

FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY, TIME AND THE POWER  
OF THE SEMIOTIC IN THE POETRY  
OF AMPARO AMORÓS

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The poetry of the contemporary Spanish poet Amparo Amorós is noted for its technical virtuosity and allegiance to a clear philosophical vision and reduced number of central themes, among them the passage of time, essential human experience, and the challenge of poetic transcendence. Andrew P. Debicki notes that Amorós «seeks a verse that expresses a 'pensamiento poético', by which she means a coherent vision of reality embodied in verbal structures, and not merely logical thought» (33)<sup>1</sup>. Anita Hart states that «Amoros's poetry frequently offers a meditative view of human existence and its connection with a larger, universal reality. Often treating the themes of identity and destiny, her work is intellectual, imaginative, and personal...» («Creative Vision» 313). Amorós herself views her poetry as universal, preferring not to identify herself with recent trends in Spanish poetry written by women. In her interview with Sharon Keefe Ugalde, in responding to the question «¿Existe una estética femenina?» she comments that «Espero que no exista, porque hasta ahora lo que se ha entendido por *estética femenina*, que normalmente es un término más acuña-

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<sup>1</sup> Gifted poet, essayist, and literary critic, amorós reveals her attitude toward the poetic function in many of her essays on poetry. See especially her «Pensamiento poético y filosofía: la poesía de Jaime Siles, una palabra en vuelo a la totalidad del ser», in Amorós, ed. *Palabra, mundo, ser: la poesía de Jaime Siles*, as well as her «La retórica del silencio».

do por los hombres, ha sido algo dicho en este sentido peyorativo, como algo sentimentaloides y, en ocasiones, blandengue o cursi» (Ugalde 78). For his part, Jonathan Mayhew avers that Amorós is one of the more recent Spanish women poets who «prefer to place the mark of gender under erasure», not so much because of a «lack of interest in a feminine identity», but rather because of «a well-founded suspicion of gender categories» (337), and concludes that «By adopting a style traditionally defined as masculine, Amorós's poetry obliges the critic to reconsider his or her preconceptions about 'masculine' and 'feminine' modes of writing. Her aim is not to redefine feminine or female writing, then, but to abolish the category in order to gain access to a more 'universal' mode historically reserved for male poets» (341).

In the current essay, I will undertake a study of several key poetic texts by amparo Amorós in order to reveal the shadowed feminine presence that supports her poetic expression. This feminine presence refers not so much to the gendered sexual identity of the author, but rather to that which has been repressed and / or denied by the Western discourses of power. Amorós speaks from the position of female subjectivity as it is constructed by the social norms and conventions of society. According to Arleen B. Dallery, this female positionality stands in contrast to the «standards of objectivity, rationality, and universality, [that] require the exclusion of the feminine, the bodily, the unconscious. Indeed, the logical ordering of reality into hierarchies, dualisms, and binary systems presupposes a prior gender dichotomy of man / woman. Not only has women's voice or experience been excluded from the subject matter of western knowledge, but even when the discourse is 'about' women, or women are the speaking subjects, (it) they still speak(s) according to phallographic codes» (53). The «gender under erasure» posited by Mayhew responds to conscious stylistic choices on the part of the writer, but as Leon S. Roudiez notes, «The writing subject, then, includes not only the consciousness of the writer but also his or her unconscious. (...) The subject of writing also includes the non-conscious, that is, the domain not subject to repression but not within the reach of consciousness either. This is the area covered by the notion of dominant ideology: the whole system of myths and prejudices that gives our view of society and of our place in it a specific orientation» (8). I would posit that the power of the word in Amorós's verse derives from the play between

her conscious choice to align herself with the canonical aesthetic criteria above as embodied in the work of such male poets as Vicente Aleixandre, Carlos Bousoño, Claudio Rodríguez and José Ángel Valente, and her unconsciously formulated subjectivity as a woman, which remains outside the economy of patriarchal power and patriarchal discourse. It is my view that if in her poetry Amparo Amorós purposefully adopts the pose of «gender under erasure» posited by Mayhew from a stylistic perspective, there also can be detected the unconscious signature of the feminine, of the repressed and the unconscious, the makes itself known in the writing process itself, and which contributes to her poetry's uniqueness and power. It is in the poet's relationship to and expression of time, the semiotic and the pulsations of the *chora*, as posited by Julia Kristeva —prior to entrance into the symbolic, law, order, and desire of the father— that the power of her verse makes itself manifest<sup>2</sup>. The *chora*, this maternal ambience is «Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligent translation; it is musical, anterior to judgement...» (*Revolution* 29)<sup>3</sup>. This nurturing pre-linguistic space often finds its expression in the image of the female womb or uterus. Terry Eagleton, in commenting upon Kristeva's conceptualization of the semiotic, interprets it as «a kind of pulsional pressure within language itself, in tone, rhythm, the bodily and material qualities of language but also in contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence, and absence» (188).

In her essay entitled «Women's Time», Julia Kristeva comments that the concept of time must be looked at more closely in order to discern its nuances and to established the phases of the women's movement both in France in particular and Western Europe in general. For the purpose of discussion here, I will focus on the various manifestations and conventional organizations of time and its relationship to space, and then relate them to Amo-

<sup>2</sup> In regard to the semiotic and the symbolic see Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic approach to Literature and Art* (1980) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984).

<sup>3</sup> In her interview with Ugalde, Amorós spoke of the strong impact that music has on her work, and how it helps her to achieve a level of consciousness conducive to poetic creative. In part, she states: «La música es mi hogar. Cuando oigo música es como si me crecieran árboles por dentro, y esos árboles son los poemas» (83).

ros's utilization in her poetry<sup>4</sup>. Kristeva notes that «when evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the *space* generating and forming the human species than of *time*, becoming or history» («Time» 472)<sup>5</sup>. Women are connected to «the problematic of space, which innumerable religions of matriarchal (re)appearance attribute to 'woman', and which Plato, recapitulating in his own system the atomists of antiquity, designated by the aporia of the *chora*, matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God, and consequently, defying metaphysics» («Time» 472). Kristeva's discussion then center on the differentiation of time within several categories as they relate to female experience. She reveals that «female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnamable *jouissance*» («Time» 472-473). Aside from the cyclical time that one can clearly associate with female corporeal rhythms of fertility and gestation, in addition, Kristeva also points what she defines as a monumental temporality, «without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits» («Time» 473). This monumental time, all-encompassing and indivisible, may be related to cultural mythology, such as in the case of «various myths of resurrection which, in al religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within the same time via dormition (according to the Orthodox faith) or via assumption (the Catholic faith)» («Time» 473). She then goes on to comment that «The fact that these two of temporality (cyclical and monumental), are traditionally linked to female

<sup>4</sup> Although several critics already have focussed on the representation of time in the poetry of Amorós, none have specified time's various manifestations, nor speculated on the import of its fragmentation and classification. See especially the studies by Debicki, Hart («Challenging»), and Werner.

<sup>5</sup> The use of emphasis through italics in Kristeva's text are those of Kristeva herself.

subjectivity insofar as the latter is thought of as necessarily material should not make us forget that this repetition and his eternity are found to be the fundamental, if not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly the mystical» («Time» 473). Thus, Kristeva posits that historical time, its syntax worked out in linear fashion on the passing calendar pages, relates more to the patriarchal and male subjectivity, whereas both the cyclical and monumental manifestations of time have traditionally been related to the matriarchal and the maternal and thus female subjectivity. The *jouissance* that she notes emanates from the expressions of visions and the unnameable before, outside of, or in spite of symbolic language, and which often is associated with the mystical experience<sup>6</sup>.

In speaking of her own creative process Amparo Amorós states that she has «Una intuición irracional de lo que quiero expresar y luego, de pronto, dé con el vehículo que sea más adecuado para este contenido. En un proceso apasionante, sobre todo porque yo escribo siempre de una manera motivada. Nunca me siento a escribir un poema sobre algo, sino que el poema se me impone como una necesidad interior» (Ugalde 84). Thus, the intuitive formulation of the poem's content and ultimate meaning finds expression in spite of the rational self, which enters this poet's creative process at a later stage when, she admits, «Después, corrijo en frío, distanciada y disciplinadamente» (Ugalde 84). It also bears noting that Amorós has an abiding interest in mysticism and the role of silence in modern art and poetry, both of which relate more to the manner in which Kristeva defines female subjectivity and the power of the semiotic than to the discursive strategies of the symbolic<sup>7</sup>. Also, Amorós resolutely refuses to enter into the male dominion of historical time in yet another very telling fashion, in that she adamantly refuses to reveal her date of her birth. She rejects the suspicion of «coquetería femenina» in this regard, but rather insists upon her excision from the traditional chronological

<sup>6</sup> In his study of santa Teresa, Paul Julian Smith has elucidated the connection between Kristeva's conceptualization of the semiotic and female mysticism. See especially his *The Body Hispanic* as well as *Representing the Other*.

<sup>7</sup> See for example the following studies by Amorós which speak to her interest in both mysticism and the role of silence in contemporary art forms: «La retórica del silencio», «Palabra y silencio en la poesía de Jorge Guillén», «La influencia de la poesía mística en la poesía española contemporánea: José Angel Valente», and *La palabra del silencio*.

ordering to guard against being «incluida en una generación poética a la que pertenecía por cronología, pero con la que no me sentía vinculada por razones de poética. Procuré ocultar ese dato precisamente para no ser encasillada en un grupo generacional con el que no me identificaba» (Ugalde 79).

Turning now to her poetry, several poems of her first published collection, *Ludia* (1982) demonstrate ably the poet's awareness of the various configurations of time as well as her propensity for the representation and entrance into either the cyclical or monumental times frames posited by Kristeva. Andrew P. Debicki already has noted that the collection is named for a female *persona*, Ludia, whose Latin source suggests play and gamesmanship (34). As this critic notes, in poems such as «Escena de caza» (62-65), the poetic speaker establishes a relationship between life and art, wherein poetry seemingly becomes the vehicle to «overcome time and the intranscendence of daily life» (34). The poet's gamesmanship is readily apparent in her highly nuanced representations of the monumental time espoused by Kristeva, since in this poetic text, time's referent may be that of the eternal, monumental framework of art in general, the frozen time of the particular work of art suggested by the poem's title, the mythic context of Daphne's flight from Apollo, or ultimately, the eternal present of the poem before the reader's eyes. The poetic speaker facilitates the process by which the reader, «el testigo ocasional» (62), passes from one artistic framework to another, and effectively escapes historical time: through ekphrastic suggestion, the speaker allows the reader to contemplate eternity captured in the fleeing figure of Diana, as represented in a classical painting. Hart comments that at the poem's closing, the reader «sees the vivid, singular moment with its tension between beauty and danger, thus viewing the myth of Daphne from another vantage point» («Creative» 316). In utilizing this mythical encounter and its representation via multiple frames — a quote from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the painting alluded to in the poem's title of «Escena de caza», the ekphrastic suggestion, the poem itself framed by blank space on the page —, the reader is made aware of the points of entrance and departure from the various manifestations of feminine time, whether monumental or mythical.

Another short untitled text of this same collection also bears commentary in this same regard:

Con las manos cogíamos el fuego:  
se derramaba como ardiente vino  
y sus lenguas de grito proponían  
treguas a la negrura.

Al trasluz nuestras sombras simulaban  
rituales murciélagos nocturnos  
en la sima de un vientre sigiloso (50).

Here the poetic speaker on a mimetic level describes the enactment of an unnamed dark and sacred ritual, which contains archetypal resonances of light and darkness, good and evil perhaps, with reference to «el fuego» and «treguas a la negrura» as well as «trasluz» and «murciélagos nocturnos»<sup>8</sup>. Several critics have already noted that for Amorós the image of «fuego» represents poetry and the power of the word metamorphosed from concept into language<sup>9</sup>. The poetic speaker plays with the language on several levels, given that here fire is taken into the hands, perhaps to evidence poetry in its written form, while still suggesting its spoken form in the expression «sus lenguas de grito», where there is play between the two meanings of «lengua» as either the physical tongue located in the buccal orifice, language, or both. But one must note the insistence upon female subjectivity from the perspective of the temporal framework suggested by Kristeva, since the poetic speaker refers over and over again to past cyclical time in the use of the imperfect verbal tense —«cogíamos», «se derramaba», «proponían», «simulaban»— as well as to the female corporeal imagery of the final line of verse, suggestive of Kristeva's concretion of the *chora*: «en la sima de un vientre sigiloso». The womb is the site of creation within the female body, and the body of this particular text, and the adjective «sigiloso» at once reminds the reader of the original act of creation and eternal damnation, the story of Adam and Eve. Eve, who was the first mother, first site of human creation, was tempted by the slithering snake. The

<sup>8</sup> John C. Wilcox sees in the conflict of light and darkness in the poetry of Amorós the play of the two opposing forces of the modern poetic undertaking, that of knowledge and ignorance (98). He holds that her poetry is situated between these two impulses (101). In regard to the image of fire, in addition to the texts discussed here, see also Amorós's «Bajábamos cantando con antorchas», «Recidiva», «Transfiguración», and the collection of prose fragments entitled *El fuego pensativo*. All these texts are included in her *Visión y destino*.

<sup>9</sup> See the studies by Werner and Wilcox.

reader, like Eve, is tempted, but in the case of the reader temptation comes in the form of textuality, whose site of creation is reminiscent of the nurturing womb.

A major poem of the second collection of poetry by Amparo Amorós, *La honda travestía del águila*, brings clearly into focus the poet's confrontation with the various conceptualizations of time as well as the female poet's space, place, and function in regard to both the symbolic order, scene of male subjectivity and the semiotic order, site of the repressed and of subjectivity excluded from the dominant structures of power. In her «Juana, las voces y el fuego» (29-32), the poet presents for her readers' consideration a lyrical rendering of the story of the French warrior saint, mystic, and national heroine, Joan of Arc (1412?-1413)<sup>10</sup>. As Debicki has already noted, this long poem is spoken from the perspective of various speakers and has recourse to differing discursive poses as well as temporal registers. It is significant that Amorós chose this historical figure in particular, since Joan of Arc embodies several key themes and strategies of great import to the poet in the formation, control and dissemination of her own Word, in the form of the body of her poetic work; thus, one reading of this poetic text could be the poet's projection of her alterego and her personal process of artistic creation, which is very similar to the three stages of mysticism, purification, illumination, and union with the absolute. Debicki views the message poem as «an embodiment of a higher vision» (41), and I would add, a higher vision that offers a possible solution to the problematic of the (un)gendered poetic «I». Joan, in the tradition of the woman warrior, embodies this female poet's vision and task. The poet utilizes the figure of Joan of Arc, warrior and mystic, who resolutely places her «gender under erasure» in order to achieve her goal of historical, political and spiritual transcendence, and to enter into mystical union with God<sup>11</sup>. The poet for her part, opts for a consciously presented poetic persona with «gender under erasure» in two distinct way. First, she chose as the protagonist of this poetic text the figure of Joan of Arc, who took on a masculine role in history, rejecting female submission, dress and custom; and secondly, the

<sup>10</sup> See also the studies of this poem by Debicki and Hart («Challenging» and «Poetry»).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the literary manifestations of the warrior women of popular balladry, see the delightful study by Dianne Dugaw.

poet utilizes the masculine style of writing in order to put her own female gender under erasure on the surface level of the text. But the lyric voice aspires to a higher vision, a vision beyond superficial characteristic of gendered identity. And this identity is underwritten with the shadowed sign of the feminine, not from the perspective of sexual orientation but rather from that of the writing subject. This feminine aspect finds expression in the mystical experience itself, in the act of possession by God, in the case of Joan of Arc, and in Amorós's possession by the power of the semiotic. In this particular text, Amorós demonstrates very clearly her affinity with the views of the José Angel Valente, who ascribes to a feminine interpretation of the writing process: «Crear no es un acto de poder (poder y creación se niegan); es un acto de aceptación o reconocimiento. Crear lleva el signo de la feminidad. No es acto de penetración en la materia, sino pasión de ser penetrado por ella. Crear es generar un estado de disponibilidad, en el que la primera cosa creada es el vacío. Pues lo único que el artista acaso crea es el espacio de la creación» (*Material memoria* 41)<sup>12</sup>.

The poem opens with a brief epigraph taken from Octavio Paz «Oigo las voces que yo pienso, / las voces que me piensan al pensarlas», indicating an intuitive act of possession on the part of those interior voices toward the subject whose body they inhabit. There follows a disembodied description of time and place and how they relate to the power of the word by an as yet unidentified lyric voice:

Hay tardes que entra el viento por los ojos  
mientras devana el huso las guedejas del lino  
y el tiempo va manando entre los dedos  
entra de par en par hasta las sienes  
encallando palabras sargazos en las cejas,  
palabras que resbalan cielo adentro  
del paladar  
y salpican las noches de voces consteladas (29).

The specificity of afternoons framed by domestic, female activities and the outer world of anecdotal reality will soon be contrasted with the monumental, interior time of a first-person speaker who struggles to 'come to terms' with the unnerving expe-

<sup>12</sup> See Jonathan Mayhew's study of this aspect of Valente's work in his «'El signo de la feminidad': Gender and Poetic Creation in José Angel Valente».

rience of the presence of «las voces» that take possession of her consciousness and create a palpable boundary between the outer world organized and regimented by linear time, and the inner experience unfettered by chronological temporal constraints. It is only in the second and succeeding strophes that a lyric «I», Joan of Arc of the poem's title, allows herself to be given corporality in verbal form, as she stills herself to await their coming:

Me siento junto al fuego y las oigo venir  
 corredor hacia mí de la memoria.  
 (...)  
 Me toman de la mano  
 y dicen no sé qué de algún largo viaje  
 mientras bajo con ellas al fondo de mí misma  
 y aprendo una canción que se llama destino  
 pero aún no comprendo  
 porque el vaho del miedo ha empañado la letra (29-30).

Joan of Arc, the text's speaker at this juncture, frames the conjecture of the voices' departure within a domestic economy, and gives expression to the female metaphor of domestic space and enclosure in order to contemplate their possible disappearance: «Si al fin me abandonasen me deshabitaría / casa que nadie puebla, hospedaje de ausencia, / caparazón inútil albergando vacío» (30). She herself is the «casa», the «hospedaje de ausencia», and the lobster-like «caparazón inútil albergando vacío» (30). In this segment, all occurs and is conceptualized within the framework of the eternal, monumental present. Her identity with the word overrides all humanly constructed edifices and orderings:

Porque yo soy el nombre que interroga su enigma  
 y ellas el eco de mi ser: acorde  
 de acentos disonantes que conciertan  
 el instante de amor que es la belleza.  
 Saberlas es saberme  
 y revelarlas  
 imagen de la muerte que salvará el olvido (30).

After a pause and with the signal of typographical space, a disembodied and unidentified lyrical voice declares «Ya todo se ha cumplido. / Perdura sólo el rastro. / Hay ahora un sosiego que se llama silencio» (30). As if to serve the purpose of a radio announcer or dramatic framer, the lyric voice tenders the closing of

one segment of this poetic text, based for the most part on the perspective of monumental time. The lasting presence of an all-encompassing trace or «rastros» drifts in the air, supported by the surrounding silence.

In the succeeding segment, marked not only by a change of lyric voice, but typography and discursive style as well, there is presented an excerpt from the *Procès de condamnation* (vol. I, 390), by which Joan of Arc was tried and condemned for heresy and sorcery. The change in tone to a distinct form of discourse while maintaining the format of poetic verse anchors this segment to historical temporality but breaks the frame of the poetic text of Joan's story in several ways, in that the poet marks this other form of textuality by offering it to her readers in italics, and also provides a footnote which reveals the specific source of this simultaneously excised and inserted component:

Y le fue mostrado  
cuán serio y peligroso  
es examinar curiosamente  
las cosas que están más allá  
de la comprensión humana,  
y creer en cosas nuevas...  
e incluso inventar cosas nuevas  
y desusadas,  
pues los demonios saben  
cómo introducirse  
en semejantes curiosidades (31).

The discourse of official condemnation frames itself within the historical past by utilizing the preterite, and also frames of the surrounding lyrical text with the insertion of the obtrusive footnote. This double act of framing effectively extricates the unnamed Juana from her interior world of voices and inserts her and her story into that of ecclesiastical hierarchy. As Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway comment, «Genres serve as key to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community» (2). The genre of ecclesiastical and juridical proceedings defines and is defined by a given community, in this case, that of the patriarchal Church hierarchy that aspires to silence a singular female voice, that of Joan, which claims direct communication with God<sup>13</sup>. Joan is referred to only indirectly, while emphasis is placed upon the error

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the relationship of gender to genre, and to the reading process, see the excellent study by Mary Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*.

of her ways, as they are interpreted by the male ecclesiastical tribunal. By making reference to the source of the text from the proceedings of her condemnation, it is a foregone conclusion that her silencing will be carried out by means of her execution. But ironically, her bodily removal from the course of history, as controlled by male subjectivity, will assure her entrance into the monumental time of myth and the eternal, the nurturing presence beyond time, with its suggestion of female subjectivity. Joan's monumentality, her status as an individual who remained true to her iconoclastic course in spite of the deadly consequences, signals her excision from the discourse of political power and her entrance into the realm of the eternal.

After a brief pause marked by a space on the page, the unnamed lyric speaker returns to offer a metaphorical statement concerned with freedom, flight, and transcendence, presented in conventional typographical casting. It is significant that the nightingale, symbolic of love, charity and the humility of the priesthood (Pérez-Rioja 57) ascends toward the sky, with its suggestion of both plumage and flame: «Escapando / a las cimas del aire / una alondra busca su libertad / mientras el cielo / es una espesa flama / de humo y de ceniza» (31). The speaker thus alludes to Joan's ability to transcend the historical discourse of her ecclesiastical condemnation as well as superficial gender distinctions that attempt to confine as well as obliterate her. Her higher calling to the priesthood and direct communication with God put her at odds with religious authority both because of her gender and because of her rejection of the conventionalized ecclesiastical role as intermediary to the divine. The allusion to conflagration, the «espesa flama», efficiently conflates burning love and desire, burning at the stake, and the eternal flame of memory and remembrance.

The poetic speaker then presents for the reader's consideration the denouement which in truth is an end of the historical tale of Joan of Arc, but in fact the point of entry for her ascendance to the mythical and eternal. By utilizing a framework once again based on the masculine ecclesiastical community, that of the banquet table, the speaker points to their attempt to exclude the feminine in the (her)story of Joan of Arc:

El banquete tocaba ya a su fin.  
 (...)  
 mientras los tonsurados, el obispo

y los nobles, hambrientos  
 todavía  
 de justicia, insaciables  
 de verdad absoluta,  
 rebañaban los platos  
 con las postreras  
 migajas del mantes (31-32).

There exists traditionally a powerful relationship between women and food: women prepare the feast, launder and press the table linens, set the table, and serve the food, but often are prohibited the right of participation at the banquet itself. In this case, Joan is absent / present at the feast, absent because she has been condemned to death and burned at the stake, but present in the thoughts of the nobles and the bishop, who are «hambrientos todavía de justicia» (31), and who are attempting to justify and rationalize their judgment of her. In a very literal sense, Joan is present at the banquet because she provides those seated at the table with 'food for thought'. The speaker contrasts the base and vilifying hunger, this self-serving gluttony of the male nobles and bishop, their hunger representing their insatiable desire for power, status, and the silencing of Joan, with the spiritual hunger of Joan herself, who wishes to be joined with her beloved in mystical transfiguration. Her body will feed the flames of the bonfire, while her spirit will be joined to the flame of divine love. The nightingale «busca su libertad» (31), escaping to the heavens set ablaze, «una espesa flama / de humo y ceniza» (31).

The poetic speaker then poses a question that incorporates both the male subjectivity of historicity as well as that of the repressed Other that remains outside the power of discourse, in order to consider Joan of Arc's relevance for the present time: «¿Quién ya / sino en tu nombre / los recuerda?» With this apostrophic query, the speaker addresses Joan herself and alludes to her historical existence in chronological time, her continuing presence among us by means of remembrance and memory, as well as the inversion of hierarchies effected by memory. Those unnamed men who silenced and condemned this brave, visionary woman are remembered now only in relation to her. The power of this apostrophic conjuring allows Joan of Arc to exist fully within monumental time, the eternal present, and suggests her continued viability and power. The answer to the question ironically has been answered

by history, the domain of male subjectivity. Joan's name, renown, and story remain, while the cast of characters intent on her destruction has been silenced and forgotten. It is only through her that a remembrance of them takes form.

The poem closes with a commentary upon Joan of Arc's continued relevance, her eternal presence, and the power of her word:

En cambio tú  
 por ser llamada a la hoguera de lo que no dura  
 eres Juana del fuego,  
 Juana de las voces  
 y fiel a su respuesta  
 permaneces  
 ardiendo la memoria  
 para siempre (32).

The speaker insists upon the image of fire, not only in «hoguera», «fuego», and «ardiendo» but also in the ellision of the concepts of flame, «llama», and calling, from the verb «llamar», in the Spanish word «llamada». Joan's calling sent her to the flames, but as a consequence, the flame of her love and desire continues to burn bright in the retelling of her story. The power of divine love and the word propel Joan into the eternal sphere of the poem's closing verse of «para siempre». The higher calling of Joan of Arc is equivalent to that of the poet herself, who must on the one hand consciously choose to rise above the divisions of gender in submitting to the power of the voices that take possession of her at the level of the semiotic, and on the other, depend upon the power of female subjectivity in order to leave behind historical contextualization. In so doing, the poet, like Joan of Arc, is empowered to enter into the much more eloquent and resonating realm of the eternal<sup>14</sup>.

Joan's faithfulness to her voices and the response, the «respuesta» within her as evoked in the closing strophe of this poem, became the title of yet another poetic text in Amorós's following book of verse entitled *Árboles de la música* (1995)<sup>15</sup>. Many poems from

<sup>14</sup> Although it falls outside the scope of this study, it is interesting to note that in «Juana, las voces y el fuego» the imagery that refers to Joan of Arc revolves around the elements to fire and air, the two basic elements that are conventionally associated with the masculine.

<sup>15</sup> From this point forward all page references will be to Amorós's *Visión y destino. Poesía 1982-1992*, a compendium of her poetic production up until that date.

from this collection appeared in print previous to the collection's publication as a whole, and had circulated in photocopied versions as well. This poem, aptly titled «La respuesta» (165-166), opens with a series of queries, whose answer(s) is / are the poetic text itself:

¿Nunca te has preguntado cuando cae la tarde tu edad  
 y en silencio, frente al fuego incesante de los días  
 por qué hay leños que arden hondo y sin llamear  
 como en un vendaval que, interior, los devora  
 sin destellos ni queja, prendidos de su ser,  
 ávidos de cumplirse abrazando la yesca  
 de esa devastación que los enciende en canto?  
 ¿Qué consciente locura consume su existir parco  
 de teas lúcidas? ¿Qué aliento sigiloso  
 los aventa en ceniza aún tibia sobre el mundo?  
 ¿Es éste su sentido? ¿Nacieron para arder?  
 ¿Para ese arder sin ramas de luz ni hojas de fuego,  
 sobrio y desarbolado, secreto de tan solo,  
 altivo porque es débil, en vilo del coraje,  
 verdad de su pasión por una forma pura,  
 fuerza de esa belleza que es íntimo poder? (165)

In this poetic text, the speaker contemplates the existence of the material world as it takes form in trees. The ungendered poetic voice invites the reader, «tú», to contemplate the nature of existence for this form of life, and by extension, to contemplate the meaning of life for the human sector as well. As is her wont, Amorós plays upon the various manifestations of time, showing how trees respond to the passage of time in a historical sense, in order to enter into the realm of the eternal, the realm of the absolute: «es hora de sentarse sereno y en penumbra / a contemplar, absorto, cómo queman el tiempo / los leños del invierno...» (165). The poetic speaker differentiates between those trees that burn brightly, «crecen en lenguas / altas, / restallan, centellean, alzándose gozosos / con su triunfo de palmas momentáneas y vívidas», and those that burn more slowly, stubbornly holding on to their form of existence: «y también hay maderas refrenadas, muy tercas, / sostenidas, leales, con la tenacidad que requieren al alba los fríos de febrero» (166). Trees, in their glory and variety, lend themselves quite freely to a representation of the feminine, cyclical aspect of nature, which renews itself even in the destruction of a conflagration.

The poem concludes with the poetic speaker encouraging the reader to receive the gift that is being offered —the fire's warmth, and also the poetic text—, by commenting upon the generosity of the trees in giving of themselves to be possessed by the flames in order to fulfill their destiny and ascend to the realm of the absolute:

Recibe este regalo de su calor hermoso  
 y si en darlo se extinguen no sientas su destino.  
 Hay una gloria humilde en las cosas que en ser  
 lo que son se consumen. Fieles, como estos leños.  
 Nacieron para arder (166).

The act of handing oneself over in humility to the experience of consummation is reminiscent of the female passivity necessary for the act of creation signalled by Valente. Debicki comments that «The landscape of tress and nature weaved by the poet, reminiscent of some works of Vicente Aleixandre effort at creating a vision —perhaps even a myth— with which to battle the forces of time and death» (44). I would add only that the experience and rendering of female subjectivity as it relates to the temporal and the semiotic allows the speaker to focus on the mythical and eternal as a means of reconciliation with the poetic function. Trees, like the poet, burn brightly, and in being consumed, both fulfill their destiny and render a service by contributing to the natural order.

In her poetry Amparo Amorós consciously elects to place her gender under erasure in regard to the specifics of her discursive practices. But in her representation of time and space within the context of the mythical, the natural order, and the eternal, she opens herself to the expression of the subjectivity of otherness which includes that of the feminine, and to the transcendence of the semiotic. In so doing, her poetry in turn opens itself to the expression of a telluric wisdom that surpasses conventional gender limitations imposed by social norms, customs and preconceptions, and thus enters the realm of eternal truth, for women and men alike. In allowing herself to aspire to this higher vision and subsequently to adopt the socially constructed female position of passivity, and then to be possessed by the power of the semiotic, a knowing beyond language itself, her poetry expresses an intuitive —and decidedly feminine— knowledge of the absolute.

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