

# Dissidences

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

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Volume 5 | Issue 10

Article 2

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November 2014

## Creating a Space for Love and Revolution: The Poetry of Otto René Castillo

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### Recommended Citation

Muñoz, Kerri A. (2014) "Creating a Space for Love and Revolution: The Poetry of Otto René Castillo," *Dissidences*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 10 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences/vol5/iss10/2>

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## Creating a Space for Love and Revolution: The Poetry of Otto René Castillo

### Abstract / Resumen

In the poetry of Otto René Castillo, the theme of community is resounding and it manifests itself in the Socialist Revolution. This paper studies how Castillo conveyed his vision of said Revolution, that is to say, of how Guatemala fit into his vision of a new worldwide order. The study begins by placing Castillo's poetry in its artistic context and outlining his agenda that advocated that words be supported by actions. Next, a brief biography demonstrates how the poet-revolutionary lived out his agenda by committing himself to the military struggles of the Revolution. Then starts the literary analysis of his poetry beginning with the study of Castillo's political commitment as he articulated it in verses that followed the conversationalist trends. In this context, the poet offers images of the imperialist world against which he was struggling. Then, there is an exploration of how the poet used the metaphor of love for its generative qualities to speak of the Revolution's inherent promise of a better world. This section is followed by a close reading of the poetry Castillo wrote specifically to his *amada* and it focuses on his development of the theme of sacrifice. Lastly, the verses dedicated to his *pueblo* are examined to conclude that, in Castillo, sacrifice—stemming from love—was essential to the Revolution.

### Keywords / Palabras clave

Otto René Castillo, Guatemalan poetry, Revolutionary poetry

## CREATING A SPACE FOR LOVE AND REVOLUTION: THE POETRY OF OTTO RENÉ CASTILLO

“Enorme es la importancia de cada gesto en nuestro tiempo”  
Otto René Castillo (“Conmigo a pesar de todo” 263)

In the poetry of Otto René Castillo, the theme of community is resounding and it manifests itself in the Socialist Revolution. In this paper, I study how Castillo conveyed his vision of the Revolution, that is to say, of how Guatemala should fit into his vision of a new worldwide order.

I open this study by placing Castillo’s poetry in its artistic context and outlining his agenda that advocated that words be supported by actions. Next, I offer a brief biography that demonstrates how the poet-revolutionary lived out his agenda by committing himself to the military struggles of the Revolution. I then begin my literary analysis of his poetry. I start by studying Castillo’s political commitment as he articulated it in verses that followed the conversationalist trends instigated by poets such as those of the Peruvian César Vallejo, the Chilean Nicanor Parra and the Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal. In these poems, Castillo offers images of the imperialist world against which he was struggling. Then, I look at how the poet used the metaphor of love for its generative qualities to speak of the Revolution’s inherent promise of a better world. This section is followed by a close reading of the poetry Castillo wrote specifically to his *amada* where I focus on his development of the theme of sacrifice. Lastly, I look at the verses dedicated to his *pueblo* suggesting that, in Castillo, sacrifice—stemming from love—was essential to the Revolution.

In his essay entitled “Otto René Castillo: Su ejemplo y nuestra responsabilidad,” Roque Dalton quotes Miguel Ángel Asturias as saying that “el poeta es una conducta moral” (xxv). This phrase, Dalton writes, served as a springboard from which Castillo and his generation, “La Generación Comprometida,” fashioned not only their poetry but their identities as well, committing both to their political ideology: that of militant Communism. In appropriating Asturias’s phrase, however, Dalton shows that Castillo was not paying homage to his artistic predecessor. Rather, this act is to be understood as a symbolic break with the past that allowed him to free himself of the chains that linked him to an imperial world, thus allowing him to imagine something different and project it in his poetry.

The Marxist writers of “La Generación Comprometida” criticized Asturias for having accepted the position of Guatemalan Ambassador to France under the

government of Carlos Castillo Armas, the U.S.-backed regime that overthrew the left-winged government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, therein ending the hopes the Guatemalan people had placed on the October Revolution. This criticism, however, served only as the immediate pretext for their disapproval of Asturias as their repudiation of the author had deeper roots. According to “La Generación Comprometida,” Asturias’s willingness to work for the government of Castillo Armas—an act that went against his own politically charged writings—signaled a hypocrisy that questioned his allegiance to the social commitment he proposed in his work. For these young writers, Asturias’s words, “el poeta es una conducta moral,” alluded to a dedication that, for him, did not extend beyond the written page. The authors of this new generation, however, took these words to heart, making their writings and their lives command one another, consequently underscoring what they felt to be Asturias’s non-committal position. Further, it is important to note that by criticizing Asturias, these writers were also going beyond him in order to denounce the ambiguous, “middle-class reformist perspective” (Zimmerman 273) that they felt he represented and which they blame for the ultimate failure of Guatemala’s Ten Years of Spring, reinstating with Castillo Armas what Dalton calls el “oscuro pasado” (xxviii).

Responding to what he read as Asturias’s empty words, it is evident throughout the poetry of Otto René Castillo that he believed that it is only through one’s words combined with one’s willful actions that identity is fully voiced. Stemming from a Marxist perspective, these actions needed to be communal and the identity of each individual was intertwined with that of the *pueblo*. Castillo clearly expresses his conviction in the following poem addressed to his mother, where the hands, a traditional symbol of community action, serve to define a people’s *biografía*, their common identity:

¿Por qué ponerse trágicos  
entonces? Mataremos, pues,  
mi dulce viejecita,  
porque solos  
con nuestras manos  
estamos en el mundo.  
Y lo que ellas  
hagan  
será, por fin,  
la biografía de nosotros. (18)

The connection the poet builds between action and identity necessarily questions the role he attributed to words, to poetry in his particular context. In his poem,

“Antonio, el poeta,” Castillo wrestles with this subject and concludes that the importance of words lies in their power to inspire. Antonio, “poeta de la más honda / estirpe” (107), approaches the figure of Spartacus during the slaves’ revolt against the Roman imperial system, and commits himself to fighting along his side. Spartacus answers by emphasizing the need to fight with words rather than with the sword:

Enséñanos mejor tu canto,  
Antonio,  
luchar lo puede hacer  
cualquiera,  
pero nadie como tú,  
para hacer de las palabras  
las alondras azules  
que necesitan  
aún nuestros hermanos. (108)

Here, a generative power is associated with words, and it is made clear that it is only through them that one of human beings’ most basic needs is created: hope, signified by the *alondras* that announce the dawning of a new day, a new beginning. *Azul*, a color traditionally associated with poetry and the totality of the universe—an image expressed later in this poem as “el cielo ancho y celeste” (108)—represents a freedom without boundaries. By using the color blue, the poet molds his use of the concept of “hope” to signify a hope for political and economic freedom, a freedom from the imperial world against which Spartacus fought in the past and against which Castillo was still fighting in the twentieth century.

Speaking through Antonio, though, Castillo makes it clear that the hope generated by words will not suffice. Antonio answers Spartacus’ words asserting that for freedom to be realized, something more is needed, and this something more carries us back to action:

Las aves de más dulce canto,  
Espartaco  
defienden su libertad  
también con garras. (108)

Words, symbolized by Antonio’s poetry and the birdsong he creates through it, are essential in that they give form to the hopes for which human beings must fight. In Castillo, like in so many other Central American revolutionary poets, this

struggle is certainly—but not merely—an intellectual debate; rather, it is also hands-on combat, it is armed “con garras.” Antonio, then, the *poeta-guerrillero*, comes to represent the perfect fusion of word and action—of theory and practice—that Castillo tried to forge of his own life and communicate through his poetry. And that is, as Raymond Williams has written, a “central thrust of Marxism” (200).

### **Rewriting Social Change**

What little is known with regards to Otto René Castillo’s life comes from his fellow poet and revolutionary Roque Dalton’s essay that I cited above, and that is the primary source for the information given below. The reader comes to know the Guatemalan poet at the beginning of his political awakening and his subsequent revolutionary / military commitment. Undoubtedly, the foremost purpose of Dalton’s essay is to demonstrate the arduous “unidad del pensamiento y la práctica” (xxiii) that Castillo’s life represents. He makes an example of the poet that counters the hypocrisy read in the preceding generations of so-called engaged poets and that can—and should, he argues—be used to create a new, revolutionary identity that consequently becomes the responsibility of the future Marxist generations to carry on.

Born in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala in 1936, Otto René Castillo witnessed both the rise and fall of his country’s October Revolution. At the age of seventeen, he became one of the central youth leaders of the Communist Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT) when the Revolution was silenced in 1954 by local powers lead by Castillo Armas supported by U.S. imperial interests. After that date, he lived in exile in El Salvador, “buscando la proximidad a la patria que haría más eficaz la continuación de la lucha” (Dalton xix). There, he met and worked with the militant Salvadoran poet, Roque Dalton and instantly joined the Communist Party of El Salvador. Within the Party structure, he worked nonstop to educate the other young artists he met “sobre los problemas de la responsabilidad social-revolucionaria del creador” (Dalton xx). During this period, Castillo’s literary work, as well as that of his *compañeros*, was published prolifically in local newspapers and magazines. Additionally, these artists gave readings where ideas of social responsibility were debated and elaborated upon within the public realm. Also during this time, Castillo proved himself to be resolutely linked to the Revolution, risking his own life for it by crossing the Salvadoran border incognito various times in order to contribute to the propagation of Communism in nearby Guatemala.

In 1957 Castillo officially returned to his homeland where he continued the law and social science studies that he had started in El Salvador. On scholarship he traveled to the German Federal Republic where in 1959 he continued his education in Leipzig. Inspired by Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Castillo left his formal schooling behind in 1962 in order to collaborate with Joris Ivens, the Communist filmmaker who was forming a brigade to make documentaries about the Latin American liberation struggles. Castillo returned to Guatemala in 1964 where a popular armed rebellion had already begun. The poet became the director of El Teatro de la Municipalidad de Guatemala while simultaneously participating in the armed struggle. In 1965, he was climbing a mountain to record a documentary of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) when he was captured and sent into exile once again. In exile, he was appointed Guatemalan representative in the Comité Organizador del Festival Mundial de la Juventud, under which title he traveled to, among other places, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Cuba. Upon completing these duties, he returned permanently to Guatemala in order to join the FAR, a group that put Castillo in charge of Party propaganda for the eastern region.

In 1967, Otto René Castillo was wounded in combat. He was captured along with his *compañera* Nora Páiz, tortured and burned alive. Even under torture, Dalton writes, Castillo never broke, reaffirming his conviction to such a degree that even his executioners had to admit the strength of his will. Dalton continues:

murió como un indolegable luchador revolucionario, sin ceder un ápice en el interrogatorio, reafirmando sus principios basados en el marxismo-leninismo, en su ferviente patriotismo guatemalteco e internacional, en su convencimiento de estar siguiendo—por sobre todos los riesgos y las derrotas temporales—el único camino verdaderamente liberador para nuestros pueblos, el camino de la lucha armada popular. (xxii)

Having only lived from 1936 to 1967, in his thirty-one years of life Otto René Castillo actively contributed to reconstructing the avenue of political and social change as has been shown above. He was crucial in the development of armed struggle in Central America. According to Iván Uriarte, prior to Castillo's struggle, "el poeta y el intelectual centroamericano habían jugado un rol pasivo, ya sea en el exilio, o en el propio país, plegándose al sistema o sirviéndole indirectamente" (37). With Castillo, the boundary between intellectual and *guerrillero*—between theory and practice—was broken and the two merged into one.

As mentioned above, Castillo's exile and work in El Salvador linked him with other Salvadoran *compañeros* and permitted him to develop his convictions to such a degree that he became "un nuevo tipo de salvadoreño y un nuevo tipo de guatemalteco . . . un centroamericano revolucionario" (Dalton xxvi). This fused transnational identity enabled him to re-imagine the national construct within the new context of a world that, at least for him, had been erased of arbitrarily drawn political boundaries and where all were equal without exception, as he states in "Tu hombre se despide, amor mío:"

Y como mi vida entera  
luché contra toda excepción,  
porque quiero siempre  
que la misma sea la regla  
tengo que irme, así de común  
barato de egoísmos. (178)

But, the world in which he was living was one that had not yet been realized; rather, it existed in the form of a hope or an idea that is unmistakably articulated in his poetry and for which he fought until his end.

Dalton writes that between 1954 and the year that Castillo was assassinated, the fever to erase these boundaries and build a world unified in liberation had spread among the Central American *pueblo*: "los centroamericanos comenzamos a ver hacia dentro de nuestra realidad, de nuestra nacionalidad común, de nuestra historia" (xxxii-xxxiii). As Dalton writes in his essay, the only plausible response to this common history defined by the systematic suppression and coercion inflicted by the imperial process was militant Communism: "es necesario encarnar en cuerpo y alma la nueva vía de la revolución: la de la lucha armada, nacional, centroamericana, revolucionaria" (Dalton xxxii). In other words, joining the Revolution was synonymous with sacrificing oneself entirely to the Party, as Castillo articulated when he wrote: "Ante todas las cosas soy la lucha misma" ("Keineswegs allein" 45).

### **Rewriting Central American Poetics**

The spiritual incarnation of the Revolution that Dalton describes is what Otto René Castillo left to history through his poetry. With Castillo, Central American poetics were rewritten as the genre became a direct form of communication, of Communist propaganda, meant to elicit participation from the *pueblo* in re-imagining and subsequently liberating and reconstructing the nation. This

communal effort defines the spirit of the Revolution and it is repeatedly invoked in Castillo's poetry, a body of work that follows two clearly differentiated aesthetic roads. One avenue of Castillo's work concerns openly political themes through which he bitingly denounces the socio-political crises that defined his historical moment. To this end, Castillo contributed to the development of conversationalist trends also cultivated by Roque Dalton and Ernesto Cardenal, "his two peers in Central American revolutionary poetry" (Beverley and Zimmerman 157). The second direction of his work at first appears to be less political as he speaks at a more intimate level invoking the various powers of love. This vein, however, was just as politically charged as the other and through this poetry he imagined alternate, future realities instead of simply denouncing that which already surrounded him. These two aesthetic roads, both of which write of the same Revolution, part only to merge at their joint destination: the place of his imagined Guatemala.

In order to speak directly to the people, Castillo's poetry is, at times, denuded of the ornate complications frequent in the genre. He rejected "the grand rhetorical and narrational Nerudian mode of political poetry" (Zimmerman 281). Instead, he cultivated a style that moved toward the conversational trends of César Vallejo and Nicanor Parra that were, as Zimmerman writes, "emerging as hegemonic in the Latin American literary ambience in the years after the Cuban Revolution" (281). Implicit in this denunciation of Neruda's poetics is an echo of his rejection of Asturias. Castillo and his contemporaries—most notably Roque Dalton and Ernesto Cardenal—read in the figure of the Chilean poet the stand of an intellectual whose literary acts of socio-political resistance and denouncement were not enough to affect a change. The dissatisfaction these younger poets felt with their historical circumstances motivated their own agendas. In an interview with Mario Benedetti published in 1972, Roque Dalton, in rejecting what he describes as the Nerudian "poesía canto," says that "no era suficiente la expresión admirativa o condenatoria, sino que precisaba un análisis más profundo" (19), an analysis that he most clearly articulated in his collage-epic *Las historias prohibidas del Pulgarcito* (1974).

Representing his own rejection of this mere "expresión admirativa o condenatoria," Castillo wrote "Intelectuales apolíticos." Considered to be a "poetic manifesto of his generation" (Zimmerman 274), this poem foretells the day when all comfortably uncommitted intellectuals will be interrogated and held responsible for their lack of action by "los hombres sencillos" who

nunca cupieron  
en los libros y versos

de los intelectuales apolíticos,  
pero que llegaban todos los días  
a dejarles la leche y el pan,  
los huevos y las tortillas,  
los que les cosían la ropa,  
los que les manejaban los carros,  
les cuidaban sus perros y jardines,  
y trabajaban para ellos,  
y preguntarán,  
'¿Qué hicisteis cuando los pobres  
sufrían, y se quemaba en ellos,  
gravemente, la ternura y la vida?'  
Intelectuales apolíticos  
de mi dulce país,  
no podréis responder nada. (145)

Iván Uriarte writes that with Castillo Central American poetics were revolutionized: “la poesía centroamericana recibe un baño de pureza: simplificando el lenguaje, eliminando todo adjetivo ampuloso distorsionador de la idea; con él la poesía se impregna del pueblo, único modo de denunciar la miseria y la injusticia cotidiana” (37). The simple, quotidian language Castillo use—amply exhibited in “Intelectuales apolíticos,” quoted above—is a good example of the simplicity toward which he was striving: a simplicity that allowed for a direct form of communication unconfused by the traditional elaborate language used by Neruda and Asturias. The “lowering” of language in the realm of poetics is not to be understood as a condescending effort to speak to the *pueblo* but, rather, as an act of reverence toward the common people. The poet’s use of language signified an inclusion of those who had traditionally been excluded and alienated from the genre: the underprivileged, uneducated *pueblo*.

Castillo incorporates the *pueblo* on the thematic level as well. The central theme of the “Intelectuales apolíticos” is unconventional for poetry: it is illustrated in the litany of menial jobs for which the common people are responsible and to which they are limited, representing the unambiguous exploitation to which they are subjected every day. That which was previously silenced, then, that which was never mentioned “en los libros y versos,” becomes that which is voiced, and the *pueblo*, previously marginalized from the genre, is now its subject, and it consequently becomes the center of poetic discourse [1]. Due to this poetic change, Castillo symbolically gives the *pueblo* its voice.

With this voice, Castillo portrays the common people interrogating the apolitical intellectuals, as is seen in the questioning quoted above. At a loss for words—because Castillo has symbolically stripped them of their voice—the said intellectuals are left to rot in their silence, a silence with which the poem climactically comes to an end:

Os devorará un buitre de silencio  
las entrañas.  
Os roerá el alma  
vuestra propia miseria.  
Y callaréis,  
avergonzados de vosotros. (145)

This vein of Castillo's poetry branches toward what was developing into *exteriorism*, Ernesto Cardenal's foundational contribution to world poetry. Defining his poetic technique in the religious compound of Solentiname in 1972, the Nicaraguan poet writes:

El exteriorismo es la poesía creada con las imágenes del mundo exterior, el mundo que vemos y palpamos, y que es, por lo general, el mundo específico de la poesía. El exteriorismo es la poesía objetiva: narrativa y anecdótica, hecha con los elementos de la vida real y con cosas concretas, con nombres propios y detalles precisos y datos exactos y cifras y hechos y dichos. En fin, es la poesía *impura*. (Cardenal 9) [4]

A good deal of Otto René Castillo's work reflects this tendency to incorporate the impurity of the "mundo exterior" of which Cardenal writes and which played such a key role in Dalton's writings as well. In so doing, the poet necessarily posits the exterior against the interior, thereby creating a corresponding binary that, as Edward Said has shown in *Orientalism*, separates the objective from the subjective. In poems such as "Asesinados en junio" (115), "Los fusilados" (118), "Lo más importante de todo" (125) and "Obreros de algodón" (151), Castillo aims to reconcile the two, showing to his readers that the exterior and its cohort, known as objectivity, are simply myths that have been perpetuated to condone complacency. This integration of the "real" or the exterior world into his poetry lends to Castillo's work a testimonial feel as he offers snapshots of the suffering and injustices to which the *pueblo* is subjected.

The poem that most clearly illustrates this thread of Castillo's work is "Informe de una injusticia" (148). The poet begins by prefacing in the style of an epigraph from *Radioperiódico* dated June 10, 1964: "Desde hace algunos días se encuentran bajo de la lluvia los enseres personales de la señora Damiana Murcia v. de García de 77 años de edad quien fue lanzada de una humilde vivienda situada en la 15 calle 'C' entre 3ª y 4ª avenidas de la zona 1" (148). Castillo accomplishes two tasks by introducing the poem in this manner. First, he bestows credence onto what he is about to tell, communicating to his readers that what they are to read did actually happen, he is merely relating the facts. Second, the quote from *Radioperiódico* slyly allows the reader to slip into his or her complacency that the distance of news broadcasts all too often permits. This turns out to be a trick, however, as the poem begins with a jolt to the reader that wakes him or her out of his or her complacency transporting readers from their comfortable spot where they are reading to the very place where this injustice is happening. Castillo realizes this spatial maneuver by addressing the reader directly with the second person *tú* from the position of first person and by bringing in the shifter *aquí*. Through this rhetorical device, and as Emile Benevise has shown in *Man and Language*, he erases any potential temporal or spatial distance that the third person pronoun may have created aided by the impersonal *allá* typical of news stories. The location of the poem thus becomes the here and the now of the reader as the distance of objectivity has been erased:

Tal vez no lo imagines  
pero aquí  
delante de mis ojos  
una anciana  
Damiana Murcia v. de García  
de 77 años de ceniza  
.....  
recibe  
sobre la curva de su espalda,  
toda la injusticia  
maldita  
del sistema de lo mío y lo tuyo. (149)

At the end of this first stanza, Castillo does not project the blame for the widow's situation upon a foreign political body. Instead, he places the responsibility for the injustice upon himself and his readers when he claims the capitalist system as their own creation with the words "lo mío y lo tuyo."

The injustice to which Castillo refers in the title is twofold. Firstly, he is obviously condemning the unjust eviction of Damiana Murcia from her home that throws her into complete “soledad / abierta al cielo” (150) simply because she cannot pay the rent. In being evicted, Damiana Murcia is also dehumanized by those who turn her out of her house because they see no other worth in her apart from the money she can or cannot produce for them. Secondly, Castillo is also denouncing the dehumanization that those who evict Damiana have undergone due to the capitalist system they are perpetuating, a system that conditions them to witness what has happened to Damiana without so much as thinking twice about it. Castillo communicates this complacency in the following excerpt, where he ironically depicts life as going on as normal in the face of such blatant tragedy:

Pero lo peor de todo  
es la costumbre.  
El hombre pierde su humanidad.  
Y ya no tiene importancia para él  
lo enorme del dolor ajeno.  
Y come,  
y ríe,  
y se olvida de todo. (150)

The world, then, according to Otto René Castillo, seems to be ruled by a fragmented and dehumanized system structured upon a polarized binary that separates the evicted from the evictors, clearly a division that also corresponds to one of victim and perpetrator. This binary, however, just like the world in which he was living, is malleable. Castillo’s choice in drawing upon the case of Damiana Murcia among innumerable possible examples is crucial in the message of this poem. That he chooses her and accentuates her feebleness, solitude and old age, means that he wanted to relay the message that the system in which she, the readers and Castillo were living was one to which anybody could fall prey, and so anybody and everybody—even a helpless figure like Damiana—is a potential victim. And, unless each person actively does something to change the course that this unjust society is taking—specifically, join him in the Revolution—she or he, through his or her complacency, becomes just as responsible as the active perpetrator for what is taking place.

By the end of the poem, the significance of Damiana Murcia is double. On the one hand, as is signified by her old age, she is unmistakably a representation of the capitalist past from which the society must free itself and which has led up to the moment that is being narrated. On the other, Damiana simultaneously comes to represent the threat of a capitalist future, in that she symbolizes the readers’

own old age or the future that they themselves will have fashioned through their complacency if they do not act now.

The *tú* in “Informe de una injusticia” then, refers to those who have not yet joined the Revolution. It is directed specifically to these people in an effort to heighten their awareness: to snap them out of their complacency and invoke their active participation. The use of the singular *tú* reflects the ideology of the capitalist world where the individual takes precedence over the community, and to communicate this situation Castillo starkly contrasts the singular *tú* with the plural and communitarian *nosotros*: “No te imaginas / lo que duelen estas injusticias. / Normales son entre nosotros” (150). In this juxtaposition, the poet succeeds in alienating the solitary “*tú*” and the ideology in which he or she resides from this new, communal world he has envisioned.

In “Informe de una injusticia,” Castillo narrates the dehumanizing binaries of a capitalist world that separate the perpetrator from the victim, the public from the private, the objective from the subjective, the exterior from the interior. At the same time, he imagines a future without these binaries and offers the Revolution as the means—the only means—to the singular end of attaining the community he has envisioned. Clearly, bringing about the Revolution necessitates action and he is openly calling for it. First, however, the Revolution requires an imagination that can picture a world in which there will be no more Damiana Murcias. This is where Castillo’s poetry fits into the struggle. For Castillo, this future is what he wistfully calls Guatemala—his *Patria*—throughout his work, and it is a world that has yet to be realized. To make his *Patria* real, the love that leads to the compassion, action and community that is wanting in “Informe de una injusticia” and that, for Castillo, goes hand in hand with the Socialist Revolution must be found and nurtured. This is the ultimate search that Otto René Castillo undertakes in his poetry. Through the love he envisions, people will be brought together and the binaries that fragment society will finally be broken.

### **The Revolutionizing Power of Love**

Love is a fundamental theme in Castillo’s work: the poet appropriated this topic for its implications of inter-personal union and its generative qualities. As such, in his poems, love ultimately becomes a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution, the means through which the *pueblo* would come together to re-imagine and subsequently re-build the nation. Therefore, whereas the one vein of Castillo’s poetry is clearly political and associated with the work of his contemporary revolutionary peers, particularly Cardenal and Dalton, this other avenue of his

work speaks of a continuity with the *Modernista* movement led by Rubén Darío (1867-1916) at the turn of the twentieth century.

Love is a central theme in Darío's poetry and it is a means to an end: it is a tool used to re-imagine the world. According to Cathy Jade, the Nicaraguan poet used the genre to confront "feelings of fragmentation and alienation by attempting to rediscover a sense of belonging and 'wholeness'" (*Rubén Darío* 4). In his writings, Darío presents love as something that endures and it is all encompassing: "amar se convierte para Rubén en la razón de vivir" (Núñez Rey 11). Most importantly, love is human and it is of this world, the earth and the sky:

Amar, amar, amar, amar, siempre, con todo  
el ser y con la tierra y con el cielo,  
con lo claro del sol y lo oscuro del lodo;  
Amar por toda ciencia y amar por todo anhelo.

Y cuando la montaña de la vida  
nos sea dura y larga y alta y llena de abismos,  
amar la inmensidad que es de amor encendida  
¡y arder en la fusión de nuestros pechos mismos! ("Amo, amas"  
249)

Jade reads Darío's use of love as the channel through which the historical moment is penetrated: it is "the human solution to the problems that one must confront during life's long, uphill journey" (*Rubén Darío* 102). She adds, "through it [love] individuals forget mundane anxieties and are transported outside themselves as they fuse with their beloved and with the cosmos" (*Rubén Darío* 102), therein reconciling the fragmented world and healing the feelings of alienation astutely pointed out in her study. Love, then, is equivalent to a union of the self with something bigger, something other than itself. And in Darío, this union is powerful in that it comes to be the keystone of "un mundo más habitable" (Núñez Rey 21) that he struggled to create through his poetry [2]. It is to this same constructive end that Otto René Castillo used the symbol of love: as a tool through which he re-imagined his world—in particular his *Patria* [3].

Paradoxically, even though love is the central theme in Castillo's poetry, he at the same time promotes violence through armed struggle as the only method through which the future will be realized. This combination of love and violence would at first seem to be a grave contradiction; nonetheless, this contradiction is reconciled, even if the violence is neither forgiven nor comprehended, when one understands Castillo's appropriation of it as an act worthy of Caliban. Just as

Shakespeare's character was forced to learn his colonizers' language only to turn it around on his oppressors, Castillo does the same with violence. His moment in history was one in which the state communicated primarily through violence, converting daily life into a nightmare, leading the Guatemalan poet to write:

Nos ha tocado vivir  
el minuto más hiel  
de todos los siglos.  
Si pudiera dar nombre  
al siglo veinte, le pondría:  
combate. ("Frente al espejo" 234)

Castillo appropriated the violence that governed his world only to subvert it. Whereas the repressive state used violence out of hate to perpetuate an ideology of fear that prevented change, Castillo converted it into a symbol of love through which he aimed to promote hope for the construction of a new *Patria*. Highlighting this unification of love and violence in the figure and writings of Otto René Castillo is essential to my study because I consider it the first step towards understanding his use of love as a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution.

In his poem, "Romeo y Julieta," Castillo concisely outlines his complex conception of this human emotion. Just as in the play, and mirroring Castillo's own agenda, "Romeo y Julieta" is a poem that narrates violence—here in the form of a suicide—necessitated by love. The poet begins at the moment just after Julieta awakens from her feigned death only to find a fading Romeo who tragically expires:

Y la dulce señora  
reclina su suave cabeza  
sobre el pecho aéreo  
del gran intranquilo. (187)

The image of Julieta placing her head on Romeo's chest after he kills himself symbolizes the physical coming together of two individuals through the power of love. Additionally, the eventual suicide of both protagonists, due to neither one wanting to endure life without the other, attributes to love a power that diminishes the importance of their individual existence while enabling them to take control of their own common destinies.

In the final stanza, Castillo rewrites the ending of the play: "Pronto trinará / para ellos / la alondra del día" (188). The poet changes the story of Romeo and Julieta

with these words from a tragedy that ends when the curtain falls to a message of hope that extends beyond death. Again, the *alondra* appears—as it did in “Antonio, el poeta,”—and with it comes its song of joy, heralding a new day, a new beginning. This new day is to be interpreted as a future in which the two protagonists will live on together beyond the violence of their deaths.

As “Romeo y Julieta” suggests, Castillo used love “como sentimiento generador” (Morales, “El amor a la vida” 19) to speak of something new in the future. Love leads to breaking spatial boundaries as it draws people out of themselves and towards someone / something else; love shatters the boundaries of time and is deemed eternal. Challenging these restrictions, love is to be understood as a power that enables human beings, just as it enables Romeo and Julieta in his poem, to mold their own futures because they are no longer trapped by the traditional conventions of space or time. Destiny, then, no longer has its hold over people’s lives and they and their world have the potential to become what they imagine.

In “Mañana triunfante,” a poem specifically about the Revolutionary process, Otto René Castillo concisely relays the Revolution through the essential elements of love that I described above. He begins the poem abruptly and assertively: “Estoy seguro” (101). The juxtaposition of the title with the curt opening verse communicates from the very beginning the poet’s unflinching certainty about the future. Castillo continues the stanza by drawing an image of what that tomorrow will look like:

Mañana, otros poetas buscarán  
el amor y las palabras dormidas  
en la lluvia  
Puede ser que vengan  
con las cuencas vacías a llenarse  
de mar y paisaje. (101)

The future is defined by hope because these “otros poetas,” like Castillo and Antonio before him, will unrelentingly continue the search for justice. What they seek is the communal unification of practice and theory that is essential to the success of the Revolution and that is symbolized by “el amor y las palabras” respectively. Castillo guarantees that the search is not futile when he writes that the objects of desire, “el amor y las palabras,” have not disappeared. Rather, they have been dormant, waiting only to be awakened. Castillo’s placing of the poets in “la lluvia” is significant on two fronts. One, the author suggests with the symbol of the rain that the journey will be a process of purification and renewal for

humanity. And two, the poets are steadfast in their conviction because they persevere on their travels through the rain. This conviction-inspired perseverance converts the poets into migrating pilgrim figures, people whose life journeys are sculpted by their beliefs.

In “Mañana triunfante,” it is clear that the poets / pilgrims will undergo a time of trial and poverty before reaching the land that has been promised in the preceding verses, where “el amor y las palabras” have been nesting. Castillo equates this time of trial and utter poverty with the “today” of the poem when he writes:

Hoy, la amargura y la miseria  
rondan mis bolsillos  
abiertos en la noche  
a las estrellas. (101)

The bitterness and misery that envelope the poetic voice—a synecdochic representation of the revolutionary *pueblo*—is augmented by a solitude that is symbolized by the night sky. All is not lost, however, as Castillo splatters the night’s darkness with the light of the stars, symbolizing hope.

Following these verses, the poet leaves the “today” behind in order to dedicate the rest of “Mañana triunfante” to projecting his visions of the tomorrow. What he sees in this future is a world in which he and the poets mentioned above have found what they were seeking, “el amor y las palabras.” Love and words have redeemed the universe of the fragmentation that had led to the misery and isolation that is briefly narrated in the first stanza and that the poet had already represented in “Informe de una injusticia.” This redemption is voiced through repeated symbols of love that serve to define this new world while simultaneously negating the old.

The first picture that opens the new world is that of a *novia*. Symbolizing human union through love, this image challenges the misery and solitude evoked previously by offering sounds of reverberating joy that fill in the silent void of the night sky:

Mañana, para mi júbilo repicando  
en las paredes  
la novia tendrá su más bella  
campana hecha de mar y arena  
de lluvia y panorama. (101)

The following stanza continues elaborating the concept of love while explicitly alluding to the political engagement of the poetic voice, which is linked to the natural elements of the land:

Mañana me amarán los ríos  
por haber pegado propaganda  
en la noche de la patria:  
ellos se encargarán de recordar  
mi nombre. (101)

The intimate human union represented by the figure of the *novia* is echoed in the union of love that binds the poet to the *pueblo*, symbolized in the personification of the *ríos*.

On a literal level, the rivers are the central veins that provide and sustain the life of the geographical space of the *Patria*. Symbolically, however, they appropriate their traditional significance of the human experience. Read at these two levels simultaneously, the rivers come to be a metaphor for the *pueblo*, for it provides and sustains the spiritual life of the *Patria*. And because the poet is clearly part of the *pueblo*, the love between him and the *ríos* comes to speak of a love among the people that proves to be seminal to the creation and sustenance of the *Patria*.

Castillo then narrows his gaze in order to focus on portraying individual snapshots that serve to illustrate the constitutive parts of this *pueblo*. He shows it to be far from destined to the “amargura y miseria” that is characteristic of another time:

Y con su rostro de sonrisa  
la más humilde campesina  
escribirá la poesía de amor  
que no salió de mi garganta.  
El rostro de un niño alimentado  
escribirá lo que detuvo  
un grito de combate en mis arterias. (101)

The individuals that make up this *pueblo* are the new poets. Thus the Poetry that was once Castillo's, no longer belongs to him: he has handed it over to the *pueblo*. In this new epoch, though, the meaning of Poetry itself will change. It will no longer represent the hope of a “mundo más habitable” (Nuñez Rey 21) as it did in the hands of Castillo; rather, it will come to signify the very life the *pueblo* is living: “la vida / es la poesía más alta” (Castillo, “Holocausto del abrazo” 240). Life, being equal to poetry, is turned into an art form, a conduit for human

creativity that empowers the *pueblo* to become what they have imagined and so their life lies in their own hands. And when the poem that is their life comes to an end, they will be the ones who “firmarán su canto” (“Mañana triunfante” 102) because they will have been the authors of their own destinies. The implement with which they will take final possession of their *canto*, however, is not a pen. Rather, it will be a rosebush, “firmarán su canto con rosales” (“Mañana triunfante” 102), a symbol of the Socialist Revolution. With the “rosales,” Castillo closes his poem foregrounding his agenda, writing that this new life—or this new poetry—will manifest itself only through the Revolution.

Upon close examination, “Mañana triunfante” undeniably shows the parallels that Castillo drew between his conception of the Revolution and his understanding of love. With the title, Castillo initiates an engagement with the future and a break with the past that he solidifies throughout the poem by offering images of what this new world will look like and by writing his verse almost solely in the future tense. By evoking repeated images of love, Castillo privileges communal over individual will. And, finally, by converting the *pueblo* into the new world’s poets, he alludes to what is at the core of Marxist theory in that he places “an extraordinary emphasis on human creativity and self-creation” (Williams 206).

As I have demonstrated, in the poetry of Otto René Castillo, love symbolizes the fusion of action and theory that characterizes the Revolution and it serves as the keystone to what he had envisioned Guatemala, his *Patria* to be. Love, then, defines his imagined place; and to get there, he was willing to sacrifice everything.

### **Loving the *Amada***

The *amada* is a powerful and recurring symbol in Castillo’s work, and because of the mystic tradition it is a symbol charged with meaning within Hispanic poetry. The poet uses her to articulate—on a very personal level—the power of love in his life and writings. In these poems, Castillo borrows from canonical love poetry as he describes an intimacy that reveals physical as well as spiritual union and passion. The loved one portrayed in these works serves as a catalyst through which the poetic voice sees, understands and acts in this world: she serves as his eyes; she acts as his muse; she re-defines time and space [5]. Ultimately, as I will argue in this section, the beloved represents the incarnation of love and, by extension, she is a symbol of the Revolution.

The intimacy in these poems is articulated on many levels. Castillo narrates the physical coming together of himself and his loved one through the traditional

poetic symbols of human contact: the kiss and the embrace. These symbols signify, as in “Romeo y Julieta,” the bodily coming together of two individual beings. Through the power of love, however, this physical union evolves into something greater. Thus, the poem, “Nuestro deseo,” is ostensibly about physical desire. By its end, however, this desire is converted into a metaphorical engine for the re-imagining of the nation.

“Nuestro deseo” begins:

A mis manos  
sube tu cuerpo  
desnudo  
en esta ola de tiempo.  
Tu cuerpo  
es como un río  
de fuego  
hacia mis dedos  
viene,  
cantando su piel. (206)

This moment just prior to contact is conveyed with a timeless purity. The woman is beseeched to climb into the speaker’s empty hands offering a still image of a man who—represented by his empty hands—is unencumbered by any past or present burden, literally and metaphorically: he is all hers. Likewise, the nudity of the loved one can be interpreted as a metaphor for purity that symbolizes the total, unmediated giving of herself to him: she is all his. The emptiness of his hands, accompanied by her nakedness, suggests that the two will come together after having shed their individual histories. Time, for them, has stopped and has yet to carry on. This is seen in the verse “en esta ola de tiempo,” that bears the sensation of that timeless and silent moment felt in the welling of a wave just prior to its breaking on the shore. This moment of purity is given transcendence when Castillo compares the lover’s body to “un río / de fuego” (206), symbolizing not a clichéd, impassioned “burning love” that survives for the moment, but a purification through death and renewal.

Castillo’s use of hyperbaton in these initial verses emphasizes the image of the *manos*. Here, as in the rest of his poetry, *manos* serves as a synecdochic symbol of the self that represents human creativity and self-creation as I already pointed out in his poem “Madre dolorosa.” When the speaker first appears with empty hands, he is, as of yet, undefined. At the closing of the stanza, the speaker and his world are turned into blank slates through the purification process, and it is understood

that the speaker, along with his lover, are about to embark on a journey of self-definition.

In the following stanza, Castillo makes it known that this journey will not be easy:

Mientras tanto,  
un viento lejano  
sopla  
salvajemente la ribera  
del lago  
donde se alza nuestra casa. (206)

The wind, symbolizing violence and the passing of time, threatens the stillness represented in the preceding stanza, a stillness that is further encapsulated and threatened in the image of the wind-beaten house in the final verse. The discord that arises from this conflicting imagery of stillness and movement is symbolic of the struggle that the two protagonists will face on the journey they are about to undertake: the potential for creation that is inherent in the stillness represented in the first stanza will be challenged every step of the way by destructive forces that lie outside of their control.

Castillo closes the poem, nonetheless, by writing that the two, because they are united in their desire, will prove to be victorious. The second and final stanza begins when she reaches his hands, signifying the recommencement of time for the lovers and the beginning of their journey together:

Tu cuerpo  
sube, entonces,  
hasta las llamas de mis manos,  
y juntos ardemos y ardemos. (206)

Through this physical union, a catalyst of death and rebirth, transcendence and creation, symbolized by the fire imagery, they jointly embark upon a voyage of self-definition that necessarily begins by imagining a different and improved world:

A lo lejos,  
el agua es más azul  
que nunca,  
y más hermosa su mirada. (206)

This new world that they imagine is the first fruit of their desire: it is a *Patria* where the tranquility that is symbolized by the blue water will replace the turbulence of the wind-beaten choppy waters that lie right outside their door. The words “a lo lejos,” then, are to be understood as a temporal rather than a geographical projection and the world they imagine is one of the future.

Castillo finishes this stanza with the following verses:

¡Amor—te digo—  
nuestro deseo tiene  
su andar en incendio!” (206)

Their desire, manifested in this new world that they have imagined, begins at the precise moment in which, freed from the limitations of the past and the present, they are able to construct their future. At this crucial point, after their desire has been consummated, Castillo introduces love into the poem, therein demonstrating it to be the essential building block upon which they will construct this new world.

The love of which Castillo writes in “Nuestro deseo” is a channel through which the poet imagines the future. It serves as a metaphor for the creation / construction of a new world implying the destruction of the old. This motif of creation consistently converts the *amada* into a muse-like figure who serves not only to inspire his poetry, but also provides the inspiration the poet-revolutionary needs to continue his labors toward the formation of a better world.

“Lo privado también cuenta” is another poem that elaborates this idea of the *amada* as a muse:

Tal vez  
sean tus ojos  
lo más privado  
que tenga  
sobre el mundo .... (235)

By condensing the beloved into the image of her eyes, the poet converts her into a symbol of vision. Just as the muses are responsible for creative vision, the *amada* guides the poet’s gaze as is symbolized when he appropriates her eyes in the above verses. The creative vision bestowed traditionally by the muses on the poets is echoed here in that his “muse” is the motivating force behind this poem as she is its subject. As the verses continue, though, it is clear that the image of

the poet and his empty page, that which serves as the proverbial blank slate, corresponds to the revolutionary and his world, respectively. Therefore, the vision the *amada* provides becomes the inspiration that is essential to Castillo's revolutionary struggle and so she, his poetic muse, also becomes the *compañera* that struggles by the *guerrillero's* side:

pero ellos [tus ojos] aumentan,  
como nadie todavía,  
mi deseo de luchar  
para cambiar al mundo.... (236)

This jump from *amada-as-muse* to *amada-as-compañera* is not a far leap; for just as the muse accompanies the poet along his journey so, too, does the *compañera* accompany the poet's counterpart—the revolutionary—on his. And since both, the poet and the revolutionary are united in their common objective of creating a new world, the muse and the *compañera* are likewise united in their goal of providing adequate vision and inspiration along the way.

To this end, the *compañera* never abandons the revolutionary in his struggle. He carries the image of her eyes, or her inspiration, with him, guiding and protecting him in his trajectory: “tus ojos van conmigo, / atentos / a que nada me pase” (237). She is a song in the revolutionary's most silent and loneliest hours, reminding him that he is not alone on his journey:

tus ojos  
son un siempre estupendo  
que canta en mí  
a la hora más noche  
de todas  
cuando estoy cansado ya. . . . (236)

In addition to watching over him, his muse carries other meanings. When he writes that her eyes are “dos astros, muy dulces y lejanos, / que me anuncian / . . . / la pronta llegada del alba” (237), Castillo likens her to the morning star, thus converting her into the promise of a new and better world that he suggests to be his *Patria* when he concludes that this promised *alba* is “para todos” (237).

As I have pointed out, in “Lo privado también cuenta,” Castillo initially draws the image of an *amada* as a muse, who then evolves into a *compañera* only to escalate into a symbol of hope, a symbol that is a constant throughout his poetry. In “Ayuda a vivir tu risa,” the poet conveys this feeling of hope by portraying the

*amada* through a discourse of youthful rejuvenation: “Tu risa de mundo en primavera. / Tu suave alegría, abriendo / su amanecer en rostro tuyo” (221). At the poem’s closure, Castillo uses this hope—muse—to construct the future:

De muy cerca, tu risa  
colabora conmigo,  
amor mío,  
a convertir en amistoso  
el planeta  
para los hombres que vienen! (221)

In “Invernado,” another poem in which Castillo equates the *amada* with hope, the speaker prepares to say good bye to his loved one as he heads toward “el sur / a combatir / junto a [su] pueblo” (281), and as he does so he describes her laughter as a star that will accompany him:

Ríe para mí,  
ríe,  
y que tu risa  
sea la última  
estrella  
que guarde mi memoria  
alma mía. (283)

By repeatedly writing of the *amada* as hope, he lifts her up as a symbol of the Revolution. This analogy is given credence when his “love poetry” is read in the greater context of his work as a whole. There he has written that “la palabra revolución / va siempre unida / al vocablo esperanza” (“Lo más importante de todo” 127). These verses suggest that the *amada*, symbolizing hope and, by extension, the future, necessarily speaks for the Revolution. Consequently, she comes to articulate the hope for the new world for which the poet-revolutionary is fighting: she is abstracted into an ideal.

The parallels that Castillo draws between his feelings for the *amada* and the Revolution offer the reader dual avenues from which to approach his poetry. On the simplest level, this love poetry is clearly that: verses written to a loved one. On a more profound level, Castillo converts her into a symbol for the Socialist Revolution. It is when this poetry is approached by both readings simultaneously and the *amada* is understood as a dual signifier that its richest meanings become clear: for the Revolution to succeed, the human element of love must be the

essential motivation behind every step and every breath taken. And conversely, in order for love to succeed, the Revolution must be that which binds:

Hermosa encuentra la vida  
quien la construye hermosa.  
Por eso amo en ti  
lo que tú amas en mí:  
La lucha por la construcción  
hermosa de nuestro planeta. (“Comunidad” 192)

### **Loving the Pueblo**

In his poetry written to the *pueblo*, the poetic voice denies himself a union with his *amada* when he leaves her behind in order to go off to fight for and with the people. This separation from her is voiced, again and again, as the greatest abnegation he can make in poems such as “Carta de amor constante” (33), “No estar contigo, se llama viernes” (60), “Tu voz” (175), “Conmigo, a pesar de todo” (263), “Te llamarás ausencia” (283) and “Alto en mi corazón, arde tu nombre” where he writes: “tú, la más aguda renuncia / que haya hecho mi corazón / sobre el planeta” (259). This personal sacrifice for the public good is essential to the message that Castillo wanted to convey in his poetry because it is a manifestation of the fusion of theory and practice that was central to his political agenda. His joining the Revolution and subsequent departure from his beloved, signify the first step toward the fruition of the ideal world that the two, the poet and the *amada*, had imagined together.

That the beloved must be abandoned in order for this new world to be realized opens a space in Castillo’s poetry for a discourse of sacrifice. Within this sacrificial paradigm, outlined by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss in *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, the militant poet is converted into the “sacrifier” (Hubert 10) who offers his *amada*—clearly his greatest earthly treasure—as the chosen victim to be sacrificed to a higher power, in this case not a god, but his *Patria*. Inherent in this paradigm, there is a rebirth that converts the profane victim—the beloved—into her sacred essence (Hubert 35): the Revolution. Through this sacrificial process, the profane and the sacred are drawn together (Hubert 10), and Castillo’s profane actions that make up the Revolution are consequently instilled with sacredness. The sacredness that Castillo attributes to the Revolution allows him to offer it to his *pueblo* as a road to their *Patria* where they will be redeemed. This said, the redemption he is offering will not come from divine but, rather, human agency in the form of extreme personal sacrifice. That the Revolution is synonymous with love still holds true in the poems directed toward the *pueblo*.

Here, however, the love that is described is fraternal. And in these poems written to the *pueblo*, Castillo offers the Revolution—or love—as a new religion or ideology through which humanity—his *pueblo*—will be reborn into the future in the place of their *Patria*.

As I have already explored above in the context of the poem “Informe de una injusticia,” a significant amount of Castillo’s poetry exposes the day-to-day sufferings to which his *pueblo* is subjected. These poems are most fully understood when they are approached as an effort to prove the validity of his political actions—the “why”—and they seem to function in order to “[mobilize] a collective response and [serve] as a repository for a collective memory and consciousness” (Harlow 34). To this end, Castillo challenges the monologue established by the hegemonic historical records again and again by incorporating “el mundo exterior” (Cardenal 9) into his poems. In Castillo, “el mundo exterior” is manifested in a series of “dialogized images” (Bakhtin 46) that work together to create a sort of poetic photo album of his *pueblo*. Castillo, then, converts the genre of poetry into a historical record, saving the people’s unwritten history from oblivion. In so doing, the poet uses literature as a means to the end Bakhtin had imagined: Castillo ensures the “the future memory of [the] past” (Bakhtin 19) by bringing it up to the present moment where it can be accounted for and responded to accordingly.

In “Conmigo a pesar de todo,” Castillo poeticizes—in order to condemn it—the 1954 CIA-backed military coup that marked the end of Guatemala’s Ten Years of Spring. He writes: “Aquí, en mi país, se levantaron ellos contra la vida; / contra la ternura de las gentes más pobres. / Y enterraron el amor solemnemente” (261). In this world the speaker describes, life is threatened and love is buried, death wins and hate and its perpetuators reign supreme: “Los que inventaron la muerte del amor deben morir. / Pero los inventores del odio no murieron; ellos tenían el poder” (262). This post-1954 world is the unifying backdrop—Bakhtin’s chronotope—against which to read the suffering Castillo portrays in this vein of his poetry. These poems narrate a particular global place—his Guatemala—that is defined by “días terriblemente amargos, / días nacidos más allá del llanto / días de malos y negros sentimientos” (“Los albañiles” 114).

Castillo takes up this theme of death again in “Sabor a luto,” a poem in which life is constantly threatened as death literally waits around every corner to strike at will:

Si alguien toca a la puerta,  
nunca sabes si es la vida

o la muerte  
la que pide una limosna.  
Si sales a la calle,  
puede que nunca más  
regresen los pasos  
a cruzar el umbral  
de la casa donde vives. (255)

Here Castillo poses a binary separating the private from the public by incorporating the image of the house, suggesting the private space it represents to be a safeguard against the dangers that lie outside its doors, an idea reminiscent of what has already been seen in “Nuestro deseo” where the lovers are momentarily protected from the brutality of the world that is represented by “un viento lejano / [que] sopla / salvajemente” (206).

“Los fusilados” is precisely a poem about the moment in which death had decided to strike: “Los llevaron lejos de la ciudad / y no volvieron a llorar sus ojos / sobre las grises calles de mi país” (118). The streets are grey, implying a lifelessness that runs deeper than a physical death, one that is lived out on a daily basis by the “limosneros, / prostitutas” (“Invernado” 281) that populate the streets and constitute what Castillo refers to as his “pobre pueblo” (“Invernado” 281). In this same poem, Castillo writes about the “niños / sin la rosa del pan / sobre la mesa. . .” (“Invernado” 281). Presenting a table wanting of bread, Castillo suggests that the lifelessness is not only in the streets but it has penetrated the homes as well, therein unveiling the false security of the doors that separate the public from the private in “Sabor a luto” and “Nuestro deseo”. Central to this image are the children, representing the future of the *pueblo*. That Castillo specifies them as being without bread, without life, suggests that the *pueblo* is essentially being born only to die.

When the *pueblo* does fight for its bread—symbolic of its life—as in “Lo más importante de todo,” it appears to be of no avail. The national army “desbarató la huelga / de los ferrocarrileros / por más pan” (125). In these poems in which Castillo transposes the “real world” onto the page, there is an overwhelming sense of destiny that paints the *pueblo* as a people resigned to their situation, living only to prepare for death. As one of Castillo’s poetic personas, “un fogonero,” notes:

‘Uno se acostumbra  
tanto a sufrir,  
que nada puede dolerle más  
de lo que ya le duele.

Será mejor ahorrar  
para el entierro.’ (“Lo más importante de todo” 125)

The destiny to which the *pueblo* has resigned itself involves a process of dehumanization by the hegemonic system that has already been explored in the context of “Informe de una injusticia.” It is a process that victimizes the *pueblo* but, again, it is also perpetuated by the *pueblo* when they see no other option:

Para poder comer y dormir  
mejor  
se despojaron de sí,  
se convirtieron tristemente  
en el gusano que odiaban. . . . (“Retorno al dolor de todos” 22)

In these poems, Castillo aims to open alternatives to this vicious cycle and to do so he begins by holding up a poetic mirror to his *pueblo* so they can see what has become of them. In so doing, it seems that the poet hopes to spark awareness that their situation is not predetermined. Rather, it is a historical product made of time and space and, most importantly, of human agency, their own as well as others’. Once this is communicated and understood, Castillo can proceed to offer hope for a change. The hope he provides is clearly the Revolution, and it is conveyed in terms of new beginnings that construct for the *pueblo* the road that they need “para buscar la luz / después de haber errado / en la tiniebla” (“El milagro hecho por el hombre” 37).

The most concrete image of hope that Castillo offers the *pueblo* is provided through the example of the success of Socialism in Germany. He writes a series of poems on this theme that have been grouped together, albeit posthumously, under the title “El milagro verdadero alemán.” In these poems, Castillo pays homage to the “enormes sacrificios / de humanidad” (“Ahora que comienza a invernar” 93) that the East German people made in order to break with their “destino doloroso” so that they could build a “futuro . . . de gloria” (Todo Berlín está en tus ojos” 73) if not for themselves, for those that were to come afterwards. Castillo narrates the selflessness that was required for the change in Germany to succeed, a selflessness that often resulted in one’s own death. Through this death, however, life continued on:

Dresden es alzada desde la ceniza,  
desde la muerte misma es alzada.  
.....  
Y flores

que crecen entre las ruinas,  
como pequeños cantos  
infantiles,  
que no se deben apagar. (“Con el alba, en Dresden” 80)

And so in these poems there is a reversal of that which is presented above in the poems dealing with Guatemala. Instead of living to die, one dies so that life may continue: “Y sin embargo sé: hay tantas formas / de dar la vida por la vida. Lo importante es: / darla como se tiene que dar!” (“Distanciamientos” 163).

In reading Castillo’s poetry, it becomes evident that there is a dialogue between the poems that illustrate the suffering of the *pueblo* and those that offer a vision of a different new world. The fusing of the two results in a message that is a call to action, an entreaty for a whole-hearted commitment to the Revolution that will, in the end, lead to the *pueblo’s* redemption in the *Patria*. The redemption that Castillo foretells for the *pueblo* is one through which they will don the humanity that they are currently wanting: “y nació el hombre, / lo único bueno de mi tiempo” (“Holocausto optimista” 242). They will live in a world in which the children, instead of going hungry, “crecen y sonríen” (“Los nuevos amaneceres” 135). This redemption, however, is pricey as it entails sacrifice of enormous proportions. As an example for his *pueblo*, Castillo sacrifices the *amada* but he is also willing to sacrifice his own life as he repeatedly proclaims throughout his poetry, the most powerful example of which is found in “Viudo de mundo:”

Compañeros míos,  
yo cumplo mi papel  
luchando  
con lo mejor que tengo.  
Qué lástima que tuviera  
vida tan pequeña  
para tragedia tan grande  
y para tanto trabajo.  
.....  
Sabéis,  
me hubiera gustado  
llegar hasta el final  
de todos estos ajetreos  
con vosotros,  
en medio de júbilo  
tan alto. Lo imagino  
y no quisiera marcharme.

Pero lo sé, oscuramente  
me lo dice la sangre  
con su tímida voz,  
que muy pronto  
quedaré viudo de mundo. (291)

So, when Otto René Castillo asked for a commitment to the Revolution that could very well result in the giving of one's own life, he did not ask for something that he himself was not willing to give.

### **Love-Borne Sacrifice: A Conclusion**

Whereas for his artistic predecessors, social commitment was limited to their writings, for Otto René Castillo and his generation, these writings corresponded to a pledge to action. This union of word and action is at the heart of Castillo's poetic and political agenda.

His poems, when read as a whole, are in dialogue with each other. One vein of Castillo's work problematizes his historical moment that was defined by U.S. imperialism and structured upon a capitalist ideology. Resonating from these poems are images of solitude, misery and death. The poet counters these images of suffering and destruction in his love poetry where he re-imagines the world as one being based upon dialogue and community where human life is valued. In these verses, love—and its incarnation in the form of the *amada*—ultimately serves as a metaphor for the Socialist Revolution and Castillo presents both as the only feasible road to the future—his *Patria*—that he has envisioned. In his poetry, love and, by extension, the Revolution is infused with sacrifice. And it is only through this love-borne sacrifice that the Revolution demands that his *pueblo* will finally come into being

## Notes

[1] Neruda does speak of the workers in his poems, particularly *Canto general* (1950), but he does it within the more elitist discourse of traditional lyrical poetry whereas Castillo is actually indicting Neruda's—and other similar intellectuals—who accuse the bourgeoisie without questioning their own bourgeois life style.

[2] In “Rubén Darío: lengua de Nicaragua,” Tomás Borge writes of Darío's influence not on revolutionary poets but on the Revolution itself:

“Darío planteó y concretó, en su obra y con su obra, una gran exigencia estética. Señaló para los pueblos de América la altura de su humanidad y de su historia. Trazó un destino que volverá por el hombre, para que el hombre vuelva a ser hombre; es decir, para que el amor sea la única relación entre los hombres y la poesía su único medio de comunicación. Para que el hombre habite el paraíso que hasta entonces había permanecido en estado de deshaucio. Esta es la tarea del Frente Sandinista, de los revolucionarios nicaragüenses, de los revolucionarios de América Latina que Rubén Darío anunció” (173).

[3] Huberto Alvarado, Roberto Morales and Rita Navarro Barberena have all explored the theme of love in Castillo's poetry.

[4] Cardenal was obviously aware that Pablo Neruda was the first to mention a *poesía impura* in his essay, “Sobre una poesía sin pureza” (1935). The Nicaraguan's *exteriorismo* should then be understood as yet another response to his generation's poetic ancestors.

[5] Among the criticism dealing with Castillo's poetry, mention is never made of a historical woman to whom these love poems would have been written. This is not to say, however, that there was not one. The ignorance regarding the matter is clearly due to the fact that very little is known with regards to Castillo's life.

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