi in 1966, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that what it is 'about' is Octavio-reading-Octavio-reading Lévi-Strauss in and through the light of India.
23. The *renga*, a Japanese genre, means 'linked poem' or 'collaborative poem'. See *Renga*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971; 1972 edition [here](#). Since then, transcultural poetics has interested me considerably. See RB, *Volta: A Multilingual Anthology* and the introductory essay, 'Border/Lines', *The International Literary Quarterly* 9, November 2009.
24. Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp, or the Castle of Purity*, tr. Donald Gardner, London, Cape Goliard Press, 1970.
25. 'The Graphics of Charles Tomlinson' (1975), *On Poets and Others*, tr. Michael Schmidt, New York, Seaver Books, 1986: 33-34.
26. See Richard K. Smith, *The I Ching: A Biography*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014: 202-204. Octavio's poem 'Duracion', which was published in *Salamandra* in 1962, has an epigraph from the *I Ching*. See Octavio Paz, *The Collected Poems 1957-1987*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1988: 114-115.
27. John Cage, *Silence*, London, Calder and Boyars, 1968. For Octavio's comment, see *Claude Lévi-Strauss, An Introduction*: 51.
28. RB, *Changing*, forthcoming, 2016-17.
29. This is a huge field. 'Correlative thinking' and 'correlative cosmos building' are terms that have been used by generations of western sinologists. The following are among the most interesting commentators and interpreters: (1) Marcel Granet, *La Pensée Chinoise*, Paris, Éditions Albin Michel,

- 1968 (1934): esp. 307-317; (2) Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956: esp. 253-303; (3) A. C. Graham, 'Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking', The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, National University of Singapore, 1986; (4) A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*, 2006 (1989): esp. 319-32; (5) Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, Albany, State University of New York, 1999: esp. 'The Natural Philosophy of Writing', 241-284; (6) A. Meyer, Robert Weller and Peter Bol. Undated. 'Cosmic Resonance Theory'. Reconsulted, April 25, 2015); and (7) Steve Farmer, John B. Henderson and Michael Witzel, 'Neurobiology, Layered Texts, and Correlative Cosmologies: A Cross-Cultural Framework for Premodern History', *Bulletin of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 2000: 48-90.
30. For comments by Octavio on the *I Ching* and synchronicity, *en passant*, see *The Other Voice*, tr. Helen Lane, San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992 (1991): 48.  
Jung's theory of synchronicity was based in part on his reading of the *I Ching*. See his foreword to Richard Wilhelm's version, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, 1970 (1951), tr. into English by Cary F. Baynes, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: xxi-xxxix. Jung presented 'On Synchronicity' at the Eranos conference in 1951, on the shore of Lake Maggiore, Ascona, Switzerland. See R. F. C. Hull's translation in *Man and Time*, ed. Joseph Campbell, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XXX, 1983 (1957): 201-211. The first English publication in 1952 was entitled 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle', in C. G. Jung and W. Pauli, *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*, tr. R. F. C. Hull, London: Routledge.
31. On magic, see Octavio's essay on Breton, referenced in note 20 above, and *Claude Lévi-Strauss, An Introduction*: 59 ff.
32. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805 edition, Book 2, lines 401-405: London, Oxford University Press, 1969 (1936): 31.
33. *Blanco*, 2nd limited edition, Imprenta Madero, Mexico, 1972. See the attached photograph of RB displaying the book at the conference, taken by Cecilia Santamarina de Orive, a Guatemalan lady in the audience.
34. RB, *Book With No Back Cover*, London: David Paul, 2003.

35. B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*: 1st edition, London, Panther, 1969; 2nd edition, London, Picador, 1999; 3rd edition, New York, New Directions, 2008.
36. Now Anglia Ruskin University. On the retirement of Deryck Mumford in 1977, a kind, generous and astute man who had been Principal since 1948, the auditorium was renamed The Mumford Theatre.
37. The friends were Dimitra and Peter Mansfield. They later divorced, and Dimitra married John King, who taught Latin American Studies at Warwick University. Emeritus Professor John King chaired our panel.
38. *In Search of the Present*, 1990 Nobel Lecture, Bilingual Edition, San Diego, New York, London, 1990.
39. Apart from Charles Tomlinson, the translators were G. Aroul, Paul Blackburn, Lysander Kemp, Denise Levertov (born in the UK but living the USA), John Frederick Nims, Muriel Rukeyser, and Monique Fong Wust. The Indian translator was Jagdish Swaminthan.
40. *Nine*, respectively no. 4, pp. 193-200, and no. 6, pp. 47-52, tr. G. R. Coulthard.
41. *Agenda, Giuseppe Ungaretti Special Issue*, 8/2, guest ed. Andrew Wylie Spring 1970.
42. Peter Levi, *Pancakes for the Queen of Babylon: Ten Poems for Nikos Gatsos*; and Aldo Vianello, *Time of a Flower*, tr. Richard Burns: both London, Anvil Press Poetry, 1968.
43. The series started in 1962 with Yevtushenko, followed by Rilke (1964), Apollinaire (1965), Prévert (1965), Greek poets Cavafy, Seferis, Elytis and Gatsos (1966), Holub (1967), Quasimodo (1967), Montale (1969) and Pavese (1971).
44. Claire Cécé, *Octavio Paz, Poètes d'Aujourd'hui*, 126, Petite Planète, Pierre Seghers, 1965.
45. I kept the cutting but not the name of the paper or the date. It was probably *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Times* or *The Observer*.
46. *Times Educational Supplement*, January 1, 1971.
47. My thanks to Kim Landers for this precise *aperçu*.

48. *An Octave for Octavio Paz*, published jointly by Martin Booth's Sceptre Press and Anthony Rudolf's Menard Press.
49. *Alternating Current*: 20.
50. 'Breach and Convergence', 1986, in *The Other Voice*: 31-2 and 54.
51. *In Search of the Present*: 17 and 18.
52. See also RB, 'Pour toi (Frayed Strands)', presentation to the conference '*Une Poétique Mondiale de la Poésie?*', Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, 13th May 2002.
53. *Alternating Current*: 21 and 34.
54. The last essay in the collection, *The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry*: 153-154
55. Octavio was fully conscious of this lineage. His introduction to *The Other Voice* ends with this: "These pages are simply a variation – yet another – of that *Defence of Poetry* modern poets have been writing now, tirelessly, for over two centuries" 4.
56. *Ibid.* 159-160.
57. *In Search of the Present*: 32-33.
58. *La Llama Doble, Amor y Erotismo*, Mexico, Círculo de Lectores, 1993; *The Double Flame, Essays on Love and Eroticism*, tr. Helen Lane, London, The Harvill Press, 1996.
59. W. B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'.
60. *The Double Flame*: 206.
61. *Four Quartets*: lines 9 and 10 of the first section of the first quartet, 'Burnt Norton', which are repeated as the last lines of the same section: 13 & 24. All the other quotations from Eliot that follow, both explicit and embedded, are taken from *Four Quartets*.
62. *Pensées*, iii. 206.
63. Jason Wilson, *Octavio Paz: a study of his poetics*, Cambridge University Press, 1979: 3.

64. *Ibid.*: 69.

65. *The Monkey Grammarian*: 84-85.

66. The penultimate line of Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach', composed sometime between 1849 and 1852.