

Imagination as Salvation in Juan Carlos Onetti's *A Brief Life*

David Elías Hernández Morales

Translated from the Spanish

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Licenciado en Lengua y Literaturas Hispánicas

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Advisor: Dr Manuel Segundo Garrido Valenzuela

Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City, 2021

*for my daughter, Olivia I. H. F.,
olive tree of my dreams;
to your imagination in flames;
in testa-ment;
cuculla rubra.*

Man is a god when he dreams,
and a beggar when he reflects.

Hölderlin

What God behind God begins the plot
of dust and time and dream and agonies?

Borges

Man is the only creature on earth
that has the will to look into the interior of another.

Hans Carossa

Contents

Introduction	2
Theoretical framework	9
Brausen, an imagined being who imagines; or, imagination as ontological salvation	16
Chapter 1. Brausen's reality and the sense of the trap	16
Chapter 2. The process of creation and self-creation	35
Chapter 3. Ontological dimensions: the journeys of being	63
Chapter 4. Salvation and the dialectic of imagination	83
Conclusions	107
Bibliography	113

Introduction

Every symbol has a flesh; every dream, a reality.

Oscar W. Milosz¹

The axis of this investigation turns on imagination as the instrument, or the central strategy, in the process of salvation of life's meaning in the novel *A Brief Life* (1950), by the Uruguayan writer Juan Carlos Onetti. Accordingly, I postulate: 1. Brausen, the protagonist of the novel under study, as a man who feels trapped and degraded in the reality of his everyday life, weighed down by a sense of inner emptiness and frustration. 2. The novel as an exploration and an overcoming of degraded and fragmented human existence.

In keeping with the specific purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the analysis of point 1, since it implicitly feeds point 2. In both perspectives the underlying idea points toward a present-day assessment of the orienting role of the novel as a genre in the search for authentic values within the complex world of a modernity in crisis, and of Latin American modernity in particular.

In this way, and paraphrasing Milan Kundera, I claim that Brausen is not happy inside the trap his world has become. From here I read that he sets in motion, through imagination, a process of salvation. Salvation in an ontological sense. For everything seems to indicate that the trap, in the end, lies in his condition as a man and in the vicissitudes that come with it. Let me be plain: since Brausen feels trapped, perhaps beyond remedy, he does not merely suffer for it; he also takes on the need to overcome the condition of his existence, and to do so he employs imagination, that depreciated legacy of Cervantes, as Kundera called it. Following Lukács,² for whom “the novel is the story of the problematic individual who undertakes a journey into the interior of himself in search of authentic values in a degraded world”, I read in *A Brief Life* the story of a suffering, riven creature; endowed, nevertheless, with a creative will, so as to build himself into a being reconciled with his genuine inwardness, beyond the worldly interests of an everyday life reduced to means and ends. Here, where imagination plays as the creative will of an authentic existence, I observe the salvation that carries being into a metaphysical dimension.³

It is worth noting that the search for salvation takes place on two planes. On one hand it is a search within an inauthentic mode of being:⁴ settling his debts, repairing his marriage, avoiding

¹Oscar W. Milosz, *La amorosa iniciación*, Toluca, Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 2002, p. 102.

²György Lukács, *Teoría de la novela. Un ensayo histórico filosófico sobre las formas de la gran literatura épica*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Godot, 2010.

³I understand the metaphysical dimension not from the traditional transcendental metaphysics on which philosophy has been founded (Aristotle to Kant), but as an order of existence proper to fiction. That is, I read the character of fiction as metaphysical by nature, sharing fibres with the world of myth, that old homeland of imagination. See on this point *El ser y la poesía. El entrecruce del discurso metafísico y el discurso poético*, by Mauricio Beuchot (México, Universidad Iberoamericana, 2003); *El tiempo y lo imaginario*, by Adriana Yáñez Vilalta (México, FCE, 2011); as well as Bachelard's extensive work on the phenomenology of imagination.

⁴To put it in Heidegger's terms in his exploration of being (*Ser y tiempo*, Madrid, Trotta, 2009).

dismissal, to name a few. All of this depends on managing to write a film treatment commissioned by his friend Stein; which is to say, on placing the creative armoury at the level of a cheque, a monetary instrument. On the other hand, the limitations of that inauthentic search, and in the end its failure, open the possibility of another kind of salvation, this time within an authentic mode of being: to be saved in an ontological order, where imagination performs its fundamental role insofar as it turns its work toward the inwardness of being; that unknown and even forgotten thing. Might the key between the one and the other lie in Brausen finding, within the everyday, the deep nature of his human condition? Onetti himself said it: “In the novel, the character is man within his circumstance”.⁵

Put another way, Brausen fails as a modern man within a utilitarian materialist logic, and so he has, in consequence, the possibility of saving himself in a deeper sense: in the complexity of his being. Let us recall that Onetti is situated in the crumbling of the modern bourgeois line, after the two World Wars (*A Brief Life* is published in 1950). Which is why the repeated ruin of his characters coincides, in large part, with that of a type of society and of man in crisis.⁶ And perhaps *A Brief Life* leaves the impression that what is at stake is not the great failure,⁷ but those small and almost insignificant ones, more pitiful still, of an ordinary man who cannot see in them the failure of man as a species. Hence if one asks, “where does the sense of salvation lie for Brausen?”, the question finds no answer in the real life of his everyday existence, but in another dimension, where the creative (dreaming) imagination recapitulates and restructures the degraded, unhappy and suffering experiences within a context that is, this time, meaningful.

It will be, then, in that other search for an authentic salvation that Brausen will notice that what he experiences as a trap in his everydayness has a deeper root: in the threads of the suffering condition of being human, where the work of imagination will be fundamental. Seen this way: is fiction a return to existential failure?

Under these terms, in Brausen, salvation will consist in raising his “being-in-the-world” into a “being(other)-in(other)-the world(other)”.⁸ That “other” will found the threshold of fiction as a

⁵ Juan Carlos Onetti, “La literatura. Ida y vuelta”, in *Requiem por Faulkner y otros artículos*, Buenos Aires, Arca/Calicanto, 1976, p. 197 [my translation]. On this point we may recall Ortega y Gasset’s unsettling sentence: “I am I and my circumstance, and if I do not save it I do not save myself”. *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2005.

⁶ “The removal of everything that was considered a value manifested itself in the literary field in a specific way. From the 1960s onward, writers have had to recreate the historical dimension of man and confront the problem of reality and fiction from a different and new perspective. Moreover, the break with the conventional has become indispensable in the face of an unknown age” [my translation]. Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, *El siglo del desencanto*, México, FCE, 2002, p. 205.

⁷ I allude to the “great failure” understood as the fall of the narratives of modern society and, in consequence, of a type of man. In *A Brief Life*, Stein refers to the “great failure” (p. 55) of his life as a whole, insofar as his sense of fulfilment is subject to the values of a modern system.

⁸ Starting from Heidegger and his notion of “being-in-the-world” (*Ser y tiempo*) as the fundamental structure of man (*Dasein*), I venture, in a kind of wish to express the nature of fiction in an ontological order, to do violence to those *existentialia* with the rank of the “other” that imagination opens, insofar as it alters the threads of a “fundamental ontological” order into a “metaphysical-poetic” one. I read, in this way, in the possibility of being (being-project according to its condition as being-time), a transgression in the ontological structure of being so as to arrive at a

narrative of the possible in a metaphysical dimension, one that carries with it an ethical and an aesthetic dimension. Through here, therefore, circulates the process of the creation of Santa María and of the self-creation of Juan María Brausen as Juan María Arce.

I observe in Brausen a dialectic in which the search for salvation through the authentic (what he wants to be) in an ontological order implies a further series of questions: does he achieve what he wants to be as salvation? Is there really any such thing? In what sense? And this leads to questioning the very consistency of human nature. In these questions nests the mystery of Brausen and of *A Brief Life* as poetics and as novelistic genre. Since no answer is given in advance, the questions become crucial across the length of the novel, and of Onetti's poetics entire, whose open and ambiguous ending grants, in consequence, no certainty at all but quite the opposite: a greater complexity, one that exceeds the work itself, to the point that it will be in *Let the Wind Speak* (1979) that mythical Santa María is finally consumed by flames.⁹ That provincial city, which was already a promise of salvation, suffers and degrades absurdly just as Brausen's reality does: an idyllic city that corrupts itself, filled with brothels, with failed men and women, with tedium and rot, perhaps as a symbolic representation of Onetti's vision of modernity in Latin America. Here is another turn of the screw, for the thing imagined suffers the ruins of the world it was made from, letting us see, perhaps, that salvation does not exist, and that every imaginary would be the door into a new hell.¹⁰ In the end, Santa María is made of Brausen's demons, in the order of a trap deeper still.

Seeing the novel and the character in question this way, I assume in this thesis that perhaps there is no salvation as such, since in Onetti the trap seems to be the human condition itself, and hence its ontological sense. Salvation, therefore, would in any case lie elsewhere, or in another game (or re-game): to imagine and to imagine again; a dynamism in which salvation would not be the end but the means. Following Bachelard,¹¹ for whom imagination means primarily the capacity to do violence to images, we may say that the static image is perhaps the petrification of a living imagination whose spirit rests on constant destruction and creation. In accordance with the above, I distinguish three key categories: trap, imagination and salvation. Each of them, being as such forms of existence, has a depth and a network of complicated vertices. Thus, in analysing trap, imagination and salvation, I examine Brausen's becoming, the role of imagination in the process of overcoming everyday existence within himself, and salvation in the terms of a new narrative or fiction, with which he attempts to reconcile everyday degradation with his most meaningful inner values.

metaphysical dimension proper to fiction; a fiction whose breath runs from the everyday to the universal, from the ephemeral to the eternal, from the finite to the infinite...

⁹"If in *A Brief Life* [says Eduardo Becerra] writing implied liberation, in *Let the Wind Speak* one arrives at an attempt at liberation through a writing that paradoxically implies the destruction of what has been created" [my translation]. "Santa María de Onetti: autodestrucción y ficción literaria", in *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*, no. 02, 1991 (219–241), Universidad Complutense, Madrid, p. 239.

¹⁰Anchored in the classical Greek tradition, "hell" carries a connotation of the impassable abyss of the unknown that we are: the *inferi* of the human interior.

¹¹Gaston Bachelard, *El aire y los sueños. Ensayo sobre la imaginación del movimiento*, México, FCE, 1985.

At the end of the thesis a contradictory salvation will come into play, which I name the “dialectic of imagination”, in which what is created suffers the ruins of that from which it is made. For this reason the question of salvation leads to a further series of questions: saved from what, what is the trap, where does its sense lie? If the trap lies implicated in human nature, is it possible to stand outside it? Faced with this, what role is played by the reality that limits, directs and conditions the full realisation of the human being? What implications, on the other hand, does fiction hold over that reality? What sense is there in imagining when failure seems inherent to it? Is imagination, then, a flight and an evasion of reality? What, in any case, are we talking about when we talk about imagination?

In general terms, I can maintain that the search for salvation has much to do with the search for happiness (in the self-perception of a full life, set against a “brief life”), which breaks through into questions as deep as love and eroticism, understood as the dynamics of a living imagination. Brausen wants to be happy, and to that end he needs to create an alternate reality that is his own and in which he recognises himself: a work in which he builds himself. In his case, another city, and himself another man. On this point I take up the unsettling notions Harari lets us see in *Homo Deus*,¹² especially in his subchapter “Happiness”, where he questions the sense of happiness within a biochemical order based on pleasure, carrying it into the terrain of sensation. How much does happiness, as an overcoming of pain and frustration, owe to perception? Might the trap of which we speak nest in the order of sensation and perception, and salvation in opening those doors so as to go beyond the festival of insignificance in everyday life?¹³ Is imagination not already a bodily, sensible exercise and not merely a mental one?

From this angle of reflection and analysis, I want to think that for Brausen the imagined creation of Arce and of the city of Santa María constitute a way of problematising, in the sense of opening, the ordinary perceptions that bind him to the suffering and frustrated existence he leads as “Brausen”. Because for him the identifying, unrenounceable narrative of his life is generated as a trap insofar as it condemns and petrifies his own being. After all, perceptions are the central matter of the narrative each of us tells of and to himself and to his existential circumstance. For this reason, with imagination’s help, he will attempt an alternate existence: through it he will modify the petrified sensation he holds of himself, of the city, and of his existence within it.

¹²Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus. Breve historia del mañana*, México, Debate, 2016, p. 42.

¹³In this last point, alluding once more to Kundera with his book *La fiesta de la insignificancia* (México, Tusquets Editores, 2014).

¹⁴I move from “homo” to “man” understood as the transition from a being in a state of immanence (a given world) to an entity that constructs itself as culture (an architectonic world). In this transition, Žižek gives priority to the phenomenon of imagination within the unconscious, which “mediates” between one state and the other. Let us recall that imagination refers not only to the conscious act as fantasy, but is implicated, according to the Romantics (Kant, *Crítica de la razón pura*, 1781; Fichte, *Ensayo de una crítica de toda revelación*, 1792), within the unconscious and subjectivity. It is this subjective imagination that mediates between perception and thought, and that carries man to the awakening of the word (*logos*) in the process of interpretation. Understood thus, imagination “opens” the doors of being. For Heidegger, imagination is already not merely a faculty or attribute but an *existential* (*Kant y el problema*

Finally, if man becomes human by and through imagination,¹⁴ will it be through imagination that Brausen manages to descend into himself so as to open those doors again in the reconfiguration of his being? Will it be in this arduous process of coming to consciousness in the descent through himself that the mystery of trap and salvation nests, in the dialectic of imagination itself? Will salvation be possible for Brausen insofar as he manages to understand the causes that give rise to the feelings of frustration and pain? To shed light on these questions is the purpose of this investigation, founded on Brausen's existential drama in the novel and on my reading of Onetti.¹⁵

To place salvation at the height of perception, as the overcoming of a sensible trap, is to situate it at the level of the phenomenon of imagination. Both lie in what Žižek calls the “vanishing mediator”,¹⁶ where a great part of human nature is played out. Brausen presents himself to us, then, as a handful of sensations, and from them he suffers, and to them he descends in order to re-create himself as another. Santa María is sensibility made matter, a metaphysical matter but not for that reason unreal.¹⁷ Onetti recognises as much in Proust:

[...] if literature is an art, *In Search of Lost Time* matters more than everything that has been written in Spanish America for a century and a half. I accept the possibility of being mistaken, and if anyone can cite a title or an author that neutralises or destroys this opinion, let him be welcome, provided I find him convincing. Otherwise, I would not start weeping like Murena, and if I were a young writer I would be glad to have the chance to do in America what has not been done until now.¹⁸

de la metafísica, 1929). Žižek explains it so: “The key is that the passage from ‘Nature’ to ‘culture’ is not direct, that it is not possible to describe it with a continuous evolutionary narrative: something must intervene between the two domains, a kind of ‘vanishing mediator’ that is neither Nature nor culture. All evolutionary narratives tacitly presuppose this intermediary. We are not idealists: this intermediary is not the spark of *logos* magically conferred on *Homo sapiens* [...] but precisely something that, while no longer Nature, is not yet *logos* either [...]. The Freudian name for this intermediary is the ‘death drive’. On this point it is interesting to observe that philosophical narratives of the ‘birth of man’ are always obliged to presuppose a moment of that kind in (pre)history, a moment in which (future) man is no longer a mere animal but not yet ‘a being of language’ governed by symbolic law; it is a moment of a wholly ‘perverted’, ‘denatured’ Nature, ‘off the rails’, that is not yet culture” [my translation] (Slavoj Žižek, “El atoladero de la imaginación trascendental, o Martin Heidegger como lector de Kant”, in *El espinoso sujeto. El centro ausente de la ontología política*, México, Paidós, 2001, p. 47). That “vanishing mediator” to which Žižek refers is, in his words, “that of the purest and most radical imagination, whose force is destructive”, hence its connection with the “death drive”. In a similar register, Yuval Noah Harari finds in imagination the key expression in which one would have to seek the difference between the human being and the rest of the species (*Sapiens. De animales a dioses. Una breve historia de la humanidad*, México, Debate, 2016). Without doubt this theme is the subject of strong debate across a wide disciplinary range. For this investigation, centred on imagination, I recover the philosophical notions of the imaginative phenomenon within human becoming and its creative process.

¹⁵In this sense I let myself be guided by *The Art of the Novel*, where Kundera maintains that the novelistic genre is not a biography of the author but an exploration of human existence within the trap the world has become.

¹⁶Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*

¹⁷To understand fiction as “unreal” for lacking a direct referentiality has been a de facto error in the comprehension of fiction and therefore of imagination. On the contrary, these represent not a flight but a return to the deepest threads of reality, which also means narrative, plot, imagination made flesh.

¹⁸Juan Carlos Onetti, “La literatura. Ida y vuelta”, in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, pp. 195–196 [my translation].

Might that novelist not be Onetti himself, in problematising man from the deepest level of sensation and perception? If Proust is the writer of sensations, opening in them, from within the novel, the doors of perception, Onetti seems to be, at least in Latin America, one of his greatest heirs. *A Brief Life* already stands as a poetics of the sensations.¹⁹

Let me return to the beginning of this Introduction. Brausen feels trapped. That is how he sees himself. Irremediably in the trap, where he believes himself to be what in truth he is not, which is almost always the very source of pain. Brausen is not his own master; he has himself fallen into the forgetting of his being. A being that could be another, insofar as it constitutes not a solid entity but a changing one. At bottom, the imaginary journey is the adventure that runs from the experienced, assimilated and known (in everyday life) toward the unknown; a journey to the deep root of pain and to the possibilities of overcoming it, so as to be born again and elsewhere. Such is the movement from the real to the symbolic; which is to say, from the ontological to the metaphysical.

And so, from those three forms of existence (trap, imagination and salvation) I read in the novel the different levels of fiction, or levels of reality:²⁰ 1) Brausen's everydayness, which presents itself to him as a trap; 2) Santa María as the world Brausen creates imaginatively out of a film treatment rehearsed in order to save himself; and 3) "Arce" as that self-creation by which Brausen raises himself as "another" in order to undertake the journey into what he has created. In this way creation and self-creation, as levels of fiction and reality, represent new dimensions of the human in which each disturbs the other and gives it sense. Understood thus, the work of fiction, that is, of volitional imagination, will be to question, transgress and refound the ontological base of reality.

Along this line, Brausen possesses a "human complexity" insofar as one can read in his "construction" the well, or the mystery, of imagination. For this it is necessary to recall that:

"a character is nothing other than an effect of sense, and it is necessary to insist on the constructed character that every character has; [nevertheless] while it is true that a character is not a representation of human beings as a 'faithful copy'; that, owing to the self-referentiality inherent to universes of discourse, a character is, more than an 'organic' entity 'with a life of its own', an effect of sense, a character-effect; it is also true that the ultimate reference of every actor is, let me insist, to a world of human action and values.

For what is at stake in narrative is not solely language, as many would have us believe. In a verbal narrative, without any doubt, signification is produced in large part by linguistic and discursive means; the beings that act there are verbal entities and therefore *sine materia*; nevertheless, what matters, in terms of signification, is the world of human action that every narration projects [...] for the act of narrating, to invoke Culler, is a 'contract of intelligibility'."²¹

¹⁹Perhaps it is because of this continual appeal to sensibility that many readers have built bridges between Onetti's work and a cinematographic language, placing sight as the privileged sense; not, however, the only one.

²⁰Levels of reality and fiction may be read as levels of existence. Cf. Italo Calvino, "Niveles de realidad en la literatura", in Enric Sullá (ed.), *Teoría de la novela. Antología de textos del siglo XX*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1996, pp. 197–201, and Luz Aurora Pimentel, *El espacio en la ficción*, México, UNAM-Siglo XXI, 2001.

To this we must add that the importance of narrative, in this case of the narrative of fiction, in the order of trap and salvation, lies in the fact that “real” human existence takes on sense insofar as, in narration, its symbolic becoming is woven. In Ricoeur’s terms: “time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative mode, and narration attains its full signification when it becomes a condition of temporal existence”.²² In this way the space of fiction reveals a symbolic human space, which is why “Santa María” represents an interior cartography.

The methodological, theoretical and argumentative challenge therefore runs through approaching the character from the total weave of his dimensions. Because Onetti’s characters, in this case Brausen, share with us a profound entity insofar as we can read in them the problem of our own existence. It should be noted that by “dimensions” I understand the threads with which the human being is woven, threads found at different existential levels and with sensible implications of differing degrees: the ethical, the aesthetic and the erotic dimension, whose meshing with the sensible means that these are not merely philosophical disciplines but aspects of the human. For all this, I understand that *A Brief Life*, a novel of the search for an authentic salvation, means, in consequence, the novel of the search for imagination: a journey running from the discovery of imagination to the incarnation of its dialectic.

²¹Luz Aurora Pimentel, *El relato en perspectiva*, México, Siglo XXI, 1998, pp. 59–62 [my translation]. Cf. Jonathan Culler, “¿Qué es la teoría?”, in *Breve introducción a la teoría literaria*, Barcelona, Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 2000, pp. 11–28.

²²Paul Ricoeur, *Tiempo y narración I*, México, FCE, 1995, p. 113 [my translation].

Theoretical framework

*Naturam non matrem esse humani sed novercam*²³

The theoretical framework for this thesis is constituted around a phenomenology of imagination, insofar as *A Brief Life* allows us to read within it the imaginative phenomenon and problem lodged in Brausen's heuristic. Such a phenomenology, which we can trace in the Kant–Heidegger tension, following Slavoj Žižek,²⁴ opens a philosophical problem that I bring down onto the plane of literature with what Gaston Bachelard calls the “phenomenology of the creative imagination”,²⁵ which is distinguished from the “properly philosophical” one by its poetic character, insofar as it is the result of the work of imagination itself in its productive capacity.²⁶ Faced with this phenomenology, it is significant to note that between imagination conceived from a transcendental metaphysics (Kant) and imagination conceived from a fundamental ontology (Heidegger), the very character of imagination is at stake, running from an abstract nature to a corporeal one; natures that reveal, in turn, two aspects of man: consciousness and the unconscious. For imagination of a fundamental ontological character is found, in Heidegger's terms, in the “well of being”, while imagination of a metaphysical and transcendental character answers to a volitional character impelled from consciousness. Translated into a poetic phenomenology, hand in hand with Bachelard, to the fundamental ontological imagination there corresponds the image of water as the element that manifests the depth of being, the matter of its “birth”, while to the metaphysical and transcendental imagination there corresponds the image of fire, the matter of “death”, as the incarnation of eroticism. Metaphorical elements of primitive value, in whose tension the dialectical character of imagination is played out: creation and destruction. Creative work already participates in both natures, the ontological and the metaphysical, and not in one alone. In this case, the dialectic of creative imagination takes place in the founding of Santa María under a poetics of water (*A Brief Life*, 1950) and in its destruction under a poetics of fire (*Let the Wind Speak*, 1979). Understood in this way, and in tune with that poetic phenomenology of imagination, this thesis is formulated as an attempt to approach the imaginative phenomenon in both its method and its form of analysis.

Such a philosophical and literary perspective on imagination²⁷ unfolds a range of problems that point toward the question of what the human being is and what the being of fiction is. Questions that survive in the reality–fiction duality within a modern society which, as Lukács notes, has been

²³“Nature is not the mother of humankind but its stepmother.” Lactantius, *De opificio Dei* (On the Workmanship of God), 3, 1.

²⁴Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*

²⁵Gaston Bachelard, *La poética de la ensoñación*, México, FCE, 1982.

²⁶The foundation for such a phenomenology is given in a metaphorical language as a path of knowledge. “Fundamental metaphors”, María Zambrano called them. Cf. *El sueño creador (Los sueños, el soñar y la creación por la palabra)*, Universidad Veracruzana-México, Xalapa, 1965.

²⁷Terry Eagleton has already emphasised the profound connection that exists between philosophy and literary theory, a connection maintained with other disciplines as well. Terry Eagleton, *Una introducción a la teoría literaria*, México, FCE, 1998, p. 7.

erected upon the misfit between man and his world.²⁸ From that perspective, I understand that the communicating vessel between a “human world” and a “fictional” one takes place in being at a symbolic order.²⁹ In consequence, I read in Brausen, lodged in the imaginative and imaginary phenomenon of literary labour, the problem of modern and degraded human existence in the face of the fall of the modern narrative.³⁰ The notions of being that I take up from Heidegger (*Ser y tiempo*) and Jean-Paul Sartre (*El ser y la nada*) are carried in this way onto literary terrain, opening in Brausen an ontological and metaphysical perspective. Such a philosophical panorama on imagination leads me to a specific conception of trap and salvation. If imagination, in philosophical terms, represents a problem of being,³¹ the sense of trap and salvation acquires, in consequence, an existential value.

Let me be plain. The foundation of the trap has its root in man’s ontological difference from the world that surrounds him. A difference experienced, in Heidegger’s terms, as anxiety.³² Such a human nature is read by ontology as a state of thrownness, of fallenness; a state that obliges man to seek different forms of reconciliation.³³

What is singular about existential anxiety is that it does not remain in a mythical past; since it constitutes us ontologically, it survives into the modern and the postmodern age.³⁴ If the man of the closed world of myth, a stranger to enlightened reason though not to reason as a faculty, resolved his ontological difference through imagination,³⁵ modern man, by contrast, makes of that difference

²⁸Lukács, *op. cit.* Let us recall that for “closed societies” myth represents a “true history [of] inestimable value, because it is sacred, exemplary and significant”, far from all falsehood and fiction. Mircea Eliade, *Mito y realidad*, Barcelona, Kairós, 2017, p. 9.

²⁹On this point I am guided by the relation Octavio Paz sets out: “it is impossible to deny that poetry is a historical product; it is also a simplification to think it a mere reflection of history. The relations between the two are subtler and more complex” [my translation]. While Paz refers specifically to poetry, the claim is equally valid for all literary and even artistic labour. Octavio Paz, “Traducción y metáfora”, in *Obras completas*, vol. I, México, FCE, 1994, p. 160.

³⁰An important consideration is not to see the modernity–postmodernity counterpart as that of authentic values against inauthentic ones, as though modernity were a utopia that degrades until reaching its decadent postmodernity. This phenomenon is far more complex, and modernity itself presents its own contradictions. On this point see: Agnes Heller, *El péndulo de la modernidad*, Barcelona, Península, 2000.

³¹See the note on Bachelard’s *El aire y los sueños* in the Introduction above.

³²“Anxiety, as a state-of-mind, is a way of being-in-the-world; that in the face of which anxiety is anxious is thrown being-in-the-world; that about which anxiety is anxious is our potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Consequently the phenomenon of anxiety taken in its totality shows *Dasein* [being] as factually existing being-in-the-world. The fundamental ontological characteristics of this entity are existentiality, facticity and being-fallen. These existential determinations are not parts of a *compositum* from which one of them might sometimes be missing; rather, they weave an originary web that constitutes the totality of the structural whole being sought” [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 192.

³³“Every being-there, as finitude, is anxious, even though this anxiety makes possible fear, indifference, joy, or whatever else” [my translation]. Greta Rivara Kamaji, *El ser para la muerte. Una ontología de la finitud*, México, Monosílabo, 2018, p. 76.

³⁴“It is not the absence of pain or the security of being that clothes men and deeds in glad and strict contours; the share of absurdity and desolation in the world has not increased since the origin of time, only the consoling songs sound clearer or more stifling; but rather that perfect conformity of acts to the soul’s interior demands, demands of greatness, of fulfilment and of plenitude” [my translation]. *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³⁵“The initial, primary relation of man to the divine is given not in reason but in delirium.” Delirium understood as the manifestation of a subjective and radical imagination that raises gods, because: “when there are none as yet, why create them? If they have been created it must be for something unavoidable. It is, without doubt, the primary, original aspect of the tragedy that is living humanly” [my translation]. María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*, p. 28.

an interior misfit that leads him to a subsequent loss of sense, when he looks upon the “world” and finds it “the other” and does not recognise himself in it. For this reason the turn of existential anxiety in a modern age in decline takes place in evasion. If primitive man deployed gods, the man of a decadent modernity deploys hedonism, and with it a fatal trap. Fatal not because the gods bring divine salvation and their absence perdition, but because hedonism, within a consumer society, “relieves” man in alienation and in the loss of his intimate bond with what is natural in him.³⁶ In consequence, the trap consists in this: that this type of man, forgetful of himself and deprived of contemplating his interior abyss, is rendered incapable of generating an authentic response of his individual “I” lodged within a social weave. Ignorant of his existential trap, he is condemned to be condemned.

Within the frame of this thesis, I understand that the end of modern society and the beginning of late modernity (or postmodernity) marks the change of a type of society, and with it of a type of man. The new society, which Guy Debord called the society of the spectacle,³⁷ undergoes the “death of the subject” and the imperative of the object, in which man becomes a commodity by losing his qualities.³⁸ This “man without qualities”, as Musil described him, is the result of a technological alienation in the “technical production of reality”.³⁹ We face the reification of imagination into visual image. For this reason the loss of a totality of sense, brought on by the loss of volitional imagination, leads to an interior fragmentation in which man loses his critical capacity. Lacking narratives, this “one-dimensional man”⁴⁰ adopts the ritual of repeating those public and impersonal

³⁶Edgar Morin says: “We are children of the living and animal world, and all our mythologies have felt the kinship and the primacy with other living beings [...]. But our animal identity was long masked by Western civilisation, whose progress has been paid for with a terrible regression of consciousness [...]. We dreamed of becoming the masters and possessors of the Earth, even the conquerors of the cosmos, and we have only just discovered our matricial bond with the biosphere, without which we could not live [...]. The human being is fully physical and fully metaphysical, fully biological and fully metabiological [...]. We form part of the cosmic destiny, but we are marginal within it [...]. To open ourselves to life is also to open ourselves to our lives” [my translation]. *El método. V. La humanidad de la humanidad. La identidad humana*, Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 2003, pp. 54–55.

³⁷Guy Debord, *La sociedad del espectáculo*, Sevilla, Editorial Doble J, 1967.

³⁸Just as the “death of God” represented a change of paradigm toward a modern and enlightened society, based now on the idea of the “subject”, in the same way the “death of the subject” manifests the fall of modernity itself and the beginning of a new order whose name has been the subject of analysis and polemic: postmodernity, late modernity, second modernity or liquid modernity, where the prevailing cultural logic centres on the “object”. By “object” one must understand not only the tools ready to hand, but the human being himself reified as commodity. On this point, some works that may be consulted are: Gilles Lipovetsky, “Modernismo y posmodernismo”, in *La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1990, pp. 79–135. Perry Anderson, *Los orígenes de la posmodernidad*, Madrid, Akal, 2016. Josep Picó (comp.), *Modernidad y postmodernidad*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988. Zygmunt Bauman, *La cultura en el mundo de la modernidad líquida*, México, FCE, 2013. Cornelius Castoriadis, “La época del conformismo generalizado”, lecture delivered in English (translated by Celso Sánchez Capdequí) during the symposium *A Metaphor for our Times*, Boston University, 19 September 1989. Available at: <https://www.briega.org/es/opinion/epoca-conformismo-generalizado>.

³⁹“Screens inform us; screens put us in contact with the world; screens watch over us; screens formulate our desires and extend our senses; screens record, reproduce, produce, create; screens trace the signs of our subjective identity and our collective unconscious; screens give an account of our happiness and our despair” [my translation]. Eduardo Subirats, *Culturas virtuales*, México, Ediciones Coyoacán, 2001, p. 9.

⁴⁰Herbert Marcuse, *El hombre unidimensional. Ensayo sobre la ideología de la sociedad industrial avanzada*, Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1993.

narratives. Understood in this way, the trap survives in a conception of man within a cultural logic based on hedonism and the commodity.⁴¹

Part of the importance of this change of paradigm, from modernity to postmodernity, lies in its repercussion on literature. Josefina Ludmer calls “autonomous literature” that which is fully modern, and “post-autonomous literature” that which is founded in a globalised free-market world. Onetti, in Ludmer’s words, is a clear example of autonomous literature, especially with *A Brief Life* (1950).⁴² In this case, with Onetti situated at the change of paradigm in the middle of the twentieth century, his characters already show the tensions of modernity’s crisis and the feeling of a new man, because, while it is not a rule, a type of man weaves its bond with a type of hero, or antihero. In consequence, Brausen, in his will to imagine, poses again the sense of failure in a degraded world, torn between the futility of the struggle and the attempt to modify his existential circumstance. Martínez González sees it this way:

Defeat before the environment will provoke insipid responses in Onetti’s characters. Faced with tragedy, his creatures “protest” with a laconic “well, what can be done”. As though they fought with no determination at all, it would seem easy for them to accept the wreckage. But that is not the meaning of this resignation, for Onetti transfers to his characters the extreme lucidity with which he reads the world. Children of his consciousness, his fictional subjects labour negligently at their aims because they know in advance the futility and absurdity of life. None of the human actions is exempt from that mark, and yet the characters confront what will bring them down. They will suffer being crushed, but they will keep trying. Seen this way, the characters dignify failure in a profoundly human manner.⁴³

Without doubt this is not the quixotic failure anchored in the dawn of modernity, nor the romantic one at the beginnings of the French Revolution. Nourished by them, however, defeat in Onetti’s characters manifests the sum of failures of a way of making a world. For his characters are also heirs to the “coming down in the world” of a Madame Bovary (*Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert, 1856), of a Mr K. (*The Trial*, Kafka, 1925), of a Harry Haller (*Steppenwolf*, 1927), or of an entire family: the Compson family (*The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner, 1929). For Brausen’s journey remains anchored in an epic that runs from Homer’s Ulysses to James Joyce’s Leopold Bloom; the

⁴¹Cf. Fredric Jameson, “La nueva lógica cultural del capitalismo tardío”, in *Teoría de la posmodernidad*, Madrid, Trotta, 2001. This is probably one of the most significant essays on the theory of postmodernity.

⁴²Josefina Ludmer, “Literaturas postautónomas: otro estado de la escritura”, in *Revista Dossier*, 17, consulted at <https://www.revistadossier.cl/literaturas-postautonomas-otro-estado-de-la-escritura/> on 20 November 2020.

⁴³Víctor Hugo Martínez González, “El humanismo radical de Juan Carlos Onetti”, in *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, 2015, vol. 9 (160–179), pp. 173–174 [my translation]. Consulted 29 November 2020 at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=4262/426240376007>.

⁴⁴“What distinguishes modern sensibility from classical sensibility is that the latter is nourished by moral problems and the former by metaphysical ones” [my translation]. Albert Camus, *El mito de Sísifo*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999, p. 136.

other Ulysses of an epic without gods.⁴⁴ The novel as a genre also becomes. On this point, it remains unsettling that Luis Harss should have called Onetti “the steppenwolf of Uruguayan letters”.⁴⁵

And here is the passage from a trap in an ontological order to one of an ordinary character in a social becoming. Because in every common failure the sense of existential absurdity survives.⁴⁶ And it is from such a perspective that I read in Brausen the two forms of his cornering: one expressed in his everyday life and another that lies beneath, in a deeper stratum: that of his being.

Seeing trap and salvation in this way, the novel, a properly modern genre, that expression of transcendental homelessness as Lukács describes it, gives an account of man’s interior misfit while at the same time appealing, from its interior forms, for a “total man”, insofar as the novel is a consequence of the imaginative act:

Between the epic and the novel, the two objectifications of great epic literature, the difference lies not in the writer’s inner dispositions but in the historical and philosophical data that impose themselves upon his creation. The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer given in an immediate manner, of an age for which the immanence of the meaning of life has become a problem, yet which has not for all that ceased to aim at totality.⁴⁷

Without doubt this is not an appeal for a total man as an attempt to return to the world of myth, but a problem always left open, one that constantly interrogates the reader. Because in the novel the dialectical aspect of imagination is enveloped by the tension between its interior forms, which aspire to completion, and an open world in which totality is not given. A mature genre, it is the genre of disenchantment and of nostalgia:

the elements of the novel are, in the Hegelian sense of the term, entirely abstract; abstract, that nostalgic aspiration of men which tends toward a utopian completion but receives as true reality nothing but itself and its own desire [...]. The dissonance bound to the form of the novel, which makes the immanence of sense refuse to penetrate empirical life, poses a problem of form whose formal character is far more hidden than in the other art forms, and which, because it presents itself in appearance as a problem of content, demands a still more explicit, more decided collaboration between ethical and aesthetic forces than when the problem’s purely formal character is evident.⁴⁸

Let us recall that a sacred world and a profane one, in Mircea Eliade’s terms, constitute two ways

⁴⁵Luis Harss, *Los nuestros*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1966.

⁴⁶It is enough to bring to mind Albert Camus’s reflections on hope and the absurd, landed especially on Kafka’s work, in *El mito de Sísifo*.

⁴⁷Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 65 [my translation].

⁴⁸*Ibidem*, p. 66 [my translation].

of being in the world, in which “modern man assumes a tragic existence”.⁴⁹ Tragic insofar as the becoming of his destiny belongs to his own will.

For this reason the provincial character of the “mythical” city of Santa María remains significant. Provincial and mythical insofar as it reveals a state of gestation, a state of in-between: between a pre-modern sensibility and that of the great city, understood as modernity’s largest instrument. Santa María is founded upon the bases of myth, hence its name, as though Onetti, through his creator Brausen, were seeking “salvation” in that feeling of return to the modern dawn; that is, in the return to himself by way of his sensible values. Such is the sense of this mythical provincial city as an “accursed city”, insofar as it represents the demons of its creator.⁵⁰

In sum, the trap of which I speak refers to the loss of a creative sensibility, and salvation to the restitution of the interior dimensions. For all this, I place eroticism as the key to recovering a vital sensibility, since ontological anxiety makes itself present again in the face of the consciousness of death; death brings us closer to life. In consequence, the loss of sense takes place in the absence not of divinity but of intimate narratives. In Georges Bataille’s terms:

Beginning with mediation, the real order is subordinated to the search for lost intimacy, but upon the profound separation of intimacy from things there follows the multiplicity of confusions. Intimacy, salvation, is considered as a thing, in the manner of individuality and duration (of the operation) [...]. Finally, the man of salvation has introduced the principles of the order of things into the intimate order more than he has subordinated that productive order to the destructive consummations of the intimate order.⁵¹

The trap, in this way, amounts to the loss of a genuine intimacy, there where the gods once lived, in a merely operational world. Hence a total liberation of imagination without a sensible attribute leads to another kind of phantom: those of a riven man:

Imagination has not remained immune to the process of reification. We are possessed by our images, we suffer our own images. Psychoanalysis knew this well and knew the consequences. Nevertheless, “to give imagination every means of expression” [as psychoanalysis sees it] would be a regression. Mutilated individuals (mutilated also in their imaginative faculties) would organise and destroy even more than they are permitted to destroy today [end of the twentieth century].⁵²

⁴⁹Mircea Eliade, *Lo sagrado y lo profano*, Madrid, Guadarrama, Punto Omega, 1981, p. 126 [my translation]. It is important to stress that the passage from a sacred society to a profane one occurs not through the total elimination of religious cults, but in that these have passed from the public to the private sphere. As a result, the idea of God, for a modern society, no longer configures the social order, founded as that society is on “the death of God”, as it does in archaic and primitive societies.

⁵⁰On the theme of modernity and the city in Onetti see: Ángel Rama, “El narrador ingresa al baile de máscaras de la modernidad”, in *Juan Carlos Onetti*, Hugo Verani (ed.), *El escritor y la crítica*, Madrid, Taurus, 1987.

⁵¹Georges Bataille, *Teoría de la Religión*, Madrid, Taurus, 1998, pp. 88–89 [my translation].

⁵²Herbert Marcuse, *El hombre unidimensional*, p. 279 [my translation].

And here is the other turn of imagination in the trap–salvation dialectic. Because the thirst of imagination produces monsters. For this reason, if imagination harbours the demons of being, the possible path of salvation must take place within a creative communion: the Apollonian and the Dionysian.⁵³

Faced with this discussion, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the importance that imagination, as a philosophical problem, proposes to philosophy:

The history of Western philosophy has been until this century the history of the *logos*. Since Heraclitus, philosophers have been fundamentally occupied with developing some of the multiple senses of *logos*. Thus the history of philosophy has occupied itself with thought, the word, spirit, enunciation, law, science, knowledge, change, being, harmony, and all of this fundamentally by and through reason [...]. Imagination bursts onto the surface of philosophical reflection with a central role at the moment when philosophy turns critical, that is, when philosophers, chiefly Bacon, Descartes, Hume and strictly speaking Kant, take lucid consciousness of the need to begin the edifice from its foundations, and to that end begin the investigation of the reach and the limits of the epistemic instrument par excellence until then: reason.⁵⁴

I say “particular attention” because imagination as a literary problem, and no longer merely as a means of expression, results in an exploration of a philosophical order beyond the merely disciplinary. In this way, literary expressions that see in imagination an existential problem (with *Don Quixote*, 1605, and the Romantics, ca. 1770, at their feet) cannot but have repercussions on the theoretical problems expressed about it (Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others) and at the same time echo them; the Romantics and Unamuno are perhaps ideal examples of this conjunction. Artistic expression is already a philosophy that formulates itself not as an intellectual question but as a sensible one.

In consequence, faced with the crises of reason in the Western world, which always imply human crises that show man the existential traps he has come to as a society, the literary work, in this case *A Brief Life*, poses a problem and a proposal that appeals, from within the phenomenon of imagination itself, to the search for the authentic meaning, or meanings, of life. And the novel, despite being a genre proper to an open world without gods, always resonates with a mythical echo. The spirit of imagination has a primitive root.

⁵³Dionysus traversed by Apollo amounts to the sensible traversed by reason: creation. Cf. Giorgio Colli, *El nacimiento de la filosofía*, México, Tusquets, 2009.

⁵⁴María Noel Lapoujade, *Filosofía de la imaginación*, México, Siglo XXI, 1988, pp. 23–24 [my translation].

Brausen, an imagined being who imagines; or, imagination as ontological salvation

Chapter 1. Brausen's reality and the sense of the trap

He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.

Nietzsche⁵⁵

A Brief Life opens onto a closed space: the bathroom of Brausen's flat, where he, naked under the shower, listens to the conversation his newly arrived neighbour, la Queca, is having on the other side of the wall with a man unknown to him until then: "I heard her through the wall. I imagined her mouth moving in front of the icy, fermenting breath of the refrigerator, or the curtain of toasted slats that must have hung rigid between the afternoon and the bedroom, darkening the disorder of the newly arrived furniture".⁵⁶

The words reach him distorted by the noise of the water, in a reality where the senses cannot manage to experience totality, pierced through by the failure of interpretations. With the vestiges of that conversation, Brausen constructs that other room and those who are in it; he imagines because he cannot know. Imagination "wells up"⁵⁷ in him as a mechanism for completing a picture, a reality, that inevitably escapes him, as a way of filling the gaps left by his being absent from the real scene; gaps that signify, in turn, the voids of his being. Because the impossibility of perceiving goes beyond the sensible. Brausen, like any man, cannot know everything, and there lies the limit not only of knowing but of being.⁵⁸

In this Juan Carlos Onetti has a cornerstone of his poetics. His characters do not know everything, and there is therefore no true account set against others that are false. The multiplicity of versions of a single event, as in *For a Nameless Grave* (1959),⁵⁹ gives an account of the richness of interpretations, all valid at the same level, since each gives an account of an individual perspective that is ontologically bound. No character can know everything, and under this conception there are,

⁵⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *Más allá del bien y del mal*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2005, aphorism 143.

⁵⁶Juan Carlos Onetti, *La vida breve*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1999, p. 11. From here onward, all references to *A Brief Life* will appear within the body of the text with the page marked in parentheses at the end of the quotation. Likewise, all italics that appear are mine. [Translator's note: quotations from the novel are rendered from the Spanish edition cited here, not from any published English translation. Block quotations are given bilingually, Spanish first; short quotations inside the argument are given in English alone, since the complete Spanish text is available in the Spanish edition of this thesis.]

⁵⁷As will be seen throughout this work, *A Brief Life* is built around a poetics of water. Cf. Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños. Ensayo sobre la imaginación de la materia*, México, FCE, 1978.

⁵⁸The work of imagination in the order of perception has been an object of study, among other disciplines, in psychology, especially in the Gestalt School. Nevertheless, it is not until ontology (from Heidegger onward) that the inquiry into the operations of imagination in completing a uniform reality acquires an existential value.

⁵⁹Previously published in 1958 under the title *Una tumba sin nombre*.

in his work, no omniscient narrators. They narrate not because they know but because they do not know, letting us see that man's greatest ignorance is of himself. Imaginary beings, they "imagine". Imagination happens in them, in consequence, as a wound of finitude. This makes Onetti's poetics a raw vision of what the human condition means: fragmentariness, incompleteness, and the impossibility of totality.

Understood thus, Brausen's first imaginative act is not a volitional action. He imagines almost instinctively, cornered by walls that "seem to be made of paper" and by his skin covered in water. For this reason, on opening the novel, we find him with his senses naked within the vital matter of existence, like an embryonic Brausen whose birth, or rebirth, we might await. Surrounded, in sum, by an everyday water, he cannot see the totality of his circumstance.

If Brausen finds himself in such a poetics of enclosure through water, the adjoining room represents, from the start, the impossibility of the contiguity of his body and that of his being. The outside remains as the other, where he can be nothing but an absence. The walls delimit what is outside and at the same time mark an interiority, both of them inaccessible; spaces between which Brausen oscillates. La Queca's words lead him to notice himself, and his wife Gertrudis, recently operated on for the ablation of a breast. La Queca alludes to a carnival night⁶⁰ that did not come off, comparing it to a wake: "It was already broad daylight when I woke up sitting in that great big armchair [...], my wig fallen off and the enormous bunch of jasmine in my sleep. Which, with the heat, and everything shut up, really did look like a wake", and Brausen thinks inevitably of his wife: "And here Gertrudis will be, half dead, I thought, convalescing, if all goes well". (15)

The outside leads him to notice "deliberately now, Gertrudis; dear long-legged Gertrudis; Gertrudis with an old whitish scar on her belly; Gertrudis silent and blinking, sometimes swallowing her rancour like saliva; Gertrudis with a gold rosette on the breast of her party dresses; Gertrudis, known by heart". (12) La Queca's conversation, asking "when is the Santa Rosa storm going to come", (13)⁶¹ tips him into discovering "that I had been thinking the same thing for a week past, [when] I remembered my hope of an imprecise miracle that spring would work for me". (13) Yet every intimation falls not properly upon him⁶² but upon what happens to him, what surrounds him, what begins to suffocate him and crosses him at the level of the senses.

His neighbour's arrival dominates the exterior, what happens outside Brausen; while the imaginary evocation of "that severed breast, shapeless now, flattening on the operating table like a jellyfish,

⁶⁰ As Silvia Ragusa maintains: "Carnival in itself is not a literary manifestation. It is a form of spectacle with a ritual character [...]. It cannot be resolutely translated into verbal discourse, but it lends itself to a certain transposition into the language of artistic images, akin to it in their sensory and concrete character, into the language of literature. This transposition of carnival will be called literary carnivalisation" [my translation]. In *A Brief Life*, carnival opens a festive time in which the characters participate. Cf. Silvia Ragusa, "Carnaval: el disfraz como cadena de sustituciones en La vida breve de Juan Carlos Onetti", in *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, consulted at <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero31/vbreve.html>, 20 November 2020.

⁶¹ The Santa Rosa storm is a meteorological event over the south of Latin America occurring toward the end of August each year. The mythical character the population gives it, read as "salvation", remains significant.

⁶² In the sense of ownness. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*.

offering itself like a cup”, (13) dominates the interior. La Queca’s arrival next door to his misfortune thus implies a rupture in the space “outside”, while the ablation of the breast signifies, in turn, a change in the space “inside”, for: “one thing had ended and another thing was beginning, inevitable, knowing that it was necessary for me not to think about either of them and that they were a single thing, like the end of life and rotting”. (18) As Josefina Ludmer affirms: “into the everyday, ‘normal’ world of Juan María Brausen, castration bursts in on one side and madness on the other”.⁶³ La Queca will be the membrane between both spaces, the one through which Brausen passes.⁶⁴

Now, it is necessary to see that physical spaces in turn imply ontological spaces, in which exteriority and interiority take place in the spatiality proper to being.⁶⁵ For this reason reality⁶⁶ cannot be anything but incompleteness, insofar as it is the result of a limited and fragmented human condition: the epistemic limits are in turn ontological limits, those inherent to being itself. Being that signifies “space” suffers the outside-inside tensions as the anxiety between presence and absence, being and non-being. As Bachelard would say: “Outside and inside form a dialectic of division”.⁶⁷ In this way Brausen finds himself, beforehand, reduced by the walls of his being, walls whose symbolic value lies in the walls of his flat: an ontological limit experienced at the ontic level of everydayness⁶⁸ by an imagination that is likewise limited. Implicated, therefore, in the mechanisms of this imagination disposed upon perceptions, he can barely notice the confinement of his ordinary life without yet seeing in it its ontological depth.

Brausen, within the limits of his flat, will come to know the limits of his identity. Yet what was once the site of intimacy, of intimacy with himself, now takes the form of his suffocation. A flat shared with Gertrudis, it manifests the loss of the amorous duality. Where could Brausen reconquer himself if the intimate space has become a cornering?

⁶³Josefina Ludmer, *Onetti. Los procesos de construcción del relato*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1977, p. 30 [my translation].

⁶⁴Following Joseph Campbell in *El héroe de las mil caras* (México, FCE, 1959), rupture implies transgression: the “call to adventure” whose journey carries him from the ordinary world to the special world grounded in self-knowledge. Nevertheless, this archetype of the hero operates in relation to the world of the monomyth. In the novel, a genre proper to the modern world in Lukács’s terms, the “call to adventure” does not, perhaps, come from outside. In the logic of an open world without gods, the ablation of Gertrudis’s breast and the arrival of la Queca perhaps represent, on the outside, a deeper rupture within Brausen, for which both la Queca and the breast will be the bridge helping Brausen to leave, or perhaps to enter, such a state.

⁶⁵The human being, as Heidegger notes, is “spatiality” insofar as this forms part of the human condition (“being-in-the-world”) as a consequence of its ontological difference. “Space is, rather, ‘in’ the world, insofar as being-in-the-world, constitutive of *Dasein*, has disclosed space. Space is not found in the subject, nor does the subject consider the world ‘as if’ it were inside a space; rather the ‘subject’, ontologically well understood, that is, *Dasein*, is spatial in an originary sense” [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 117.

⁶⁶In Castoriadis’s words, reality means the institutionalisation of imaginaries (Cornelius Castoriadis, *La institución imaginaria de la sociedad*, Buenos Aires, Tusquets Editores, 2007), which take place by way of the being that is “space” at an ontological level. Reality understood, therefore, as a human condition woven into culture.

⁶⁷Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*, México, FCE, 2000, p. 185 [my translation].

⁶⁸I employ the terms “ontic” and “ontological” from Heidegger’s nomenclature, for which the ontic is the accessible manifestation, on the plane of everydayness, of a deeper and in itself inaccessible ontological structure that takes place in “being-in-the-world”. (*Ser y tiempo*)

Through this first act of imagination the reader walks, like Brausen, on a terrain of ignorance and supposition, of conjecture in the face of the impossibility of knowing at first hand what is happening. Thrown into the torrent of his consciousness, we “feel” from within the play of his perceptions; like him, with the sensation of not knowing, we imagine because we do not see; we examine the vestiges that reach us remotely so as to fabricate from them a slightly more complete reality, as an attempt to be ourselves a little less fragmented. Brausen moves on the threshold of uncertainties while he tries to widen his limits: to make the unknown known, and to give himself presence in a space that ignores him.

It is important to note that this first imagination, intimately bound to the processes of perception, does not yet signify for Brausen a weapon of creation, still less a taking of consciousness and of will; nevertheless we appreciate in him an impulse to transgress his space as a vital necessity to transcend himself. In this sense, while it is not a highly achieved creative imagination, it is indeed the first mechanism of a primary imagination,⁶⁹ which, while present in all processes of human perception, Brausen carries, even unconsciously, into a form of life, into a vital praxis.

For this reason such an imagination opens the dimensions of recollection and memory, and in turn nourishes his senses so as to keep advancing. In this lies Brausen’s “human complexity”, for it is an imagination that not only runs from the impressions of exteriority to mental interpretation, but, under a necessity impelled from the unconscious, performs the inverse labour: it runs from the thought that “feels itself” limited to the skin of the senses, in order to endow them with supposed impressions. This other sensible imagination creates what it does not feel, imagines beyond the threshold and the skin, beyond walls and doors. Through this exercise Brausen will have the possibility of reconfiguring the perception he holds of himself, so as to achieve a salvation different from the one he rehearses at the beginning of the novel, when we see him struggling uselessly for and before a reality that overwhelms him.

Through this imaginative mechanism he will manage to appeal to the totality of his ontologically bound being. Or, paraphrasing Bachelard,⁷⁰ I would say that in the space of his intimacy, and not outside it, the exterior will open as the immensity of himself. An intimacy recovered in the transcendent; that is, in the transcendence of his being toward a new existential (fictional) rank. In the end, to rise means to descend: to rise toward a metaphysical dimension in the descent through his abysses. In this way he recalls imaginatively the operation that occurred “some ten hours earlier, when the doctor went on cutting carefully, or with a single stroke that did not dispense with care,

⁶⁹Following the fathers of Romanticism (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Herder; cf. Isaiah Berlin, *Las raíces del romanticismo*), I call “primary imagination” the phenomenon of imagination proper to perceptions, which works beyond the will and belongs to the domain of the unconscious. “Secondary imagination” will be, in consequence, that which functions at will as creative imagination. This distinction has been crucial for Romantic poetics and for the modern literature rooted in it. In this conception I therefore differ from the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, who places imagination solely in consciousness (*Lo imaginario*). María Noel Lapoujade sees it likewise (*Filosofía de la imaginación*). On the work of imagination and the perceptions see: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenología de la percepción* (1945), Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1994.

⁷⁰Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*.

Gertrudis's left breast. He would have felt the scalpel vibrate in his hand, felt how the edge passed from a softness of fat to a dry, then a tight hardness". (12–13)

He thinks of the pain his wife's arrival will bring with it and what he will have to do to relieve her, the obligation to console her and make her feel that "for me it is all the same, nothing has changed"; (17) of "the task of looking without disgust at the new scar Gertrudis would have on her breast, round and complicated, with veinings of a red or a pink that time would perhaps transform into a pale confusion, the colour of the other one, thin and without relief, agile as a signature, that Gertrudis had on her belly and that I had recognised so many times with the tip of my tongue". (12) While the woman next door seems to answer: "My heart may be destroyed and perhaps I shall never again be the same as before", (12) in a kind of transtextual dialogue, as though in that "woman next door" Brausen's reality were answering itself. And if every signature holds an identity, Gertrudis's is woven between scars. Between the old whitish scar on the belly (the impossibility of bearing fruit) and the new one she will have on her breast (the impossibility of suckling, of feeding). Two scars that reveal the mutilation not only of two biological faculties but of ontological and sensible ones. Gertrudis finds herself in the midst of her mutilations: she is what remains.

Gertrudis's severing thus implies the amputation of a form of life. It is not she who has a breast amputated. The sensation she has of herself is that it is she who has been detached, she who has been excised: she the piece of flesh abandoned as a tumour of her own existence. The splitting occurs in the interior and invisible body of her identity. For this reason she is shipwrecked with the sensation that what is sought, her breast, can never be found, since it is lost for ever; a loss that gives her, like a ghost, her character of sorrow. The amputation of her breast amounts to the excision of her erotic, imaginative and sensible dimension. Brausen receives, naked and wet, her emptiness as a hollow that neither words nor desires will fill; he perceives in advance the future of his misfortune and the futility of his attempts to modify a reality, at the level of everydayness, that imposes itself upon him, a future that soon arrives to make him see that: "she, despite the weeping at dawn, would end by falling asleep, only to discover, in the morning, while her dreams fell headlong away from her, that the words of consolation had not been overflowing in her breast, that they had not piled up, solid, elastic and victorious, to form the missing breast". (35) Put another way, to make him see that the word and the will can do nothing; not without volitional and poetic imagination in between.

Gertrudis, mutilated and aged, carrying her own spectre, more than an erotic body signifies for Brausen his tomb, a house without windows where he once loved. A love that was desire and now becomes an imperative: "the absurd command to take charge of her happiness". (202) A trap, in the end, made flesh, because he will know that there will come: "the moment of my right hand, of the lip, of the whole body; the moment of duty, of pity, of the terror of humiliating. Because the only source of happiness and confidence I can provide her will be to raise and lower in full light, over the mutilated breast, a face rejuvenated by lust, to kiss and drive myself mad there". (16)

The first space in which the novel opens to us is, in sum, significant, for the hot and steaming atmosphere, of a dead afternoon, closed despite the open windows, throws us before a trapped

Brausen: “naked, standing, covered in drops of water, feeling them evaporate, unable to decide to take hold of the towel, looking, beyond the door, at the shadowy room where the accumulated heat surrounded the clean sheet of the bed [...] on the other side of the thin wall”. (11–12)

Brausen moves between an exteriority still unknown and an interiority that imprisons him, also unknown in its quality of being “known by heart”, (12) spaces that break through inevitably with Gertrudis, the synthesis of both, in the deplorable everydayness where there is nothing to tell: “Because if she can speak or listen to me and is not suffering too much, I shall have nothing truer to tell her, nothing more important than the news that someone has moved into the flat next door, H. She will smile, ask questions, get better, come home”. (16)

Brausen naked, though he dress; hemmed in, though he open the door and go out into the street. When we open the novel we find him already trapped. We see him retreat, search in the gloom, open for himself the clothing of the flesh: resigned and placid as another form of being frustrated and enraged. Yet where exactly is that trap Brausen experiences? How is he implicated in it? In what way does he confront it, and what are his attempts to save himself? Brausen, with his hope set on everything improving, feels cornered in his reality of debts, of announced dismissal, of a wife without a breast, of a storm that does not come to calm the heat; but he feels, he does not theorise. Submerged in a life in which he himself is an absence of himself, he cannot see the depth of his condition, nor think about what he experiences as a cornering. Brausen does not suffer from the clarity of consciousness but from everyday experience; the trap comes upon him, then, through sensibility, not through reason. The failure to notice himself translates into the impossibility of theorising about what befalls him. Perhaps what occurs is what Heidegger had already warned of: “what is ontically nearest and best known is ontologically the farthest, unknown, and constantly passed over in its ontological signification”.⁷¹ For this reason Brausen can only respond to this “feeling trapped” in an equally unconscious manner, seeking a form of salvation in an inauthentic sense; that is, attending to the problems of his everyday happening without seeing in them a deeper dilemma of an ontological character: that of his being. Lodged solely on an ordinary plane, he rehearses a salvation based on rescuing the relations that are held of him: his marriage, his debts, avoiding dismissal, seeking himself in his friendship with Stein.

Brausen does not live for himself but for others, in whose relations his trap is woven with an almost invisible thread, for whom he represents a man called Juan María Brausen, an average type, with an average job and a wife fallen into misfortune. Beyond that, however, the key question for getting out of the trap will be the question of his identity: who am I? The hinge of the whole of life, Unamuno would say;⁷² the only form of being authentic. An identity sought beyond the physical spaces of his flat: in the interiority of his being, which builds new sites: Santa María.⁷³

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, pp. 55–56 [rendered from the Spanish edition].

⁷² Miguel de Unamuno, *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*, Madrid, Verbum, 2019, p. 53.

⁷³ Identity is gained or lost through tensions of power between different types of human relation. The others are not, as Heidegger saw, “everybody else but me, those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out; the others are, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one also is” [rendered from the Spanish

Such a question will therefore lead Brausen to a taking of consciousness so as to perceive the deep sense of his trap, a consciousness that will be the axis of his processes of creation and self-creation in pursuit of an answer, as a search for authentic being. In such a noticing, Brausen's being will suffer insofar as it is submitted to a high scrutiny; a suffering that in itself implies transformation. Don Quixote already warned of this, the first novelistic man to make of imagination an identity: "I know who I am, [...] and I know [what] I can be".⁷⁴ Such a running-on with the will, as Unamuno sees it, opens the possibility of generating new relations within life as fiction, that is, life in a metaphysical dimension:⁷⁵ the identity of being is already given in change.

Now then, swallowed up in his coexisting, in what way will Brausen attempt to save himself? That is, implicated in each of his relations, how will he seek to free himself from what constrains him? I venture to think that depending on what Brausen perceives as trap, he will conceive a salvation and a search attached to that logic. In this way, unconscious in the swell of an inauthentic life (insofar as he has not appropriated his being), he can only devise an equally inauthentic salvation, through a search in which he himself will remain in the forgetting of his (innermost) being. To Brausen's lament, or at least so he perceives it at the start, all his attempts fail. Nevertheless, and in this lies the ontological peculiarity of this character, such failures will open in him the possibility of asking after himself: a noticing of identity that implies the awakening of consciousness, from which he will manage to conceive another salvation out of the will to an authentic existence, for which imagination will this time take on its full scope, bearing upon each of the threads and dimensions of his being, and therefore of reality, so as to build for himself an authentic identity and an other "world". All this because, as Unamuno already saw: "we gain personality, that is, being and the continuity of being, in and through representation", that is, through fiction, that "most direct product of the creative imagination".⁷⁶

In the search for that other authentic salvation, Brausen will enter into a series of complexities of a greater order, which serve as a fundamental axis in the novel, and indeed in Onetti's poetics; complexities woven into the trap–imagination–salvation dialectic, opening new questions: is that other authentic salvation achieved? Where does its sense lie? Is it possible?

The commission of the film treatment by his friend Stein represents the promise of a salvation in an inauthentic sense, since creation is reduced to a monetary end, to which Brausen tries to cling;

edition] (Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 123). For this reason, while coexistence is immanent to the human condition, the mystery of belonging to oneself or not lies in finding within it one's own life.

⁷⁴Miguel de Cervantes, *El Ingenioso Don Quijote de la Mancha*, p. 58. I bring in *Don Quixote* (1605) insofar as, being the first modern novel, it embodies the phenomenon of "pure imagination" that Kant (*Crítica de la razón pura*, 1781), in the terrain of philosophy, would take up more than a century later, and with him the Romantics, from whose thread the "new novel" is nourished: Unamuno, Kafka, Proust and, in Latin America, Onetti, to mention only a few. Put another way, Cervantes inaugurates, for the Modern Age, the tradition of imagination: "Don Quixote was Kant's pure will before anyone could think it" [my translation]. Cf. anon., "Hay otra ilustración: la realidad de la convivencia humana", in *Anthropos, Miguel de Cervantes. La invención poética de la novela moderna*, Madrid, no. 98/98, July–August 1989, pp. 127–128.

⁷⁵Cf. Francisco La Rubia Prado, *Unamuno y la vida como ficción*, Madrid, Gredos, 1999. For Unamuno, "the only possible authenticity is that which derives from the creative act of oneself as text, as novel" [my translation]. p. 13.

⁷⁶Francisco La Rubia Prado, *op. cit.*, p. 13 [my translation].

a payment with which he glimpses the possibility of mending, in a first moment, his marriage: “Thirteen thousand pesos at least, for the first treatment. I leave the agency, we go and live outside, wherever you want, perhaps we can have a child. Don’t cry, don’t be sad”. (18)

He will be able to leave Macleod Advertising and begin a new life elsewhere, undertake a journey, insofar as he believes salvation can be found in a spatiality, in a sense of territory. Yet, as will be seen later, neither trap nor salvation constitutes a space in the exteriority of being to which one can arrive or from which one can flee.⁷⁷ Brausen clings, still absent from himself, to the idea of writing while: “behind me, Gertrudis went on sleeping, snoring softly, forgotten, setting me free”, (21) as the means to modify his immediate reality where he feels cornered, convincing himself: “when you are better I shall start writing. A week or two, no more. Don’t cry, don’t be sad”. (18) Still bound to the affective ties, Brausen takes the first step in the gloom toward an imagination that might liberate him: “watching for the brief grandiloquent storm that would transform the city into a fertile territory where happiness might arise, sudden and complete, like an act of memory”. (13) An appeal to memory from within the city, made under the presentiment that memory holds the mythical state of existence: the land where imagination puts down its roots.

It will be important to note that while the film treatment signifies for Brausen the possibility of overcoming his misery, in the attempt and the failure the dialectic of creation is already occurring. Because under his purpose of saving himself with a cheque, he is already weaving, into what he imagines and without knowing it yet, the brushstrokes of what that other salvation will be, one for which the first significant and symbolic step is the one where: “this Gertrudis-Elena Sala, the one I met that night, would come smiling into the consulting room of Díaz Grey-Brausen”, (36) as a reconciliation of reality and fiction in the transfiguration of one into the other. In this way the film script will lead Brausen, like a Homer,⁷⁸ to the discovery of imagination. And here there takes place a confirmation that the overcoming of suffering occurs at the level of narrative, of “fiction”; that is, at the level of mind and imagination.

The failure to write any treatment at all, the first of a painful series of failures, will give him the possibility of generating a mechanism to save himself in another way, this time in an authentic and no longer utilitarian sense, through the work of imagination; an imagination not placed at the service of capital, not operative, but transgressive and without value for monetary relations. Perhaps for this

⁷⁷The problem of happiness in a modern world is, as Leonidas Donskis says, paraphrasing Milan Kundera, that “globalisation is the last failed hope that somewhere there exists a land where one might escape and find happiness. Or the last failed hope that somewhere there still exists a land different from your own in the sense of being able to oppose the loss of meaning, the loss of criteria and, ultimately, moral blindness and the loss of sensibility” [my translation]. Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis, *Ceguera moral. La pérdida de sensibilidad en la modernidad líquida*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2015, pp. 22–23.

⁷⁸Like a Homer rather than an Aristotle. I make such a reference in the sense that it is Aristotle who, in Castoriadis’s words (“El descubrimiento de la imaginación”, *Los dominios del hombre: las encrucijadas del laberinto*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 1988, p. 150), is the first philosopher to “discover” imagination. Nevertheless, this is a theoretical discovery within a first classical modernity. For this reason I consider Homer symbolically the first to discover imagination from sensibility, that is, from imagination itself in the creative act. Homer’s importance comes to the point in that it was he who sang the greatest epic of antiquity, a vestige of what would later be, in Lukács’s words (*Teoría de la novela*), an epic without gods: the novel.

reason, carried by the excitement of imagining and not so much by that of writing his work, when that Saturday arrives on which Gertrudis is not in the flat and it is the moment to create that salvation directed toward capitalised exchange,⁷⁹ he does not manage to write and, cast down, acknowledges the defeat of translating the film treatment into a cheque.

On the threshold of his expiry: “when the night ended, when I got to my feet and accepted, without rancour, that I had lost, that I could not save myself by inventing a skin for the doctor of Santa María and getting inside it” (37), that is, that he could not invent for himself a salvation that would keep his marriage afloat and give him a new life, Brausen senses that this time failure carries within it another form of liberation, though at this moment he does not know with any clarity in what way or with what reach.

Thus, faced with the impossibility of writing the film treatment, he works instead that primary imagination with which we saw him at the beginning of the novel, oriented now toward a more elaborate and complex imagination, volitional and transgressive, driven by his: “growing need to imagine and draw near to a doctor of forty [...] a little maddened, playing with the ampoule” (18), an ampoule that will be the symbolic trigger of the imaginary order.⁸⁰

He manages, in consequence, on the one hand to raise a Santa María, still imprecise but certain, made out of recollection: “because I had been happy there, years before, for twenty-four hours and for no reason”. (18) On the other, to trace a Doctor Díaz Grey made of his own ruins,⁸¹ and an Elena Sala out of: “the portrait Gertrudis had had made in Montevideo, so many years before, hanging now on the shadowy wall to the right, beyond the plate with the gnawed chop”. (35) All this at the same time as he will know, as one who desires knows, that:

en algún momento de la noche, Gertrudis tendría que saltar del marco plateado del retrato para aguardar su turno en la antesala de Díaz Grey, entrar en el consultorio, hacer temblar el medallón entre los dos pechos [...]. Ella, la remota Gertrudis de Montevideo, terminaría por entrar en el consultorio de Díaz Grey; y yo mantendría el cuerpo débil del médico, administraría su pelo escaso, la línea fina y abatida de la boca, para poder esconderme en él, abrir la puerta del consultorio a la Gertrudis de la fotografía. (36)

at some moment of the night, Gertrudis would have to leap from the silvered frame of the portrait to await her turn in Díaz Grey’s waiting room, enter the consulting room, set the medallion trembling between her two breasts [...]. She, the remote Gertrudis of Montevideo, would end by entering Díaz Grey’s consulting room; and I would maintain the doctor’s weak

⁷⁹“But I had this whole Saturday night in which to save myself; I would be saved if I began to write the treatment for Stein, if I finished two pages, or one, even, if I managed to get the woman to enter Díaz Grey’s consulting room and hide behind the screen; if I wrote a single sentence; perhaps”. (35)

⁸⁰Cf. Chapter 2 of this work.

⁸¹“A blurred doctor of forty, a laconic and hopeless inhabitant of a small city set between a river and a colony of Swiss farmers, Santa María [...] he must wear glasses, have a small body like mine, thinning hair of a blond that merged with grey”. (18–19)

body, would administer his thinning hair, the fine and dejected line of the mouth, so as to be able to hide myself in him, to open the consulting room door to the Gertrudis of the photograph. (36)

The peculiarity of such a defeat will consist, therefore, in the fact that within it lies one of the keys that will carry Brausen from an inauthentic search to an authentic one. It is the awakening of consciousness. A noticing made, without doubt, with cruelty, for as Onetti himself would say: “the moment of creation is the hour of truth, and with truth there are no tall tales”.⁸² Perhaps for this reason consciousness casts Brausen down in a hopeless, even resigned manner, conceived under the poetics of an Onetti who glimpses that: “he who accepts being lost will be saved”. (181) The only possible response before the gaze of a reality that imposes itself as unbearable and impossible.⁸³ For as Argullol has noted: “[the] heroic I starts from a radically pessimistic principle [because] for the hero, what gives wings to the will and makes it fly beyond the ravine of despair is precisely this absolute perception of his own condition”.⁸⁴ This position is maintained and carried to its extreme by Onetti in a sensibility anchored in the city. As Ludmer would say: “there is no literature without a labour upon the ‘sad grey days’ of reality”.⁸⁵ And disenchantment is necessary for hope. Brausen will thus acknowledge his sadness, as he will later acknowledge his solitude, in an act of acceptance of his identity:

No había podido escribir el argumento de cine para Stein; tal vez no podría nunca salvarme con el dibujo de la larga frase inicial que bastaría para devolverme nuevamente a la vida. Pero si yo no luchaba contra aquella tristeza repentinamente perfecta; si lograba abandonarme a ella y mantener sin fatiga la conciencia de estar triste; si podía, cada mañana, reconocerla y hacer que saltara hacia mí desde un rincón del cuarto, desde una ropa caída en el suelo, desde la voz quejosa de Gertrudis; si amaba y merecía diariamente mi tristeza, con deseo, con hambre, rellenándome con ella los ojos y cada vocal que pronunciara, entonces estaba seguro, quedaría a salvo de la rebeldía y la desesperanza. (38)

I had not been able to write the film treatment for Stein; perhaps I would never be able to save myself with the drawing of that long opening sentence which would be enough to give me back to life. But if I did not fight against that suddenly perfect sadness; if I managed to abandon myself to it and to sustain without fatigue the consciousness of being sad; if I could, every morning, recognise it and make it leap toward me from a corner of the room, from clothing fallen on the floor, from Gertrudis’s plaintive voice; if I daily loved and deserved my sadness, with desire, with hunger, filling my eyes with it and every vowel I pronounced, then I was certain, I would be safe from rebellion and from despair. (38)

⁸²Juan Carlos Onetti, “Creación y muerte de Santa María”, in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, p. 222 [my translation].

⁸³Like a K. before the castle who, instead of fighting, decides to surrender. Cf. Franz Kafka, *El castillo* (1926), Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2014.

⁸⁴Rafael Argullol, *El héroe y el Único*, Madrid, Taurus, 1999, pp. 60–271 [my translation].

⁸⁵Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 71 [my translation].

For this reason, faced with the failure of writing (placed within capital means), imagination triumphs. At the close of the chapter "Salvation", Brausen at last achieves the first precision of a new space and a new dimension. The self-styled "salvation" fails because it does not signify such. And so he has, in the face of the defeat of not writing, the certainty that what was imagined now exists, born of his desire; a new world that opens from a consulting room, where it was he, another and the same, "dressed in a long badly buttoned white coat, who held the consulting room door open until the unknown woman passed brushing against me, advanced to the middle of the carpet, stopped and began to move her head to observe calmly my furniture, my instruments, my books". (39) Everything so old and, nevertheless, newly created. A woman who has ceased to be Gertrudis and is not yet Elena Sala.

Díaz Grey is now alive, he breathes and he too desires. A melancholy doctor who, before an Elena Sala in whom he recognises no trace of any other woman, will weave his own story.

In this way, and in this other salvation already sensed in the work of creation as the only mode of authentic existence, Brausen manages, on that Saturday night, to widen the limits of his being, while at the same time marking out, through the impossibility of writing, his future failures: that of his marriage, that of his imminent dismissal, that of his debts.

The new exploration now takes place in the processes of a more elaborate imagination, capable of bearing directly, and this time at will, upon recollection, memory and anticipation; an imagination whose dynamic is given by desire, the wish to free himself as a search for being another through reconfiguring and altering that immediate reality which imprisons him, but no longer in an immediate and everyday order, rather in a symbolic and ontological one, made possible by creation, which in turn implies the courage to look toward himself, to seek: "in Gertrudis's portrait, Montevideo and Stein, [...] my youth, the origin, only just glimpsed and still incomprehensible, of everything that was happening to me, of what I had come to be and what was cornering me". (37)

For this reason Brausen, before a consciousness devastated by looking at the relations he maintains,⁸⁶ undertakes a new search sponsored by a creative imagination that obliges him to note that: "only oneself is important, because it is the only thing that has really been entrusted to us; when we glimpse that only one's own salvation can be a moral imperative". (56)

In this way the series of failures after not managing to write the treatment will signify for Brausen the rupture of every type of relation in which he was absent from himself, leaving alive only the one in which he can find himself: his relation with himself; in pursuit of a full life and no longer "the brief life". If the treatment represented the promise of moving away from "poverty as from an aged mistress" (17), a mistress who was without doubt Gertrudis, now that aged mistress takes on the sense of every relation he was abandoning: "I understood that I had been knowing for weeks that I, Juan María Brausen, and my life were nothing other than empty moulds, mere representations of an

⁸⁶"Gertrudis and the filthy job and the fear of losing it [...]; the bills to pay and the unforgettable certainty that there is nowhere a woman, a friend, a house, a book, not even a vice, that can make me happy". (55)

old meaning maintained with indolence, of a being dragged faithlessly among people, streets and hours of the city, acts of routine". (141)

In sum, having failed before the impossibility of writing the treatment that would save him, Brausen unleashes, through imagination, the processes of consciousness. Slow and lethargic, we see him "open his eyes": to go from sensibility to a faint reason,⁸⁷ to the noticing of himself, as an obligatory step in order, creatively, to raise himself as another.

Now, this possibility of an authentic existence, as an authentic mode of being, must not be taken as the simple opposite of an inauthentic mode of existence. The man who appropriates his being cannot leave what Heidegger called the "they",⁸⁸ the great social and human weave, for this is a phenomenon inherent to being. The peculiarity lies in the new type of relations with those others in which his existence, even ordinary existence, takes on sense.

The man who appropriates himself in a state of wakefulness conceives his reality as a construction and not as a given mechanism. From this authentic mode, Brausen throws himself into the enterprise of building his world⁸⁹ as a way of raising himself, but never outside the human weave. Within such an order, Brausen will be able to erect critically a life that is his own. Understood thus, fiction will not signify flight or escapism. On this point, despite the vindication by some critics of the role of imagination in Onetti,⁹⁰ it remains widespread to see in it an act of evasion.⁹¹ Nevertheless, properly understood, imagination implies entering essential reality down to its last threads, without ceasing to be in ordinary life.

Brausen works another reality (Santa María) that will bear directly upon the one in which he lives everyday (Buenos Aires), by putting in check the ontological foundation of each. The character of that new space of "reality", called fiction, will be a new state of being and therefore of existence: the metaphysical dimension of man. Both levels (reality and fiction) will suffer a tension between

⁸⁷Cf. María Zambrano, *Los sueños, el soñar y la creación por la palabra*, Universidad Veracruzana-México, Xalapa, 1965.

⁸⁸Let us recall that what Heidegger called the "they" [*das Man*] "is an existentielle, and belongs, as an originary phenomenon, to the positive structure of *Dasein* [being]": "[...] being-with indicates that *Dasein* is subject to the dominion of the others in its everyday living-with. It is not itself who it is; the others have taken its being from it. The arbitrary will of the others disposes of *Dasein*'s everyday possibilities. But these others are not determinate others. On the contrary, any other can replace them. What is decisive is only the inconspicuous dominion of the others, which *Dasein*, as being-with, has already accepted without noticing. One is oneself part of the others and reinforces their power. 'The others', so called in order to conceal one's own essential belonging to them, are those who immediately and regularly 'exist' [*da sind*'] in everyday living-with. The who is not this one nor that one, is not oneself, nor some, nor the sum of all. The 'who' is the impersonal, the 'one' [*das Man*] [...]. The 'they' that answers the question of the who of everyday *Dasein* is the nobody to whom every *Dasein* has always already surrendered itself in its being with others" [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 131.

⁸⁹"World" as an *existentielle*. *Idem*.

⁹⁰Critics such as Reyes E. Flores (*Onetti: tres personajes y un autor*) or Hugo J. Verani (*Onetti: el ritual de la impostura*).

⁹¹Of course, this has a greater cause. Modern society, founded on reason, assigns to imagination, that "madwoman of the house" as Saint Teresa called it, a role not only lesser but outside rational society. The imaginative act is usually seen, at least at first, as flight, evasion and a dodging of a reality that is not considered imaginative. Modern society dissociates reason and imagination in order to found itself. Yet reality is already the instauration of imaginaries.

them, through which Brausen will then be able to undertake the process of his self-creation as Arce so as to transgress both.

Understood thus, and because Brausen has, symbolically, the complexity of a being in time, his being is a “potentiality-for-being” that will reach its mastery from his having himself, from his ownness. Thrown into time, “authentic being” throws itself as project.⁹²

While in the possibility of an authentic existence, conceived as salvation, the “they” is not annulled, Brausen, in taking consciousness of it, takes consciousness of himself; self-consciousness from which he looks again at his life woven into his relations and is not content with it. Only from that self-recognition can he intercept the different levels of his “reality” and therefore those of his being. In this way, to be awake is a good deal more complex than opening one’s eyes and “realising”; it implies transformation, daring to leave behind the palliatives and reliefs the “they” has created for passive man; “complicating one’s life” in order to live it from its depths; that is, to exist as a “being open” to the dominion of the “they” in order to attend to one’s own being. Only from such a mode of existence, in the work of creation and self-creation, will Brausen descend to his abysses to confront his demons; to become “possessed”, that is, master of himself.⁹³ It will be the consciousness of death and finitude that is the essential feature of the clarity of existing, of: “the small shame of being alive and not knowing what this means”. (222)⁹⁴ A noticing of death that is assayed with the rite of a new loss of consciousness: love; for, as Onetti himself already saw:

I believe there exists a profound desolation from the absence of God. Man must create religious fictions for himself. Man must live religious acts (I should clarify that I do not refer exclusively to the experience of a temple). The loss of sense on account of alcohol, or on account of writing almost obsessively, or the moment in which one makes love, are religious facts. Religious life, in the widest sense, is the form one wants to give to life.⁹⁵

Eros and Thanatos, life drive and death drive, both governed by a noticing of being; because while the consciousness of death breaks through as anxiety,⁹⁶ love is not in Onetti a drowsing or an

⁹²Heidegger would say: “Immediately I ‘am’ not ‘I’, in the sense of my own self, but rather I am the others in the manner of the ‘they’. From this and as this I am immediately ‘given’ to my ‘self’. Immediately, *Dasein* is the ‘they’, and as a rule it remains so. When *Dasein* discovers and brings the world near to itself, when it discloses for itself its own mode of being, this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of *Dasein* are always carried out as a clearing away of concealments and obscurings, and as a breaking of the dissimulations with which *Dasein* closes itself off from itself” [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 133.

⁹³“Abyss” understood from the classical Greek tradition as a symbol of the human interior. “Demons”, in consequence, as the alterities of the “I” that survive in the subconscious.

⁹⁴Onetti himself evokes, some time later, the importance of death in his life, and therefore in his work: “I was very young when I discovered that people died. I have never forgotten that; it is always present in me” [my translation] (“*Ida y vuelta*”, in *Requiem por Faulkner*, p. 194).

⁹⁵Juan Carlos Onetti, “La literatura. *Ida y vuelta*”, in *Requiem por Faulkner*, p. 194 [my translation].

⁹⁶“Anxiety”, as Heidegger notes (*Ser y tiempo*), is not an attribute but an *existential*; that is, a fibre inherent to the being of the human being. Anxiety is woven into “being-in-the-world”, and in it is expressed man’s ontological difference from the rest of his world; a difference that leads him to feel distinct from the rest of the species.

abandonment of “being awake”, but the dark side of reason (the unconscious), whose terrain can only be explored by imagination, that is, by eroticism: “There are three things that have happened to me, that happen to me, which have a similarity: a sweet, well-graduated drunkenness, making love, sitting down to write. And these are not flights, but moments in which unconsciousness flows with incredible intensity, as it does not flow with the rest of things; moments in which one participates with everything and opens the unconscious, as Freud would say”.⁹⁷ Not for nothing does Bataille see eroticism as “the approval of life even unto death”.⁹⁸

For all this, and without any doubt, it will be the dismissal from Macleod Advertising that is the final act casting him out of the world of objects and tools as a piece of equipment that no longer serves. His relation with Macleod encloses a greater phenomenon, one not reducible to a relation with another man but with a greater entity: the world of advertising. Macleod represents an entity, a sector and a type of man who, more than subject, is an object; but above all, Macleod is the manifestation of a world-system:⁹⁹ “I know that I am not... I mean that I do not belong to myself. Not entirely free. I am what New York decides [...]. And if not, this Macleod goes and another comes”. (165)

The world of Macleod Advertising is that of the commodification of appearance, because advertising, in the last instance, does not sell an object but a narrative around that object: it is not the watch, the car or the hotel tickets: it is status, power, family or holidays. Advertising generates narratives insofar as it produces desires. It directs the mass by giving an answer to the most intimate needs, that never-tangible thing that is essentially human. Yet these are not narratives as givers of sense but as generators of emptiness:

Yo esperaba de pie en la penumbra y miraba un dibujo a medio hacer en una de las mesas: una bañista sobre un sillón de playa, en una azotea bebiendo de una botella. El traje iba a ser verde, el sol amarillo, el asiento tenía ya un hermoso color rojizo [...]. Debía de ser una campaña de Stein; y Stein habría aconsejado “Veranee sin billete” o “Lleve el veraneo a su casa” o “Enero en la azotea” o “Sin valijas usted puede”. En la gerencia, el viejo Macleod habría sacudido la cabeza, entornando los ojos, gritado de pronto con su voz enronquecida: — ¡Flojo, muy flojo! Y gastado. Tómese unas copas y haga algo con punch. (25)

I waited standing in the gloom and looked at a half-finished drawing on one of the tables: a bather on a beach chair, on a rooftop drinking from a bottle. The costume was to be green, the sun yellow, the seat already had a handsome reddish colour [...]. It must have been one of Stein’s campaigns; and Stein would have suggested “Summer without a ticket” or “Bring the summer home” or “January on the rooftop” or “No suitcases needed”. In management, old Macleod would have shaken his head, narrowing his eyes, suddenly shouted in his hoarsened

⁹⁷Juan Carlos Onetti, “La literatura. Ida y vuelta”, p. 195 [my translation].

⁹⁸Georges Bataille, *El erotismo*, México, Tusquets Editores, 2008, p. 15 [my translation].

⁹⁹To put it in Immanuel Wallerstein’s terms (*Análisis de sistemas-mundo*, México, Siglo XXI, 2006).

voice: “Weak, very weak! And worn out. Have a few drinks and do something with punch.”
(25)

Narratives crossed by capital turn into narratives of merchandise. As Fischer reminds us: “With the arrival of the capitalist era, the artist found himself in a very peculiar situation. King Midas turned everything he touched into gold: capitalism turned everything into merchandise”.¹⁰⁰ Everything, man included: being has been put up for sale:

– [...] Es así. Hace años, usted sabe, el arte era un subproducto de la religión [...]. En la Edad Media todo estaba al servicio de la Iglesia [...]. Era así. Ahora, no todavía, pero vamos en ese camino, el arte está al servicio de la propaganda. Música para la radio; dibujos, pinturas para los avisos, los afiches; literatura para los textos, los booklets. ¿Eh? En París y en New York ya se ha hecho propaganda con versos de poetas de primera línea. Entonces, no es sólo asunto de conseguir cuentas y cobrar el dinero. Hay muchas cosas, es una línea complicada. (165-166)

“– [...] That’s how it is. Years ago, you know, art was a by-product of religion [...]. In the Middle Ages everything was at the service of the Church [...]. That’s how it was. Now, not yet, but we are going that way, art is at the service of advertising. Music for the radio; drawings, paintings for the notices, the posters; literature for the copy, the booklets. Eh? In Paris and New York they have already made advertising with verses by first-rank poets. So it is not only a matter of getting accounts and collecting the money. There are many things, it is a complicated line.” (165–166)

The person who consumes these narratives does not create them: he attempts, uselessly, to be what he is not through an object that likewise is not. It is the appearance of being in the search to be, inauthentic in the extreme. Because advertising feeds with hunger the thirst for imaginaries of a mass that shows itself, in its inauthenticity, incapable of building its own. And the ultimate function of advertising is to create not a type of human being but a type of consumer in search of happiness: “‘That is my race,’ said Stein, ‘the material entrusted to me to build the world of tomorrow’”. (48) Impersonal narratives stand behind every slogan, every image, every object and pretty body on a billboard, on a grimy metro poster, in a spot repeated thousands of times on screens: “don’t think any more; buy now”:

Nadie podría, por ejemplo, decir que no a una campaña inteligente acerca del deber social, higiénico y patriótico de abrirse el escroto cada primavera con los famosos bisturíes Unforgettable adoptados mundialmente, preferidos por el ejército norteamericano, viejos conocidos de la Clínica Mayo. Cuando florezcan las lilas. Éste es el momento. No espere al verano. Corte limpiamente su escroto y deje que la brisa primaveral... (164-165)

¹⁰⁰Ernst Fischer, “El arte y el capitalismo. El espíritu del romanticismo”, in *La necesidad del arte*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1973 [my translation].

Nobody could, for example, say no to an intelligent campaign about the social, hygienic and patriotic duty of opening one's scrotum every spring with the famous Unforgettable scalpels adopted worldwide, preferred by the North American army, old acquaintances of the Mayo Clinic. When the lilacs bloom. This is the moment. Don't wait for summer. Cut your scrotum cleanly and let the spring breeze... (164–165)

To the anxiety of being, modern man, out of whose modernity Brausen rises, surrounds himself with noise and spectacle.¹⁰¹ Macleod looks at himself in the mirror and Brausen asks: "What does he see when he looks at that old man of sixty, condemned to die soon, with the patches of grey hair under the hat, reddened skin, candid blue eyes sucking the air through his pipe?" (163)

And by advertising one must understand not only the promotion of the private firm but every public and therefore impersonal narrative: the markets, the State, the religions, and so on. "Public" insofar as it dominates the public life of the man who has abandoned the possibility of an interior or private life.¹⁰² In this sense Sabina, the woman in Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, suspects rightly: "the person who loses their privacy loses everything. And the person who deprives themselves of it voluntarily is a monster".¹⁰³ Advertising is the manifestation of the "they", the impersonal.

In such a world Brausen "works", and his dismissal is the closest thing to the discarding of an object, of something that has ceased to serve: an obsolete Brausen thrown onto the rubbish heap of the un-useful unemployed. Nevertheless, paradoxical as it may seem, his removal from Macleod Advertising signifies not only a first step but a decisive moment for recovering himself and returning to himself, because Macleod Advertising expels him from the world of objects, of merchandise, of a whole world-system, and Brausen has the possibility of "ceasing to be" a "commodity-being" in order to go in search of the authentic in his own being. In the new cultural logic, being does not exist; it serves. A servitude that makes of corporeality an instrument at the disposal of a system (the body-for-others) and no longer an ontological dimension: "the body as being-for-itself";¹⁰⁴ let us recall that Brausen's existential trap is given from his skin and his senses; a trap that assails the whole body. In this register, Macleod, Brausen and Stein are not men but tools, "men ready-to-hand":¹⁰⁵ "Macleod had not been himself for many years; he was the post he occupied. He was

¹⁰¹Cf. Guy Debord, *La sociedad del espectáculo*.

¹⁰²"Publicness [*die Öffentlichkeit*]. It regulates in the first place every interpretation of the world and of *Dasein*, and is always right. And this occurs not through a particular and primary relation of being with 'things', nor because it disposes of a transparency of *Dasein* made explicitly its own, but precisely because it does not go 'to the bottom of things', because it is insensible to all differences of level and of authenticity. Publicness obscures all things and presents what is thus concealed as something known and accessible to anyone" [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 131. [Translator's note: the Spanish *publicidad* carries both "advertising" and Heidegger's *Öffentlichkeit*, "publicness". Eliás's argument turns on that double sense, which English does not preserve in a single word. Throughout this chapter *publicidad* is rendered "advertising" where the referent is the industry and "publicness" where it is Heidegger's term.]

¹⁰³Milan Kundera, *La insostenible levedad del ser*, México, Tusquets Editores, 1996, p. 51 [my translation].

¹⁰⁴Jean-Paul Sartre, *El ser y la nada*, Buenos Aires, Losada, 2008.

¹⁰⁵I write "men ready-to-hand" in a nod to Heidegger's "equipment ready-to-hand" (*Ser y tiempo*).

determined by what they had made him believe he was; before thinking, he thought what it felt to a transplanted North American to think, with such a job, such an age, such a salary. Before desiring he thought..." (25)

A type of equipment generates a type of thing-man, an identifiable mass: "It was seven o'clock, and the bar was beginning to fill with noisy and confident Macleods, barely disdainful". (164) And one must listen attentively to the advice Macleod gives Brausen as he discards him: "'A man will do nothing if he does not forget himself [...]. But I give you this advice: if you do not forget Brausen and give yourself over completely to a business... It is the only way to work, to get things done'". (165) To forget oneself insofar as one ceases to be and abandons oneself to an everydayness of objects; that is the only form of being in this new cultural logic, and even the only conceivable form of saving oneself in a useless progress.

More significant still is that Macleod (perhaps McLeod)¹⁰⁶ dismisses Brausen in the bar, that is, in the public site of the impersonal, from which: "I saw him move away, at the beginning of the night, toward the poetic, musical and plastic world of tomorrow, toward our common destiny of more cars, more toothpastes, more laxatives, more little towels, more refrigerators, more watches, more radios; toward the pale, silent frenzy of the maggotry". (166)

The markets, in sum, also make reality: superficial and consumable.¹⁰⁷ The dismissal from Macleod Advertising marks Brausen's trap insofar as it opens the uncertainty of no longer having an economic solvency with which to face his growing debts; nevertheless, it is a trap lodged in the "inauthentic mode of being", and one which, in an "authentic mode of being", is the door to a salvation: "He is going to pay me the difference between the cheque I expected and the one he signed, with some infallible formula of Plato Carnegie, Socrates Rockefeller, Aristotle Ford, Kant Morgan, Schopenhauer Vanderbilt". (165)

The relation between the foregoing names is one of tension, of a dialectic of "worlds", one mode of "being" and another, one type of man and another: the beginning of modernity and its degradation, the new face already glimpsed in the middle of the twentieth century when Onetti was publishing *A Brief Life* with a view to a new sensible order (postmodernity) that would operate under a savage capitalism and a volatile globalisation. A relation expressed, in the end, in a Brausen-Macleod.

As we can see, the first Brausen, lodged in an inauthentic existence as a navigator of surfaces, was incapable, without the weapons of imagination, of generating his own reality; that is, of producing his own narratives. Advertising had built his life and dictated the manner in which he should live it; it gave him his systems of belief, relations of power, hierarchies and narratives: that is, it had

¹⁰⁶In a linguistic play denoting the mercantile game of a new world-system.

¹⁰⁷One must think of Zygmunt Bauman when he says: "ours is a society of consumers: in it culture, like the rest of the world experienced by consumers, manifests itself as a store of conceived goods" [my translation]. Zygmunt Bauman, *La cultura en el mundo de la modernidad líquida*, p. 15. Such a society is governed by obsolescence, seduction and the diversification of things. Cf. Gilles Lipovetsky, "La seducción de las cosas", in *El imperio de lo efímero*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1990.

established a reality into which he had to enter and act accordingly, because in his impersonal coexistence, through the “they” manifested in the impersonal *one*, he did not notice himself.¹⁰⁸

In this way the failure of Brausen’s relations implies the fall of a reality that for him was inauthentic, that did not satisfy him and that he experienced as a trap, so as to raise from that collapse, from those ruins, fiction, the only means of salvation to which he soon clings: “I was resigned to the disappearance of the face of Elena Sala’s husband, to the disappearance of Gertrudis, to the loss of my job, announced confusedly by Stein. Nevertheless, I tried to conserve all this, insisting on preventing Díaz Grey from vanishing”. (70)

But all this was possible after having exhausted the possibilities of a first salvation in the search to translate the film script into a cheque that might rescue him. Far now from that attempt: “[having accepted] the death of the film treatment, I mocked the possibility of getting money by writing it”. (129) This time it is not the treatment but the complete and complex weave of an other life in which he, creator, finds himself in his creature.

Finally, Brausen manages to see the sense of each relation so as to realise that the trap is not in the other person, object or means, but in the part of himself he left implicated there. The trap was not his wife in herself, but the Gertrudis he had inside him, a phenomenon he notices with complete clarity and without compassion toward the end of the novel: “I had provoked old age at the moment I agreed to stay in Gertrudis, to repeat myself, to welcome anniversaries, security, to rejoice because the days were not the eve of conflicts and choices, of novel commitments”. (221)

It is the inevitable consciousness that leads Brausen, driven by the desire to save himself from the origin, to: “the idea of killing her, [to] the game of imagining her dead, disappeared; of pushing her with a soft movement of the hand back to her origin, her birth, her mother’s womb, the dusk before the night on which she was engendered, nothingness”; in sum, to return her to non-being as the homicidal act of an imagination that would modify a reality at a stroke and fabricate another for which Gertrudis had never existed, and where everything “I believe I find of her in my memory belongs to imagination”. (67)

The sum of these failures is not only a series of blows to Brausen’s consciousness; they signify, in turn, blows to his reality. Brausen fails as a modern man within a rational and utilitarian logic, and precisely for that reason he has the opportunity to notice himself within a new logic, this time sensible and sponsored by the mechanisms of the creative imagination, in which imagination is not a stratagem but a complex process of coming to consciousness, of deconstruction and reconstruction; that is, of the re-founding of being in a new order, already metaphysical, but not for that reason unreal or untrue.

¹⁰⁸“We enjoy ourselves and have fun as one enjoys oneself; we read, see and judge literature and art as one sees and judges; but we also withdraw from the ‘crowd’ as one must; we find ‘irritating’ what one must find irritating. The ‘they’, which is no determinate one and which is all (though not as their sum), prescribes the mode of being of everydayness” [rendered from the Spanish edition]. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, p. 131.

Now then. What is the unveiling of Brausen's reality in the creative disposition, and how does it occur? What are the procedures he carries out upon his reality in order to "save himself" on the plane of fiction? That is, in what way does he open the dimensions of himself so as to re-found himself as another? These questions are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 2. The process of creation and self-creation

Here my ship runs aground. To act or not to act, tempting destiny.

Aeschylus¹⁰⁹

Before a Brausen wounded by a consciousness that strips him bare, cast down by a false salvation not achieved, we realise that after he discovers imagination, nothing can halt the processes it opens in his thinking. As Onetti himself evoked some time later:

[*A Brief Life*] begins with a thoroughly realistic thing, which is the requirement that Juan María B. (Brausen, I think, no?) write a film script to earn a living. Now, as he goes about it, he realises that as a script it is no use, but it *is* of use to him, how shall I put it, as a detachment from reality, as a possibility that everything might be fulfilled: to do as he pleases, to fabricate Santa María. That is the root; I do not see a conscious process in the man.¹¹⁰

This new imagination, which runs from the unconsciousness of perception to the consciousness of the will, drives Brausen to create as a vital necessity. An act by which he suddenly realises that to imagine is “to be like God”.¹¹¹

Such a new state of consciousness springs not from reason but from sensibility.¹¹² Woven into the mechanisms of imagination, insofar as it participates in the sensory phenomenon, it will not be for Brausen a means of theoretical analysis in the order of ideas, but a search that opens again the doors of perception with the aim of reconfiguring himself in every conception he holds of himself, under the desire to transform pain into the possibility of happiness.

That is, this is not a rational and theoretical consciousness whose light forces the shadows to retreat and the abysses to correct themselves, but a consciousness sponsored by poetic reason, “intellectual intuition” in Novalis’s terms,¹¹³ which does not know everything but knows by pre-sentiment, by

¹⁰⁹“Las Suplicantes”, in *Tragedias completas*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1995, p. 208.

¹¹⁰Juan Carlos Onetti, “Creación y muerte de Santa María”, in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, p. 226 [my translation]. The italics are mine.

¹¹¹“The poet is a little God”, in Huidobro’s words in “Arte poética”.

¹¹²“Reason” understood not only as a mental faculty (psychology) but as a philosophical category of the Platonic-Kantian tradition, which founds the bases of the modern world (the scientific method). The crisis of this tradition in the West is marked very well by John Burrow in his book *La crisis de la razón: pensamiento europeo entre 1848-1914*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001, and before him by María Zambrano in “La Crisis del Racionalismo Europeo”, in *Pensamiento y Poesía en la Vida Española*, México, La Casa de España en México-FCE, 1939. Along this line, the consciousness sponsored by sensibility means, in Zambrano’s terms, a reason no longer “proud and totalising” but capable of being flexible and of seeing beyond the classical categories (such as “subject” and “episteme”) in pursuit of metaphorical foundations (poetic reason). It is this sensible reason that I read in Brausen in his process of creation, for “poetic” means *poiesis* (creation). Poetic reason as a symbol of Dionysus traversed by Apollo. The dialectic of artistic creation. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *El nacimiento de la tragedia o Grecia y el pesimismo*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2000.

¹¹³Cf. Rüdiger Safranski, *Romanticismo. Una odisea del espíritu alemán*, México, Tusquets, 2011.

the impulse of the descent, without the betrayal of translating itself into a well-argued explanation. Brausen's consciousness is devastating, insofar as it shows him a reality he had long ignored and that imprisons him, but it is not entirely clear to the dominions of his understanding; far from showing itself once and for all, it takes on body little by little, successively and increasingly, in the measure that imagination ascends.¹¹⁴ And faint reason, far from excluding the human rational dimension, widens its dominions by transforming its light into a tremulous flame: that of eroticism, Paz would say.¹¹⁵ A faint reason for which descent means in turn ascent: a journey to the abysses of the soul, toward the secrets of the unconscious, which is at the same time a journey to a state of the supraconscious, to the divine. Put another way, only faint reason, endowed with the force of creative imagination, gains access, in its descent to the ontologically abysmal, to the metaphysically suprasensible. To rise means to descend.

For this reason the knowledge of this sensible imagination, as a synthesis of desire and will, knows by constructing, that is, by destruction. Because as Bachelard would say: "imagination is not only the capacity to create images, but to do violence to them".¹¹⁶ Brausen arrives, through imagination, at another state of consciousness: that of a living reason.¹¹⁷ The language of faint reason is, as Zambrano notes, always metaphorical. Meta-phorical toward a meta-physics.¹¹⁸ A beyond of forms for a beyond of the physical. Imagination, seen this way, also signifies a path of knowledge.

This destructive force proper to imagination, a negative force as Žižek names it,¹¹⁹ helps Brausen to bear upon his reality so as to turn it to ruins. A process that simultaneously implies a dismantling of his identity and of his interior dimensions. And here we confirm that to imagine does not mean evasion: there is no process of creation outside the everyday. Creation is made possible by deconstruction: opening the threads of which "being-in-the-world" is made and submitting them to scrutiny in a labour of self-valuation. Brausen examines himself in each of the sensible beliefs he holds about himself, in the exercise of leaning over and descending into the abyss of his existence: only the possessed man suffers the impulse to create. To imagine creatively means to unstitch the being of man in order to seek and build the authentic possible of identity. A destruction that leads to a reconstruction: an ontological re-founding of the human being.

¹¹⁴If, following Heidegger (*Ser y tiempo*), imagination is found in the foundation of being-in-the-world, I understand with Žižek (*op. cit.*) that the phenomenon of imagination ascends the "ontological tree" until reaching its zenith as volitional imagination on a foundation that is now metaphysical.

¹¹⁵Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, México, Seix Barral, 1993.

¹¹⁶Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 9 [my translation].

¹¹⁷In Zambrano's terms.

¹¹⁸Metaphor: "second quarter of the 15th c., Lat. *metaphōra*. Taken from Gk. *metaphorá*, id., properly 'transfer', 'transport', derived from *metaphéro* 'I transport, I employ figuratively' (from *phéro* 'I carry')". Joan Corominas, *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, Madrid, Gredos, 1973, p. 394. Metaphysics: "the form f., from late Lat. *metaphysica*, and this from Byz. Gk. μετὰ [τὰ] φυσικά *metà [tā] physiká* 'after [the] physical ones', a designation applied, in the ordering of Aristotle's works, to the books of first philosophy". *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española*: <https://dle.rae.es/metafisico>. Consulted 21 November 2020.

¹¹⁹Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*

In this sense, creation begins by generating violence:¹²⁰ the desire to kill Gertrudis: “dead she would be worse, but it would be definitive”. (49) The “growing pleasure of striking” la Queca: “everything had been organised so that I would kill her”. (156, 172) The intention of murdering her lover Ernesto. Violence, in the end, of destroying himself within an unchangeable body, because the destruction of the other implies, symbolically, a destruction of the I.¹²¹

It will be this consciousness sponsored from sensibility that is the blade with which Brausen makes ruins of his reality and opens every sensation he has about the world and about himself: to expose the threads of his own being. Because to imagine means to transgress human dimensions, to do violence to the instituted and immobile images of reality through the dynamism of the images of fiction. Reality turned to ruins will now be the existence of a Brausen not only awake to his happening but also conscious of his new fragmentation, because each dismantling of his ordinary life implies in turn a dismantling of each part of himself.

This blade, like a mirror forced into truth, will cut with cruelty each fraction of his “I”, will oblige him to notice himself with no room for pity or self-compassion. Such a raw consciousness strips him bare this time from within, and no longer only from outside, as with the Brausen under the shower who opened the novel.

Such a consciousness unfolded by imagination will lead him to notice his ordinary spaces so as to recognise in them the trap of his existence. Because objects and spaces are not only “tools ready to hand” but, as Heidegger already saw, imply symbolic dispositions of existence. In this way space takes on a singular meaning in Brausen when, within it, he seeks the spatiality of his being and his existence. If the interior site propitious for intimacy had become a prison (the flat where he finds his intimacy in agony), it will be in himself that he notices his trap, this time an interior one, for which Gertrudis signifies barely the vehicle of misfortune, because as Bachelard saw: “the house is a state of the soul”:¹²²

volvería de Temperley por la mañana. Y desde que abriera la puerta, desde que entrara en el ascensor, desde el momento en que yo despertara para esperarla, la habitación, una vez más y peor que nunca, iba a resultar demasiado pequeña para contenernos a los dos y a la

¹²⁰Creation does violence to a matter: writing to the blank page; sculpture to stone; music to silence. The creative force of imagination begins from its destructive force. *Idem*.

¹²¹Fundamental phenomenology (with Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, 1927) has opened the possibility of reading alterity as a duality of the I, beyond the classical notion of “(I) subject – (other) object” of transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, *Ideas relativas a una fenomenología pura y una filosofía fenomenológica*, 1913). Nevertheless, it was Jean-Paul Sartre (*El ser y la nada*, 1943) who, from existentialism, recast the “I-other” notion, for which “the other” also constructs my being insofar as he makes me an object of his. Along this line, violence toward another individual manifests the violence one has previously exercised upon oneself. Only degradation toward oneself permits the disturbing of the other’s threshold. It is not fortuitous that phenomenology should have flourished within the frame of the two World Wars that devastated not only the world but the notion of “world” and with it that of “subject”, and existentialism after them. Seen thus, the triple mediation of man that Paul Ricoeur proposes (*Historia y narratividad*, 1955), “man with the other, with himself and with objects”, implies symbolic relations in which man weaves or destroys himself.

¹²²Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*, p. 53 [my translation].

tristeza suspirante de Gertrudis, sus miradas que se iban coagulando encima del pañuelo que no quería apartar de los labios. Demasiado pequeña la habitación para sus largos pasos lentos [...] Demasiado chica para contener, además, las sacudidas sin esperanza [...] con que yo trataba de arrancar mis rodillas del suelo fofo de lástima y desamor, de cuentas impagadas, de la intimidad que se iba haciendo promiscua, de fracasadas sonrisas planeadas largamente, del dolor de las medicinas perdurable, y el olor de Gertrudis, dividido ahora con orígenes reconocibles. (34)

she would come back from Temperley in the morning. And from the moment she opened the door, from the moment she stepped into the lift, from the moment I woke to wait for her, the room, once more and worse than ever, was going to prove too small to contain the two of us and Gertrudis's sighing sadness, her glances coagulating above the handkerchief she would not take from her lips. The room too small for her long slow steps [...] Too small to contain, besides, the hopeless jolts [...] with which I tried to tear my knees from the spongy floor of pity and lovelessness, of unpaid bills, of an intimacy that was turning promiscuous, of failed smiles long planned, of the enduring smell of medicines, and Gertrudis's smell, divided now into recognisable origins. (34)

In this way Brausen's immediate "reality" will cease to be only that medium where he lives daily in the unconsciousness of his acts, and will signify this time the matter of his creation. Brausen, who experiences his happening at the level of the senses, will feel driven to read those sensations so as to carry them to a second ontological rank. A step that is already from a form of existence alien and inauthentic to another that is his own and authentic. By this act Brausen returns to himself as a man of interiors; that is, he moves from a space in which he wanders to a body he inhabits.

Up to here, it is important to see that from a first immediate and everyday reality to a second fictional and symbolic reality, what is at stake is Brausen's internal constitution, who, through this aesthetic and ethical exercise, brings his being to recognise itself in fiction. Likewise, the process of self-creation implies a transmutation of being: the will carried to its final consequences. For this reason Brausen's everydayness, understood in a first moment as trap, will be the matter of a creation rehearsed as salvation, in which the new order of "being-in-the-world", now at a metaphysical order called fiction (Santa María), will give an account of the reality from which it was made (Buenos Aires) in a reference that is not direct but suspended and ambiguous: ambiguity means possibility.¹²³ Because fiction also says the reality of man. What is Santa María made of, and Díaz Grey, Elena Sala, Lagos? What role does Gertrudis play this time, or la Queca, Raquel, Stein? What meaning does his wife's missing breast take on at this moment, and the morphine prescribed to relieve her?

¹²³In Paul Ricoeur's terms: "by its own structure, the literary work unfolds a world only on condition that the reference of descriptive discourse be suspended. Or, in other words: in the literary work discourse unfolds its denotation as of a second rank, in favour of the suspension of the first-rank denotation of discourse [...]. The supremacy of the poetic function over the referential does not annul reference (denotation) but renders it ambiguous. To a message of double meaning there corresponds a doubled sender, a doubled addressee and, moreover, a doubled reference" [my translation]. *La metáfora viva*, Madrid, Trotta, Ediciones Cristiandad, 2001, pp. 293–296.

What risk will his dismissal from Macleod Advertising and his unmended debts impose upon his newly created world and those who inhabit it?

From the fall of his everydayness, ruined in terms of utilitarian means and ends, Brausen will generate the ruins for another reality. “Ruins”, but not for that reason chaotic. The disposition Brausen holds of them will be given by the sensibility of creating a new specific plane with its own laws and logics: the rank of fiction. And, as Ricoeur points out, the work of creation begins by making ruins of a direct referent in order to raise a metaphorical one upon it.¹²⁴

For this reason, in his ordinary immediacy various “blades” present themselves, tearing the cloth of a weave destined for ruin. From the blade of the scalpel with which the doctor cut Gertrudis’s breast, to the blade deposited in feminine teeth, which reaches different ontological levels, and which runs from tearing away the possibility of Gertrudis’s plenitude (“She was asleep, her face always toward the balcony, hermetic, showing only the edge of a tooth between her lips”), to annulling the existence of la Queca, discovered dead with “the half-moon of the teeth [that] emerged with equivalence from the zone of weak light of the bed”, (237) until it finally flowers in a “fictional” Elena Sala who touched “with her teeth the beads of her necklace” (70)¹²⁵ in an act of reborn eroticism and sensuality. Josefina Ludmer puts this act of deconstruction directed toward creation in this way: “to begin is to cut, to erect a threshold that marks the impassivity of writing with respect to things, the physical, quantity, affirmation: an edge that massively modifies the modalities of the utterance”.¹²⁶

Furthermore, a fundamental feature in the creative disposition will be the “pieces” of glass, screws and other useless ruins that Brausen collects in his daily walking through the street and the docks, in the traversal of his everydayness. An act by which, symbolically, he crumbles one plane of existence in order to build another.¹²⁷ Such pieces of his life are deposited, at exchange value, in the hermetic safe-deposit box at the bank (symbolically guarded by a metaphysical, which is to say metaphorical, Hermes)¹²⁸ so as to occupy the space left by the severance money he is gradually withdrawing:

¹²⁴“Just as the metaphorical statement attains its sense as metaphorical upon the ruins of the literal sense, so too it acquires its reference upon the ruins of what we may call, by symmetry, its literal reference” [my translation]. *Ibidem*, p. 293.

¹²⁵On this, Josefina Ludmer (*op. cit.*) has already noticed the image of the blade and the teeth in *A Brief Life*.

¹²⁶Josefina Ludmer, *ibidem*, p. 18 [my translation].

¹²⁷“That activity of collecting remains is an analogy of his function as narrator: he goes on organising the narrative out of vestiges, of fragments of life, many of them memories of journeys, gathered near the port or near a narrow railway line; they saturate the connotative dispatch to the semantic space of migration” [my translation]. Roberto Ferro, *Onetti, la fundación imaginada. Parodia del autor en la saga de Santa María*, Córdoba, Argentina, Alción Editora, 2003, p. 208.

¹²⁸“Hermes was the god of merchants, of bankers, of thieves, of soothsayers and of heralds [messengers] [...]. On the back [of his throne] a swastika was carved, for this was the shape of the fire-making machine he had invented: the fire drill [...]. Hermes also invented the alphabet [...]. Another of Hermes’s emblems was a peeled hazel wand that he carried as messenger of the Olympians [...].” [my translation]. Robert Graves, *Dioses y héroes de la Antigua Grecia*, México, Tusquets, 2011, p. 25. At a symbolic degree, Hermes “guards” at the same time as he “transports”. Creator of the alphabet (the fire of men), he is the god of the word: invention. In this way, the “senseless objects” he “guards” in that bank of ontological [terrestrial] value have the end of “being transported” by the word to a new metaphysical order: the Olympus of creation. It is not trivial to recall that from “Hermes” comes the term “hermetic” (what is hidden, what does not show itself or is not seen at first glance) and with it “hermeneutics” (a method for inquiring into the hidden). Being already nests in a hermeneutics, to which access is gained from a phenomenology.

“a form of exchange”, Roberto Ferro would say, “in which Stein’s logic [or rational logic] is not present, and which will draw the attention of the bank employee charged with opening the box, as though it were an illegible fact”.¹²⁹ Illegible insofar as the only form of reading occurs in another rank of existence: that of fiction. A symbolic mirror of creation: “I leaned over the banknotes, without avarice, as over a mirror that would one day reflect my face, unthinkingly”: (193) the face of Arce. Through such an act, Brausen ironises the world marked by the money he is taking leave of. Brausen’s courage lies, then, beyond leaning over the abysses of his existence and seeking what traps him at the level of the everyday, in daring to destroy that world so as to find in such devastation its most vital parts, in a discrimination of that in which trap and salvation nest in a single germ. By such an act of valuation, inaugurated by imagination, Brausen positions himself as an ethical being, insofar as he opens his creative aesthetic dimension.¹³⁰

Put another way, the importance of the ethical order of the ruins will be that of placing those events of his everydayness felt as trap into a “seed” that can grow, interiorly, as salvation; a synthesis of the dialectic between reality and fiction, a symbiosis of the foundation of being in its own sensible transgression. Salvation will be made of the matter of the trap. For this reason Brausen’s work will consist in seeking, among his fragments, those triggers that found a new ontological referent as a form of salvation, insofar as they generate “another reality” of which he is owner and creator.

The ethical importance of these fragments lies in their disposing of the keys to open a fictional reality, though not for that reason one devoid of truth:¹³¹ the morphine, Gertrudis’s missing breast, her medallion between the two breasts, the photograph of an unknown man inside the medallion. Fragments that function like matryoshkas in a kind of creative ellipsis, bearing upon different ontological levels of fiction, which is to say of Brausen’s being: a doctor, Elena Sala, a travelling man between two breasts.

Through these elements, the rest of Juan María B.’s immediate reality will manage to enter Santa María, perhaps by the same river that connects the interior of the provincial city with the “exterior world”, a river “neither wide nor narrow, rarely agitated; a river with energetic currents that did not show themselves on the surface, crossed by small rowing boats, small sailing boats, small motor launches...”. (23) A river whose currents take place in the depths and not on the surface because, as Bachelard noted, access to the unconscious occurs in: “the deep waters that cannot be spoken”.¹³²

In this way, faced with what corners him, instead of taking flight Brausen faces it. The hollow left by

Cf. Jorge Enrique Pulido Blanco, “‘La ontología sólo es posible como fenomenología’. En torno a la fenomenología de Martin Heidegger”, in *Franciscanum* 163, vol. LVII, 2015, pp. 87–123.

¹²⁹Roberto Ferro, *op. cit.*, p. 208 [my translation].

¹³⁰Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *La dimensión estética. Crítica de la ortodoxia marxista*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2007.

¹³¹[Translator’s note: the Spanish plays on *clave* and *llave*, which share the Latin *clavis* and mean, respectively, the key that solves and the key that opens. Elías’s note glosses that shared root. English needs no gloss, since “key” carries both senses in one word; the original note read: “*Clave* and *llave* share a single Latin root: from Lat. *clavis*, id., by learned transmission *clave*” (Joan Corominas, *op. cit.*, p. 370).]

¹³²Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 74 [my translation].

his wife's severed breast, the *pathos*¹³³ of his misfortune, now becomes a mirror without an image, a phantom of desire, in which Brausen will have to stir himself. A hollow upon a body, it now shows itself as a mouth open to his abysses:

... Ablación de mama. Una cicatriz puede ser imaginada como un corte irregular practicado en una copa de goma, de paredes gruesas, que contenga una materia inmóvil, sonrosada, con burbujas en la superficie, y que dé la impresión de ser líquida si hacemos oscilar la lámpara que la ilumina. También puede pensarse cómo será quince días, un mes después de la intervención, con una sombra de piel que se le estira encima, traslúcida, tan delgada que nadie se atrevería a detener mucho tiempo sus ojos en ella. Más adelante las arrugas comienzan a insinuarse, se forman y se alteran; ahora sí es posible mirar la cicatriz a escondidas, sorprenderla desnuda alguna noche y pronosticar cuál rigurosidad, cuáles dibujos, qué tonos sonrosados y blancos prevalecerán y se harán definitivos. (41)

... Ablation of the breast. A scar can be imagined as an irregular cut made in a rubber cup with thick walls, containing an immobile, pinkish matter with bubbles on the surface, giving the impression of being liquid if we set the lamp that lights it swinging. One can also think how it will be a fortnight, a month after the intervention, with a shadow of skin stretching over it, translucent, so thin that nobody would dare rest their eyes on it for long. Later the wrinkles begin to hint at themselves, they form and they alter; now it is indeed possible to look at the scar in secret, to surprise it naked some night and to forecast which rigour, which patterns, what pink and white tones will prevail and become definitive. (41)

Understood thus, what signified for Brausen, lodged in his everyday trap, the impediment to creation,¹³⁴ will now be the means and the motive for a new fictional order. And perhaps part of the trap Brausen confronts is that of wanting to leave what imprisons him while at the same time obliging himself to look at the total panorama of his circumstance. As Onetti himself said some time after publishing *A Brief Life*: "peace is necessary for the writer... it is bad to be anguished by what happens each day. Writing in these circumstances can be dangerous insofar as it leads to two postures: either to fold one's arms and break the pen, or to fall into the pamphlet. It is a passive or an active defence".¹³⁵ Nevertheless, within his trap his salvation survives. In this way Brausen will make consciousness and desire well up in the examination of every line of the cut in the breast, a desire not reduced to sexual appetite but raised exponentially to the eroticism of creation.¹³⁶

¹³³ *Pathos* as feeling and emotion, in a bridge with *logos*, word, reason.

¹³⁴ "It would not be possible for me to write the film treatment Stein had spoken to me about while I could not manage to forget that severed breast; it was not possible for me to forget it, however much I insisted on repeating to myself that I had played at suckling from it, from that". (13)

¹³⁵ Juan Carlos Onetti, "La literatura. Ida y vuelta", in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, p. 196 [my translation].

¹³⁶ Bataille would say: "Reproductive sexual activity is shared by sexed animals and by men, but apparently only men have made of their sexual activity an erotic activity" [my translation]. Georges Bataille, *El erotismo*, p. 15.

Into such an abyss Brausen will enter, like Morpheus,¹³⁷ with the ampoule of morphine, of “gay and secret reflection”. (17) An ampoule that can put one reality to sleep so as to open, interiorly, another. And only Morpheus is capable of reconfiguring, in the unknown of dream, a known and enveloping everydayness, capable of inducing Gertrudis into the simulacrum of her own death, of giving her a “mouth half-open and dry, almost black, her lips thicker than before, her nose shining, but no longer damp”, (17) of suppressing for a moment, in its sedative power, the referentiality of a misfortune and inciting Brausen to the possibility of a new happiness:

Antes de medianoche ella había vomitado, había llorado apretando contra su boca el pañuelo empapado en agua de colonia mientras yo le golpeaba suavemente un hombro, sin hablarle, porque ya había repetido, exactamente tantas veces como me era posible en el curso de un día: “No importa. No llores”. Mientras jugaba con la ampolla creía seguir oyendo, como manchas de ruidos antiguos que hubieran quedado en los rincones del cuarto, los sonidos resueltos, casi desesperados, con sus perceptibles matices de vergüenza y odio, que ella había hecho con la cabeza resignada sobre la palangana. (17)

Before midnight she had vomited, had wept pressing to her mouth the handkerchief soaked in eau de cologne while I tapped her softly on one shoulder, without speaking to her, because I had already repeated, exactly as many times as was possible for me in the course of a day: “It doesn’t matter. Don’t cry”. While I played with the ampoule I thought I could still hear, like stains of old noises left in the corners of the room, the resolute, almost desperate sounds, with their perceptible shadings of shame and hatred, that she had made with her head resigned over the basin. (17)

Brausen stretches out his hand “until he put it into the limited zone of light of the bedside lamp, next to the bed” (17) while he hears “Gertrudis sleeping”, (17) so as to dream from wakefulness of “an old man, a doctor, who sells morphine” (17) and to know that “everything has to start from there, from him”. (17) A new reality for which that liquid will develop to the full its “perverse quality, hinted at in its colour, in its capacity for movement, in its facility for immobilising itself as soon as my hand grew calm, and for shining serenely in the light, pretending never to have been agitated”. (18) Morphine crossed by the “faint light”, recalling Zambrano, of an intimacy on the point of resurging through imagination. The “limited zone of light of the bedside lamp” reveals the nature of the morphine. A Brausen-Morpheus who is born, at last, from the faint flame of creative imagination upon the forms of misfortune. At this degree of the plot there already appears the importance of an imagination lodged not only in wakefulness and reality but in the descent into dream and the

¹³⁷Morpheus is the son of Hypnos (Sleep) and Nyx (Night). The relation between sleep and night marks the atmosphere of a poetics of creation. “Morpheus is, etymologically, the ‘maker of good forms’” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 70. Brausen’s creative work consists in modifying the “bad forms” (the amputated breast) toward the “good forms” (dream). For this reason Brausen descends, with morphine’s help, toward a space of poetic reverie that helps him to re-create himself. Understood thus, morphine no longer acts only upon Gertrudis to relieve her physically, but upon Brausen to assist him existentially.

unconscious, in access to the real; the place to which Brausen descends in order to seek the zone of purity he had lost. Of course, such a search cannot occur with the tools of technical reason, whose work happens in consciousness, but with the weapons of fiction in the dismantling of his being within a creative phenomenology.¹³⁸

In this way, incited to imagine and with the power the morphine grants him, Brausen retreats into the thickness of his memory in order to recognise himself in his past and to find in it a vestige with which he might build a new space. Morphine induces him into the voluptuousness of the senses, the path of access to the unconscious, as Georges Bataille noted.¹³⁹ In consequence, from the evocation of a “real” Santa María: “I was there only once, barely a day, in summer; but I remember the air, the trees in front of the hotel, the placidity with which the ferry came along the river”, (100) he will build another whose referentiality is given by the ambiguity of recollection and desire. A new space in which to be himself someone else in the identity of another man, free of all weight, incarnated in a doctor: “I was not interested in [his] past, his life before his arrival, the year before, at the provincial city, Santa María”. (19) An other man who represents the possibility of contiguity for Brausen’s being:

Díaz Grey debería tener los ojos cansados, con una pequeña llama inmóvil, fría, que recordaba la desaparición de la fe en la sorpresa. Y tal como yo estaba mirando la noche de lento viento fresco, podía estar él apoyado en una ventana de su consultorio, frente a la plaza y las luces del muelle. Atontado y sin comprender, así como yo escuchaba el ruido de la ropa sacudida en la azotea de enfrente, el ritmo irregular de los ronquidos de Gertrudis y el pequeño silencio alrededor de la cabeza de la mujer en el departamento vecino. (23)

Díaz Grey ought to have tired eyes, with a small immobile, cold flame that recalled the disappearance of faith in surprise. And just as I was looking at the night of slow fresh wind, he could be leaning at a window of his consulting room, facing the square and the lights of the dock. Stunned and uncomprehending, just as I listened to the noise of the washing shaken on the roof terrace opposite, the irregular rhythm of Gertrudis’s snoring and the small silence around the head of the woman in the neighbouring flat. (23)

An unsuspecting provincial doctor for whom Brausen suddenly has enter: “a woman into the consulting room as you entered and went behind a screen to take off your blouse and show the gold cross swinging from the chain, the blue mark, the lump in the breast”. (18) A lump that was cancer, only to represent later the “excessively swollen tips” (42) of Elena Sala.

¹³⁸The importance of dream has, without doubt, a Romantic pulse on which Onetti, within a degraded modernity, draws. For the Romantics, dream already becomes an important path of access to the depths of being, in a striving for its disintegration directed toward a reintegration, in counterpoint to the rational faculties that the French Revolution was mechanising in pursuit of a new modern reality. Cf. Albert Béguin, *El alma romántica y el sueño*, México, FCE, 1954.

¹³⁹Cf. Georges Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura. Ensayos 1944-1961*, Buenos Aires, Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 1994.

In sum, Brausen clothes himself with the doctor's skin, as though in that new constitution he now had the faculty of saving himself in his role of healing the sick. A doctor who might have noticed his wife's tumour before the fatality, or who might himself have severed her breast. A doctor who, under the "as if" of fiction, will receive Elena's two breasts.

Morphine, in this way, functions as the vehicle that clears away some ruins in order to found others, from a form of death to a form of life, from a degraded Gertrudis to an Elena Sala sufficient to awaken the lost vigour in a Díaz Grey; an Elena Sala who comes to his consulting room with the need for a lie (the seed of fiction) in order to ask illegally for a prescription: "So that was it. But what can it matter to me? I suffer, if I do suffer, because the key was something that cannot matter to me. Cocaine or morphine; I have to guess it". (45) Perhaps that very ampoule another doctor prescribed legally for Gertrudis, and that Brausen now plays between his fingers. A single ampoule of morphine implicated in three frames of reality.

The constitution of the morphine will "inject", in a metaphor drawn from the injection Brausen was to give Gertrudis, Brausen's immediate real order, and it is morphine that will help him to discern and decompose it. That ampoule will introduce him into the hollow of the missing breast: flesh that rots on one plane and upon a finished woman, only to be reborn in the symmetry of a new eroticism. Morphine that will oblige Gertrudis, evoked from her portrait: "a little foolish by dint of immobility, fixed at the end of her adolescence, [in] profile, beautiful and meaningless", (35) to await her turn: "in Díaz Grey's *antesala*" (19) (the *ante-Sala* of fiction)¹⁴⁰ where she bares her torso behind a screen with an "astonishingly good-quality mirror and a nickel-plated coat hook that gave patients the impression of never having been used". (19) "The same Gertrudis would come down from the portrait to save me from discouragement, from the climate of befouled love, from the thick and mutilated Gertrudis; she would come to guide my hand to write a new beginning, another encounter". (37)

Brausen, breathed full with the power of transgression, will hold open, from Díaz Grey's hands, the door of fiction: "'Please, one minute. You may sit down', I said without looking at her. I leaned over the desk to note in the pad a name and a sum of money; afterwards the doctor, Díaz Grey, approached with coldness the woman who had not wished to sit". (40) A step in which Brausen becomes a bridge in tension between one narrator and another, from Brausen in a first person to the "free will" of Díaz Grey in a third person, still submerged in ignorance of his own creation, obedient to a greater will that conditions him. A transition from one existence to another: a journey of being.

In sum, the morphine, a synthesis of creation and destruction, "shows" Brausen a new city: "together with the river and the ferry that berths in the siesta hour". (23) A traveller upon the boat of an oneiric

¹⁴⁰"Elena-Sala-De Espera", as Josefina Ludmer saw, *op. cit.*, p. 61. [Translator's note: Spanish *antesala*, "waiting room", literally contains *Sala*, the surname of Elena Sala; Elías splits the word as *ante-Sala* to expose the pun, and Ludmer's coinage "Elena-Sala-De Espera" turns her name into "Elena-Waiting-Room". English "waiting room" cannot hold the play, so the Spanish is kept here.]

Charon,¹⁴¹ he moves from Buenos Aires to Santa María, from a state of wakefulness to a state of poetic reverie: the two Santa Marías, that of recollection and that of the lie.

And the river, a metaphor of time, connects while it separates ontological levels. A river along whose bed there runs, perhaps, the same violent and sedative liquid of the morphine, a current for the contiguity of being. A river as a bridge between two banks: from the land of desolation to the certainty of a newly created territory: the two banks of the river Acheron. A river as a vital flow outside time and in turn made of pure time, where existence marks its becoming: “you do not bathe twice in the same river, for different currents flow along its bed”, Heraclitus reminds us.¹⁴² A current that will flow like the other function of the lost breast: to suckle. The morphine is channelled as a river of milk, nourishment for Santa María. There is, in this way, between milk and morphine, a play between creation and destruction. “Fresh water is the true mythic water”,¹⁴³ in which morphine incarnates the evanescence of poetic imagination. Through the liquid state of morphine travels the evanescence of imagination.

But morphine is barely the first trigger from one everyday order into another, symbolic one. Brausen, demiurge now, will compel fiction by inciting his own arrival into that new symbolic order, hiding himself in a medallion free of monetary value, that is, free of a utilitarian rational logic: “at any moment I shall place against the rail of the ferry a woman who already carries, restless between her skin and the cloth of her dress, a little chain holding a gold medallion, a type of jewel that nobody manufactures or buys any more”. (23)

The importance of the medallion lies in its being the bearer of an image through which there travels, among the different levels of fiction, an Onetti, a Brausen, a Díaz Grey; a man, in the end, unknown: “The medallion has tiny leaf-shaped claws that hold the glass over the photograph of a young man, with a thick and closed mouth, with light eyes that extend, shining, toward the temples”. (23–24) Through this jewel one type of existence closes and another opens at a dissimilar level of reality, that is, in a distinct ontological dimension. From Gertrudis’s medallion, which keeps dead days of Brausen’s happiness, with Brausen hidden inside it, to Elena Sala’s medallion, which now harbours an unknown man; a man travelling from Buenos Aires to Santa María in the unconsciousness of a photograph, the petrification of a moment free of time. A dimension, therefore, that runs, in this jewel-seed, from a mutilated woman to another of “large breasts”; (42) from a Brausen for whom such an object had long seemed familiar, to a Díaz Grey who saw “the chain and the medallion, the sudden shine of the crystal over the tiny photograph” (42) without memory and without recognising himself in the snapshot of someone else and, nevertheless, strangely his own in its foreignness.

¹⁴¹In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of Hades charged with taking souls from one bank of the river Acheron to the other in exchange for the coins their relatives placed beneath their tongues. Cf. Robert Graves, *op. cit.*

¹⁴²Heraclitus, Fragment 91. In Juan David García-Bacca (comp.), “Fragmentos filosóficos de Heráclito”, in *Los presocráticos*, México, FCE, 1979, p. 104 [my translation].

¹⁴³Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 230 [my translation].

In this way, Brausen naked and with his feeble imaginary weapons, which are not for that reason unreal, dreams. A man with an ordinary life and an ordinary ruin, he is not an ordinary man: because in imagination lies his capacity to transform himself.

This act of imaginary creation is without doubt the first step toward Brausen being able to save himself in the will to be another. And if imagination holds what is most human in our condition, within it also lies the superhuman.¹⁴⁴ A poetic reverie through which Brausen moves from his everyday terrestrial condition to that of a metaphysical superman: the *homo* of fiction; *homo imaginans*.¹⁴⁵

The crossing Brausen will have to follow will be long, formless and confused, for the stone with which to raise fiction will be his own flesh.

In this way his processes of creation, a to-and-fro of circumstances, are a “swell of sensations”¹⁴⁶ that open consciousness and alter it, moved by desire and by search, wounded by the fear of failure and longing for a triumph that might transcend their own incompleteness. Because to create means to suffer, descent, wounded consciousness, but also ascent and struggle, an attempt to overcome finitude and its circumstances: an appeal to totality and to ontological reconciliation. Hope and failure are inherent to creation. Brausen conducts the impulse of a newly discovered imagination that claims its space, and in turn he is carried by it. Paraphrasing Gramsci, I might say that Brausen imagines with “the pessimism of the intelligence and the optimism of the will”.

And if we extrapolate Octavio Paz’s affirmation (“the relation between society and literature is not that of cause and effect”),¹⁴⁷ we can read in *A Brief Life* that the passage between reality and fiction (Buenos Aires to Santa María) is not linear, not uniform, and does not happen under the laws of a well-systematised rational logic, though it is not for that reason devoid of order. Fiction raises symbols out of everyday plots in an ambiguous and doubly problematic play. Fiction is that “oracle of Delphi which does not speak but gives signs”.¹⁴⁸

Santa María opens, in this process, as an aesthetic and sensible dimension dominated by the synthesis and destruction of imagination, the only force capable of carrying the human condition from the ontological order of “being-in-the-world” to the metaphysical order of possibility: “being(other)-in(other)-the world(other)”.

This newly conquered “land” (the founding of the aesthetic dimension) shares its mystery with the nature of myth, that old homeland of imagination in its most primitive state, where the keys to

¹⁴⁴If man becomes being by and through imagination from the well of the unconscious, he transcends himself in the act of transgressing his fundamental structure. A supernatural phenomenon of consciousness and will. Two extremes of human nature: root and fruit of this “elm that bears pears” (in dialogue with Octavio Paz). Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁵A term of María Noel Lapoujade’s, re-semanticising the notion of a rational man: *homo sapiens-sapiens*. *Homo imaginans I*, Puebla, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, La Fuente, 2015.

¹⁴⁶Within a poetics of water and of imagination.

¹⁴⁷Octavio Paz, “América Latina y la democracia”, in *Tiempo nublado*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1983 (161–188), p. 161 [my translation].

¹⁴⁸Heraclitus, Fragment 93, *op. cit.*, p. 104 [my translation]. For this reason art is knowledge without being *episteme*.

the poetic act survive. For the Romantics already: “our imagination is a dark replica of the great creative force that has formed the world”.¹⁴⁹ For this reason the arrival of Díaz Grey and Elena Sala in Santa María occurs, not fortuitously, at an “eternal midday”. A midday governed not by the clock cycle but by the solar zenith: “Always at midday she crossed the consulting room, went to sit in the armchair by the furthest window [...], both of them imagining, because the noises of the small city diminished at that hour, that the floor of the consulting room had ascended to an impossible height of solitude and silence”. (71)

An ascent from a figurative order to a mythic one, a movement in which the sensible threads of the human condition are played out. Bachelard already recognises that verticality is inherent to the poetic, that is, the creative act, as against horizontal time.¹⁵⁰ It is time arrested, the sun at its zenith, at whose extremes, below and above, are found the descent and the ascent of being.

Díaz Grey’s midday signifies full, total time, for in its verticality all times remain in one alone: the instant, in which the present becomes presence; an instant that implies “the manifestation of the divine”.¹⁵¹ Divine insofar as it communicates with mythic sensibility.

If the river represents the horizontality that bounds Santa María, midday comes to show its immobile character. River and midday thus reveal the two natures of this provincial city: the ontological and the metaphysical. A dialectic in which Brausen seeks his riven totality. A search that runs from linear and progressive time, in which his existence is condemned to move forward with no possibility of return to correct what now imprisons him, to the cyclical time proper to myth in its metaphysical possibility,¹⁵² an eternal return in which Brausen can, as in Heraclitus’s river, come back upon himself being another and the same. Round time, exempt from the weight of the past and of History, significant now for the rite of existence in its play with eternity: “There is the doctor with his forehead resting on a window; [...] he looks at a midday that could never have a date”. (23)¹⁵³ In sum, the metaphysical order of being carries within it the totality of a new ethical and aesthetic susceptibility.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Albert Béguin, *op. cit.*, p. 201 [my translation]. If imagination already represents that primordial fire, Brausen, in gaining access to it, comes to the “common fire of the universe”, as Heraclitus called it (Fragment 89).

¹⁵⁰ Bachelard, “Instante poético e instante metafísico”, in *El derecho de soñar* [México, FCE, 1985]. Bachelard of course refers explicitly to the poem, and although his sense may well be extrapolated to the creative poetic act [*poiesis*], it remains important to stress the significant differences between poetry and the novel: the first a pre-modern genre with a primitive breath, while the second rises as a properly modern rational genre. Bachelard opposes the verticality of the poem to the horizontality of prose.

¹⁵¹ María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*.

¹⁵² That is, as a “specific category of that mode of existence; an existence whose being and reality are given by an archaic ontology” [my translation]. Mircea Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2011, pp. 15–161.

¹⁵³ A most apt reading for seeing the sense of weight and lightness in existence within an open modern world as against the closed world of myth is, without doubt, *La insoportable levedad del ser*, by Milan Kundera.

¹⁵⁴ A sensible (poetic) metaphysics that shares similarities with a philosophical metaphysics, but whose pulse is not that of idealist reason, insofar as that comes from ideas, but that of faint reason: the *poiesis* of creation and of self-creation.

The mystery of this new metaphysical rank of existence is that of the suspension of an everyday reference caught up in immediacy, in favour of another that appeals to totality. A movement in which lies the passage from an everydayness lived as trap to the possibility of salvation at a degree of autonomous life.

In this way the metaphorical river that connects a reality of direct reference (Buenos Aires) with another that is suspended (Santa María) breaks the linearity of a profane and everyday time so as to reconfigure it, within its “energetic currents that did not show themselves on the surface”, into a circular and round time, with a “midday of powerful sun, dissolved in the winding streets of Santa María” that “Díaz Grey would be watching through the panes of the window and of his spectacles”. (23)

Time at midday, when Elena Sala visits Díaz Grey, thus signifies a new dimension of being, fiction facing fiction in a feeling of true existence: “We are alone in this silence [...], as though it had happened outside the world”. (72) An ontological transgression that breaks out in the dimensions of a single man: “It was then as if I could see her”, Brausen thinks, “as if I were transformed into the doctor’s mastered curiosity and were spying on her as she abandoned her body, crossed her legs [...]”. (70)

The work of inhabiting fiction becomes an effort to ask whether it is perhaps possible to live otherwise. The need to fabulate oneself, incited initially by the commission of the film script, and at every moment by its growing impossibility, amounts to the need for play, to the eroticism of being another, Díaz Grey and not Brausen, who might imagine freely: “[...] when I am free to imagine the thickness of her legs and the intensity of the heat they hold when crossed; when, without looking at her but needing her presence in order to do it, I add, modify, exaggerate, suppress, attenuate the form and the weight of her thighs flattened against the seat, and think of the possible glints of silk and down [...]”. (91)

A fiction subordinated to its creator and yet with breath enough for an autonomy that will later be total: an autopoiesis of founding itself in the sensual play, insofar as it comes from the senses, of imagining out of unconsciousness:

Entretanto, y sin que yo necesitara dirigir lo que estaba sucediendo o prestarle atención – mientras pensaba en dinero, Gertrudis, propaganda, o me empecinaba en colocar entre la mujer y Díaz Grey la materia inflexible del marido, tantas veces esfumado, tantas veces a sólo un paso, un detalle, una expiración del instante de su nacimiento–, Díaz Grey había seguido recibiendo las visitas de Elena Sala, había repetido cientos de veces el primer encuentro, esforzándose por no mirarle los ojos. [...] Así, sin variantes, una o dos veces por día, sin que yo tuviera que intervenir ni pudiera evitarlo. (63)

Meanwhile, and without my needing to direct what was happening or pay it any attention, while I thought about money, Gertrudis, advertising, or persisted in placing between the woman and Díaz Grey the inflexible matter of the husband, so many times dissolved, so many times only

a step, a detail, an expiry away from the instant of his birth, Díaz Grey had gone on receiving Elena Sala's visits, had repeated hundreds of times the first encounter, straining not to look her in the eyes. [...] So, without variation, once or twice a day, without my having to intervene or being able to prevent it. (63)

The waiting of fiction becomes the pulse that guards the omnipotence of a Brausen still stuck in his incipient collapse. A waiting in which the search for Elena Sala's "husband" takes on the problem of the referent as a tension between reality and fiction; that is, as a struggle between the exteriority and the interiority of Brausen as demiurge; an exteriority that invades him with preoccupations and an interiority that means descent upon himself. For as Josefina Ludmer already saw: "Brausen finds himself between two 'sides': his wife and the new neighbour; between two cuts, that of the breast and that of the couple recounted by the woman's voice; throughout the whole narrative he will oscillate between Arce, his other name, which he uses in the neighbouring flat, and Díaz Grey, the character of his fiction".¹⁵⁵ Two sides that may be read as the thresholds of his identity, always a space in between.

Out of what matter is the husband to be raised? How is he to be constructed amid the demands of the everyday? Fiction survives in Brausen's intimacy, an intimacy that looks toward his deep ontological dimension, to which he can hardly return while wrapped in the noise of his problems:

Porque yo necesitaba encontrar el marido exacto, insustituible, para escribir de un tirón, en una sola noche, el argumento de cine y colocar dinero entre mí y mis preocupaciones. Y eran estas mismas preocupaciones las que me impedían escribir, las que me desanimaban y me distraían, las que me hacían extraer del ensueño, de las noches en blanco y de las repentinas inspiraciones de la jornada, fatalmente, al marido equivocado, inutilizable. Era muy difícil encontrarlo, porque fuese como fuese, sólo podía ser conocido en la intimidad. (64)

Because I needed to find the exact, irreplaceable husband, so as to write the film treatment in one go, in a single night, and to place money between myself and my worries. And it was these same worries that prevented me from writing, that discouraged and distracted me, that made me draw out of reverie, out of sleepless nights and the sudden inspirations of the working day, fatally, the wrong husband, the unusable one. He was very difficult to find, because whatever he might be, he could only be known in intimacy. (64)

For this reason, the achievement of "having him", the last piece needed to execute a total fiction, comes to him not from a search within consciousness but with his back turned to it, in the unconsciousness of wakefulness, in the task of attending to his "own rotting". And reality, like a force of gravity, "affects" fiction, draws it and threatens it with collapse: a phenomenon proper to the dialectic of imagination.

¹⁵⁵ Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 26 [my translation].

The intimate exactness, understood as ontological precision, of the husband lies in his taking the next step already begun by Elena Sala (passing from the *antesala* into the interior of fiction); that is, in his identity residing in the lie and in deception:

No hay que burlarse de Lagos, medicucho [sentencia Elena Sala sobre su marido]; es más complejo, más inteligente, más difícil. Miente siempre, miente tanto, que sólo podrá llegar a saber quién es si le toca morir a solas. Y ya ni siquiera miente para mí; lo hace porque tiene miedo, porque está viejo, porque cada Lagos que inventa es una posibilidad. En último caso, una posibilidad de Olvido. (100)

You must not mock Lagos, little doctor [Elena Sala pronounces of her husband]; he is more complex, more intelligent, more difficult. He lies always, he lies so much that he will only come to know who he is if it falls to him to die alone. And now he does not even lie for me; he does it because he is afraid, because he is old, because each Lagos he invents is a possibility. In the last instance, a possibility of Oblivion. (100)

For this reason the fictional arrival of Señor Lagos occurs only after the daring of initiating himself as Arce in the flat “next door”, the other side of reality. That is, in the abandonment of his immediate exteriority in the rehearsal of a fictional existence at the very level of his everydayness: a way of making it his own. In this way Santa María takes on greater scope insofar as its energy of creation intersects with that of self-creation: to turn his reality into fiction.

Now, if the process of self-creation beats at a low pulse from the beginning of the novel, that is, from la Queca’s arrival, it is not until after having “conceived” Díaz Grey, Santa María and Elena Sala, in the midst of the problem of the referent for the husband, and after having burst into the mute flat H, that the need to “present himself” as another before his neighbour truly takes on impulse: “Arce is, from here on, what Brausen cannot be, a pure ‘he’ in ‘reality’”.¹⁵⁶ In the end, it will be in la Queca that he recovers his wife’s lost breast at his own level of existence.¹⁵⁷

For at this moment of his life and of Santa María’s, the unfolding of consciousness, equivalent to the development of his imagination, has cut into Brausen’s identity, obliging him to the ruin of himself, of the: “meanwhile, I am this small, timid, unchangeable man, married to the only woman I seduced or who seduced me, incapable no longer of being another but even of the very will to be another”. (56)

¹⁵⁶Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 103 [my translation].

¹⁵⁷Josefina Ludmer already stresses the symbolic relation between Queca and *teta* (breast), which runs from a phonic similarity to a symbolic equivalence: “[...] the murder of Queca, which may represent this mechanism in general, specifically materialises the elimination, across the narrative, of the word ‘teta’ (Queca = *teta*, not only for their phonic resemblance but for their position-function in the space of the narrative), an elimination which is in turn figured in the motif that opens *A Brief Life*, the cutting of Gertrudis’s left breast (*teta*)” [my translation]. *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16. [Translator’s note: the pun rests on *Queca* and *teta* rhyming in Spanish; English cannot reproduce it, and the Spanish words are kept here for that reason.]

Through the “faint mirror” of his sensible consciousness,¹⁵⁸ Brausen notices “The old guard; the misunderstandings” of his existence despite fiction, in knowing that: “life has been made, for many years past, of misunderstandings. Gertrudis, my work, my friendship with Stein, the sensation I have of myself, misunderstandings [...]. Perhaps every type of existence I can imagine must come to be transformed into a misunderstanding”. (56) An almost unconscious anticipation of the future in store for his provincial city, scorched by flames. For until that moment of his inventiveness, the life of Santa María seemed to run parallel to his own, in a dimension one arrived at only by imagining, but whose world barely “touched” his immediate life. Díaz Grey’s existence could not achieve the physical materiality to descend into Brausen’s skin. It is for this reason that the breath of creation drives him toward self-creation, toward fabulating himself within his everydayness in order to transgress it, toward being himself the joint between fiction and reality.

Outside the house, it will be his friend Stein who initiates the retrospection into the failures. A mature man (or as one might say in “Welcome, Bob”: “he was a made man, that is to say an unmade one”), he comes to represent almost the alter ego of an ascetic Brausen: “as Stein mocks, for the impossibility of my becoming impassioned and not for the accepted absurdity of a conviction eventually mutilated. This one, I in the taximeter, non-existent [...] biped symbol of a cheap puritanism made of refusals, no to alcohol, no to tobacco, an equivalent no for women, nobody, in reality”. (56)

Stein’s identity, on the other hand, is almost contrary to his own, in a kind of mirror of his impossibility: “‘It is not asceticism, I am not constituted to believe it,’ Stein grumbled. ‘Hypocrisy. Or perhaps a vicious degeneration of pride. Anything complicated and repugnant may be the explanation’”. (48)

Finally, consciousness unveiled under the complicity of friendship and of night runs from Stein’s public judgements: “nothing frightens me more than these series of small failures [...]. I mean the small failures. Because precisely this afternoon I had come to consider with joy my general failure. The great failure, that of the individual Julio Stein”, (54–55) to Brausen’s interior noticing, to thinking about his wife’s trap no longer with the impetus of saving her but with the instinct of flight in pursuit of his own salvation: “I do not want to arrive if Gertrudis is awake or has just fallen asleep [...]. I do not want to bear the image of Gertrudis stretched out on her back [...]. We are afraid to speak; the whole world is an allusion to her misfortune”. (49–50)

In the solitude of the nocturnal street, and after taking leave of Stein, shut into the improvised intimacy of a taxi, Brausen turns to read his reality, this time from the clarity of consciousness granted by the creative faculty (“At this age is when life begins to be a crooked smile”) (55) as an almost inexorable necessity of self-creation.

In this intimate noticing, knowing that “there are things I can do and others I cannot”, (49) he is obliged to admit, once and for all and “without protest, the disappearance of Gertrudis, of Raquel, of Stein, of all the people it fell to me to love; admitting my solitude as I had done before with

¹⁵⁸Following María Zambrano (*El sueño creador...*), “poetic reason” leads to a reflection that is not direct but ambiguous, whose metaphorical foundation is given in a “faint mirror”.

my sadness”. (56–57) A leave-taking of the relations in which his identity is undermined; an abandonment of being Brausen in order to begin a new life in the welcoming of a cleaner, more daring man; this time Arce. Fiction “made flesh”. An identity that may inhabit his body so as to attend Santa María “physically”; and he will not be able to cease being entirely “Brausen” while he is bound to those people who identify his old existence. The others, implicated in his interiority, grant him being or take it from him.¹⁵⁹

In this way each achievement in fiction implies a failure in his everydayness, and the reverse, which supposes in turn a new ontological possibility at his very level of reality, that is, another form of existence, this time under Arce’s protection. For this reason Brausen’s solitude is not the absence of others; in such a state his tensions of power beat more strongly. The struggle lies in the fight against those others within himself: others who are I in my multiplicity. Brausen, alone, burns with his demons. In the end, fictional characters do not represent a foreignness. Perhaps as in dreams, each new identity represents the alterity of the being who dreams. Just as we do not dream of full others but of our-selves, creation is born of the multiplicity of the being that survives in the “I”. In creation, Ludmer acknowledges, “the narrative stages, in the vicissitudes of the ‘author’ character (‘I’), the mutations it must undergo in order to engender the other instances (characters) of its narration: ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘you’, ‘they’”.¹⁶⁰ In this way fiction opens and founds itself in the multiple of being. Through imagination, Brausen’s identity unfolds from the one to the multiple in order to return, finally, to a new unity potentiated in a different order.

Therefore, and with the sensation of his fall at an ontological level, there begins in Brausen the need to be another: “[without knowing] what he was doing until it was done”.¹⁶¹ A need that assists him this time not in the bed of reverie but in the taking of his own corporeality for the invasion of la Queca’s flat: a visit to his “still life”.¹⁶²

Brausen, back from his solitude of the street, avoiding his arrival and his wife, goes up, like one going down, in the lift, perhaps of his own body, to find that “la Queca’s flat was open, the bunch of keys hung in the lock, the corridor light entered and died against the legs of an armchair and upon the pattern of the small rug”, (56) as though it were a new entrance to his abysses awaiting him. And the open door of the flat next door takes on a special sense if we read it in the light of the symbol of being, of descent and of reverie. In Bachelard’s words: “The door is a whole cosmos of the half-open. [...], the very origin of a reverie in which desires and temptations accumulate, the temptation to open being in its depths, the desire to conquer all reticent beings. [...]. Sometimes,

¹⁵⁹Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *El ser y la nada*.

¹⁶⁰Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 16 [my translation].

¹⁶¹*Ibidem*, p. 58 [my translation].

¹⁶²“Brausen displaces himself to the neighbouring flat-space, doubles himself there, makes himself ‘other’, inverse, leaves his family and his work, sinks into sordidness, hatred, sadism” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 83. [Translator’s note: Spanish *naturaleza muerta*, “still life”, reads literally as “dead nature”, which is why Elías can move between the painterly genre and the death of Brausen’s everyday plane in the same phrase. English “still life” keeps the genre but loses the deadness.]

here it is tightly shut, bolted, chained. Sometimes here it is open, that is, wide open”.¹⁶³ Brausen, like an Aeneas of Buenos Aires, is presented with the entrance to his *inferi* at specific moments and with specific keys.¹⁶⁴

Still, then, on the edge of his “cliff”, “the air of the empty flat gave me a sensation of calm, filled me with a particular, friendly weariness, induced me to rest a shoulder against the door and to enter, slow and in silence”, as though this were the hero’s call to adventure,¹⁶⁵ the soft attraction of a new air to move away from that rarefied air of his room, of a suffocated Buenos Aires.¹⁶⁶ For as Ludmer rightly notes: “between the good air of the neighbouring flat and Santa María, fiction is woven”.¹⁶⁷

Finally, what does Brausen penetrate? He opens the other space (his own other side) in order to read that part in which he has always been Juan María Brausen. Because the neighbouring flat is not only another site distinct from his own. Such a space appears as the antithesis of his reality: the room of the “mad world”, as against his common, ordinary world devoid of sense, that is, devoid of sensuality. That mute place next door, H, which he crosses by imagining, by descending, represents the well of madness: a path of access to the deepest strata of imagination, where the mystery of interpretation, and therefore of creation, nests. In such a poetics, silence (flat H) has the symbol of the blank space for beginning again.

The open door of la Queca’s flat manifests the open threshold for the descent into voluptuous sensibility. Descent as a fall upon the lost breast. “My fall creates the abyss”, Bachelard would say.¹⁶⁸ Or in Heidegger’s terms, I would say that such a descent symbolically recreates the fall proper to being, its state of thrownness, in which Brausen will find himself ontologically naked. “Thrown”, in this way, to the sensory threshold of the unconscious, he will attend the deepest and most radical disintegration of his being in order to be able to create himself as another: Arce. It will be in the brief pause of non-being that he confronts the need to interpret again what he looks at, to create for himself a world anew: no longer Buenos Aires but Santa María. To cross means to descend, that is, loss of consciousness: an annihilation of ethical values about the world.

The room neighbouring his own will therefore be the inverse mirror of his condition;¹⁶⁹ a sudden refuge that invites him to calm so as to take breath: “I breathed in air until I felt my throat closing

¹⁶³Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*, p. 193 [my translation].

¹⁶⁴Let us recall that Aeneas, in the Latin tradition, represents the hero’s journey through himself by way of dream in order to find the lost totality of his being. This derives from the fact that dream (Morpheus) reveals to mortals the secrets of divinity. Likewise, in order to descend into his own abysses, he must find the precise entrances that lead him inward. In this way Santa María is founded on the metaphor of Brausen’s interior space.

¹⁶⁵In Joseph Campbell’s conceptualisation in *El héroe de las mil caras*.

¹⁶⁶“The breast left, moreover, empty air, and another substitutive metaphor transforms air into one of the fundamental elements of *A Brief Life*. The air of the neighbouring flat is not only peopled by the woman, the objects she brought with her and her visitors; in that space there dwells a ‘good’, benign air that nourishes fiction; that air is saturated with fantastic characters: the ‘they’ that the woman next door hallucinates, ‘They are made of air’” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁷*Idem*.

¹⁶⁸Gaston Bachelard, *El aire y los sueños*, p. 121 [my translation].

¹⁶⁹In a kind of Alice through the looking-glass. Let us recall that in that work rational logic has been disturbed into what would seem an absurdity; nevertheless, that new order is not devoid of sense but possesses one of its own. In

and my whole body wanting to abandon itself to the sobs I had been postponing over recent weeks”. (58) If at the beginning of the novel Brausen imagined the “mad world” on the other side of the wall, the beginning of self-creation lies in penetrating that space in a corroboration of what was imagined. That is, it can now be inhabited in his quality of invader, examined and verified in each part: “calming and exciting myself each time my feet touched the floor, believing I was advancing in the climate of a brief life in which time could not suffice to compromise me, to make me repent or grow old” (59) (the first allusion to “a brief life”), as though he found himself, perhaps, in the vestibule of his own transformation, in the *Ante-Sala* of himself.

Brausen becomes an organicist searcher¹⁷⁰ within a picture of dead matter. In inspecting that “mad world”, as he had heard la Queca name it, he examines his own: “against the wall, my body twisted, I rested my ear on the partition and sought the silence, with my eyes closed; I stopped breathing a moment until I was sure I had heard Gertrudis sigh and stir, so as to obtain the vision of my flat in shadow”. (59) La Queca’s inverse bedroom, to enter the other dream, that of a renewed fiction in direct assault upon reality: “the great bed, the same as mine, placed as a prolongation of the bed in which Gertrudis was sleeping [...]”. (59) A continuity of oneiric intimacy. The dream that is illuminated by consciousness becomes an erotic dream, that is, a creative one, which leads to what María Zambrano called “transcendent awakening”.¹⁷¹ Thus, from the “other side” of consciousness, Brausen examines himself so as afterwards to conquer the threshold of the unconscious.

In this way, in the still life perhaps of himself, a painting perhaps of a self-portrait, Brausen recognises the gestures of his interiority: “[...] I froze before my face in the mirror, barely making out the shine of the nose and the forehead, the hollows of the eyes, the shape of the hat. Then I stopped seeing myself and contemplated, alone in the mirror, free of my eyes, a flat gaze, without curiosity, placid”. (59, 69) A still life equivalent to the death of his real plane of everyday living. Or, as Josefina Ludmer already saw: that other still life comes to represent, in some way, Gertrudis’s severed breast.¹⁷²

Finally, la Queca’s room will signify the space of his new internal weave; a lifeless nature that gives way to renewal: the raw material of a definitive salvation in the order of self-fiction, when,

the same way Brausen, on entering la Queca’s room, in an image contrary to his own, finds the answer for modifying his world, which at first seemed to him unalterable.

¹⁷⁰Organicism is a philosophy and a poetics that conceives the natural world as a totality whose resemblance to the human world is given through imagination as the medium that reveals: “the totality of the existential possibilities of the human being as unity” (cf. Francisco La Rubia Prado, *Unamuno y la vida como ficción*, pp. 11–13) [my translation]. Without doubt it is Unamuno, with *Mist*, who is the finest exponent of this position, in which the creator (God) takes on existence insofar as he unfolds his creative faculty and is recognised by his creature. Understood thus, Brausen, demiurge of Santa María, reveals himself to himself in his search and creation. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in Onetti’s work from Unamuno’s. Perhaps the most important of them lies in the fact that, for Onetti, creator and creature are found at one and the same existential level, with no god at all.

¹⁷¹María Zambrano, *El sueño creador*..., p. 57. This conception of the “creative dream” arises without doubt with Novalis, who carries the functions of dream toward a creative capacity insofar as it is seen as a medium in which imagination works more freely as erotic dream. Cf. Albert Béguin, *op. cit.*

¹⁷²Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

resolved, he knocks at her door to present himself as Arce, driven by “the pleasure and the necessity of lying”. (89)

For while his wife “seemed to have drawn the superstition and the hope that she would be happy again merely by taking a step or two backward, [while she seemed] to feel sure that everything would be as before if she managed to arrange the circumstances and force her sensation so as to move back through the years and live, imitating recollection, the days of a Gertrudis with two breasts”, (65) Brausen tore himself from sleep in order to: “accept the repugnant beginning of the day”. (66) That is, while she evoked “a young and whole Gertrudis [trying to] take refuge in the past”, (66) he, the ascetic creator of Díaz Grey, Santa María and Elena Sala, strove to save himself by sinking into his own misery, facing it head on so as to prepare, after the invasion and the visit to the still life of his abyss, his own death and resurrection; facing the definitive rotting of Juan María Brausen and all his lineage, so as to be reborn in a Juan María Arce engendered out of the rotting of his creator.

In this way the past signifies for Gertrudis a salvation insofar as, from the “return to the familiar smell”, (68) she can “conceive a future, a surprising happiness, because it would be based on her mutilation, a victory over a stranger [...] for whom the mutilation would come to signify, without perversity, the irresistible quality of her body”. (69) For Brausen, however, the past represents the root of his misfortune.

The work of self-creation thus has the complexity of opening Brausen’s ontological levels, by which he attends the dismantling of his ontological composition. Self-creation already implies penetrating the abysses of being. It is a descent into the unconscious toward the “fire common to all”.¹⁷³ Understood thus, the descent into being means an arduous process of deconstruction not only of oneself as an individual but of the world from which one has come to be, that is, of interrogating the ontological foundation of reality, understood as the institutionalisation of imaginaries.¹⁷⁴

The process of self-creation therefore carries with it a mechanism of greater complexity, in unstitching the weave of the human within the possibility of another mode of life, of another plot of reality. The new man, Arce, an inhabitant of a physical body upon a dead Brausen and endowed with the force of invention (imagination and will),¹⁷⁵ comes in consequence to put in check the sense of reality and fiction, their ontological and metaphysical foundations. Arce’s existence has at its base a questioning of what human nature is and what its possibilities are, of what the world we live in is “made”. From this poetic reverie, or erotic dream, Arce will appeal to salvation.

Thus, in Brausen’s process of self-creation as Arce there are at least three moments; stages of transition that imply modes in which being suffers its transformation and in which existence is

¹⁷³“For those who are awake there is one common World; the sleeping turn each to his own” [my translation]. Heraclitus, Fragment 89, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁴Cornelius Castoriadis, *La institución imaginaria de la sociedad*.

¹⁷⁵“Imagination and will, which might be considered antithetical, are in reality closely joined: dialectical. One wills only what one imagines richly [...]. When one lives a reverie of the will, time acquires a material reality” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, México, FCE, 1991, pp. 14–31.

wholly at stake: 1) the death of the being of Juan María Brausen; 2) Non-Being; 3) the process of the coming-to-be of Juan María Arce.

Brausen, confronted with himself and faced with his wife's abandonment on her return to Temperley with her mother, approaches his death. A symbolic death, without doubt, but not for that reason without "real" transcendence. It is an ontological death, of voluntarily "ceasing to be". The hero's suicide with the foresight of resurrection. A foresight not entirely conscious in the clarity of thought, but glimpsed in the desire for salvation.

The time prior to his death will be measured in "fortnight", that is, in capitalised time, quantified by payment and by dismissal. A fortnight for which: "I had desired and feared the cheque that would accompany the dismissal, the hundred and twenty days of unconsciousness, of being with myself and alone in the streets where the spring wind moved, of stopping, at last, to think about myself". (75) A time for which the only important thing will have been: "my body flung on the bed, my face raised against the wall, my mouth open so that the noise of my breathing would not disturb me, the pain in my back and my waist [a symptom of carrying his own weight], my ear gathering the voices and noises from the other side of the wall" (77-78) and the evocation of the: "consulting room in the city beside a river". (77) That is, the only important things were the "mad world" and the "world of Santa María". The two extremes of his creative dialectic: his immediate everydayness and his total detachment; or, what amounts to the same, the ontological extreme and the metaphysical.

"The last day of the fortnight" will have the equivalence of the last day of being Brausen and of the resolution of his annihilation. From faint and still hidden consciousness he will pass to the consciousness of the will, to waking and leaping "from the bed, suddenly sweating, shaken by hatred and the need to weep. It was as though I had just woken from a nightmare of a fortnight". (81) This reflexive consciousness claims its space:

Me acerqué a la luz del balcón para mirar la hora; necesité pensar en la fecha de aquel día, en la calle de la ciudad donde estaba viviendo, Chile al 600, en el único edificio nuevo de una cuadra torcida. "San Telmo", me repetía para concluir de despertar y ubicarme; en el principio del sur de Buenos Aires [...]. "Aquí estoy", dije, creyendo que comprendía lo que nombraba. (82)

I went to the balcony light to look at the time; I needed to think of the date of that day, of the street of the city where I was living, Chile at 600, in the only new building on a crooked block. "San Telmo", I repeated to myself so as to finish waking and locating myself; at the beginning of the south of Buenos Aires [...]. "Here I am", I said, believing that I understood what I was naming. (82)

A matter of great relevance, on the other hand, is that it should be la Queca's "tender laugh" (81) that shakes and rouses him; that is, that it should be the "mad world" beyond that other side of the wall that wakes him with the force of its attraction.

After “meditating a swift farewell to Gertrudis, like the salute to a flag, symbol of the country I was expatriating myself from”, (83) Brausen will present himself on the other side of his reality in the mute flat H: “I am Arce. I come on Ricardo’s behalf. Ricardo must have spoken to you about me”, (84) only to know that the rite of ontological mutation has begun: “Now I too am inside the scandal [...]; motionless, I fulfil my timid initiation, I help to build the physiognomy of disorder, I erase my traces at every step, I discover that each minute leaps, shines and disappears like a newly minted coin, I understand that she has been telling me, through the wall, that it is possible to live without memory or foresight”. (87)

A “newly minted” coin with which one can buy neither bread nor water; a coin like the one placed beneath the tongue of the dead to pay Charon for the voyage overseas, that of the other world. And does the metaphysical dimension not perhaps seek its totality in the death drive? Does it not see in it the achieved universality? Not death in a biological but in an existential sense. As Freud already saw: the death drive is man’s attempt to recover his lost immensity.¹⁷⁶

From the impact of the recent sensations the new space brings with it: “I breathed again the air of the room, it was enough for me to part my teeth for it to come and fill me”, (88) Brausen/Arce will obtain the raw material for a new vital atmosphere.¹⁷⁷

For all this, the “rite of initiation” implies in turn the intersection of two energies that until then ran parallel: that of creation and that of self-creation, each nourishing the other. The new act of love with la Queca will bring with it, under the *petite mort*, the collision of the planes of reality and fiction. Eroticism, at last made flesh, as the communion of two worlds in a single individual: “I held her tight, certain that nothing was happening, that everything was no more than one of those stories I told myself each night to help me sleep; certain that it was not I but Díaz Grey who was pressing a woman’s body, the arms, the back and the breasts of Elena Sala, in the consulting room and at a midday at last”. (90)

And the world of the prostitute signifies the world of the sensible. La Queca, a liberation of the sexual act, incarnates pure sensations; that is, voluptuousness. Not for nothing does Bataille find in this the vehicle of happiness: “Life proposes voluptuousness to man as an incomparable good, the moment of voluptuousness is resolution and dazzlement; it is the perfect image of happiness”.¹⁷⁸ La Queca, by now a distant representation of Gertrudis’s breast, recovers what that mutilated woman had lost: an erotic dimension, that is, an imaginative and sensible one. From this sensory base Brausen will be able to create under a poetics of the happiness of sensuality, not reduced to the sexual act but raised exponentially to the eroticism of imagining, of bearing at will not only upon

¹⁷⁶Sigmund Freud, *El malestar en la cultura*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999. [Translator’s note: the Spanish here reads *Creonte*, Creon, which is a slip for *Caronte*, Charon, the ferryman correctly named earlier in this chapter, in the note on Charon and the Acheron. Rendered as Charon.]

¹⁷⁷“Arce is a synecdoche of Brausen, a part in a relation of contiguity; Arce is, moreover, the anti-Brausen. Not like Díaz Grey, the displaced complement that could fill his lacks within the first system: money, work, a complete woman, but his absolute negativisation, the other law: anti-money, anti-love, anti-work” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁷⁸Georges Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 82 [my translation].

reality but upon what he wishes to feel and to interpret of it. Happiness, eroticism and literature have one and the same communicating vessel: sensations; that is, imagination. For this reason la Queca's pronouncement "mad world" at the beginning of the novel is, as Elena M. Martínez has noted, an anticipation of the world of carnival.¹⁷⁹ A prelude to his transformation.

In consequence, Brausen will feel the invitation to resurrection in "penetrating" la Queca's flat daily: "And I lived again when, far from the small everyday deaths, from the bustle and the crowd in the streets, from the interviews and the never-mastered professional cordiality, I felt a little blond hair grow, like down, on my skull, passed with my eyes through the glass of the spectacles and of the consulting room window in Santa María so as to let my back be caressed by the waves of an unknown past, to look at the square and the dock, the sunlight or the bad weather". (141–142)

Thanks to this ontological intersection, the resolution of the husband will come from the intimacy previously longed for:

En cuanto a mí, sólo podían convenirme el júbilo y la inocencia, la voluntad de no pensar, sacudirme de los hombros el pasado, la memoria de todo lo que sirviera para identificarme, estar muerto y contribuir a la perfección del mundo con el marido exacto de Elena Sala, un hombre ansioso, mitómano, indeciso, un hijo inmortal de mi pasada desdicha y de los vientres de Gertrudis y la Queca. (83)

As for me, only jubilation and innocence could suit me, the will not to think, to shake from my shoulders the past, the memory of everything that served to identify me, to be dead and to contribute to the perfection of the world with Elena Sala's exact husband, an anxious, mythomaniac, indecisive man, an immortal son of my past misfortune and of the wombs of Gertrudis and la Queca. (83)

A husband who bears as his name another body of water: Lagos, lakes. A Lagos who has arrived in Santa María by train and not by the river, "treacherously", (92) as Brausen thought, avoiding the journey of his body of static water by that of one in movement. Put another way, Lagos arrives directly at fiction with no *Ante-Sala*, with no time: a lake never flows.¹⁸⁰

But he is also called Horacio, like Horace of ancient Rome, who made of *carpe diem* a form of life, that is, a philosophy of finitude and of a life of one's own, far from any hedonism; "far from the worldly noise", as Fray Luis de León would later say, understood as a withdrawal from the noise of inauthenticity.

Such is the husband of that "Elena Sala de Espera" who surprises Díaz Grey looking "from the windows of the consulting room [...], at the square with its whitish pedestal [...]" at the centre of

¹⁷⁹“'Mad world' is a disconnected phrase that breaks the reader's expectations, a phrase that refers to carnival: world upside down, or world (mad) abbreviated" [my translation]. Elena M. Martínez, *Onetti: Estrategias textuales y operaciones del lector*, Madrid, Verbum, 1992, p. 104.

¹⁸⁰Under a poetics of water we may set the image of the lake as static water against that of the river as water in movement, especially in the symbol of the river of morphine in tension with the river of milk of the lost breast.

the deserted landscape, near and unreal as the theme of a dream". (91) A husband who confides to him once and for all what the illness is for which Elena Sala sought him out: "you were to tell me something about your wife's illness." 'It is true, forgive me,' Lagos replies. 'I can sum it up in a phrase, since it appears to interest you. I am much obliged... It is a matter of recollection'". (99)

Fiction "descends", finally, into "reality" in the skin of Brausen-Arce, and the reverse, in the effort of: "continuing to be Arce in la Queca's flat and continuing to be Díaz Grey in the city on the river's edge. [A man who] subsisted in the double secret life of Arce and of the provincial doctor". (144) Two fictions at different levels.

But fiction is not alone in managing to descend into reality; through this joint, reality also "contaminates" fiction by impregnating that metaphysical dimension, until then isolated and universal, with the "worldhood of the world" of Brausen's everydayness. Reality thus affects ontologically the metaphysical order of fiction. A movement that prepares a later dialectic of salvation lodged within the dialectic of imagination.

Put another way, Brausen's metaphysical nature, concretised in Díaz Grey and made of threads from the world of myth, an appeal to the infinite, to totality and to detachment, will find itself altered by the everyday ontic condition, by finitude and temporality.

Señor Lagos's arrival thus brings with it the affliction of the human condition from which the metaphysical dimension of imagination had wanted to free itself: recollection. An incidence by which that Santa María will begin to have history, to advance linearly within its circularity, and therefore to weave its own traps with their equivalent weight: "Díaz Grey thought of the quantity of recollections that fitted into, and that formed for Elena Sala, the recollection of the vanished man. He thought of his own poverty, recognised himself abandoned by life in that provincial city, a man without recollections". (99)

It is significant that if Brausen was once discarded from the mercantile and utilitarian world by Macleod in a bar, Díaz Grey welcomes Lagos in another bar. A re-semanticisation of a space in the appropriation of a new order: the imaginative order; that is, the bar no longer represents a public space but an interior one.

The need for drugs, contracted from the until-then alien Óscar Owen (who, "as he might have infected us with an illness, transmitted this custom to us"), (97–98) will unleash a new plot, complex and other, in the order of fiction: Díaz Grey's plot. Morphine, in this way, shifts to a new meaning: addiction. If Díaz Grey represents the metaphysical dimension in its eternal return, Óscar Owen symbolises the illness of linear time and of memory. An illness that signifies for fiction "the terror of history", to put it in Mircea Eliade's terms,¹⁸¹ but which also signifies the need, on the part of the "fictional characters", to return to the doors of perception, to the threshold from which they were conceived.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Mircea Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno*.

This new interpenetration of fiction into reality and reality into fiction thus marks the rite of initiation, Brausen's acceptance of the adventure of his own destruction: "Then I shook my head to take leave of the innumerable sacred sores, snores and sweats of Brausens who had preceded me, of the periodically repeated Juan, José, Antonio, María, Manuel, Carlos Brausen who went from bone to dust, dissolved beneath the humus and clays of Europe and America". (110–111)

And here la Queca's role is central, insofar as she "invites" Brausen to his past (Montevideo) in order to: "have to convince [myself] that one was not there, that absolutely nothing of one was preserved in the streets, in the friends; to read the newspapers and not find oneself, not even in the typography, in the defects of the layout". (184) A journey to the past in order to annihilate it in the perspective of a new future and a new man. Arce travels to Montevideo so that the hidden Brausen may recognise the root of his misfortune and realise that such a time no longer belongs to him. In this way, what for Arce signifies a journey, for Brausen manifests the return that is a departure. Movements set against each other in the dialectic of an incipient self-creation. La Queca thus serves as the sensible vehicle of such a crossing.

For this reason, after a long cohabitation with la Queca and *them*, his demons; after the revolver newly bought for the hour of the crime, to murder her lover Ernesto ("I am going to feel myself master of the world with the weight of the revolver against my leg; I am going to force my way in, wait for the fellow and kill him"); (120) after "collecting pieces of glass and iron, of screws and springs once a week"; (107) after the impossibility of seduction with Gertrudis: "fundamentally because we can no longer play"; (130) after his imminent dismissal and the breaking of the Santa Rosa storm so longed for since the beginning of the novel; Brausen will give place to his "death" in the annulment of his being at an ontological order, which will have the peculiarity of manifesting itself as the annulment of his ethical dimension, that is, of standing outside choice and valuation: "It was the time of waiting, of infertility and bewilderment; everything was confused, everything had the same value, identical proportions, an equivalent meaning, because everything was devoid of importance and happened outside time and outside life, already without a Brausen to assay it, still without an Arce to impose order and sense". (200) Because he knows that the "true path of salvation and the perfect crime" is not to be found in the one Stein prescribed,¹⁸² since "I did not want to scrub myself or remove stains or hide the dirt with a whitewash; [I] did not want to disassemble myself"; but rather in seeking "to keep myself awake and tense, [in] nourishing Arce with my will and with the money [...] as if, dead, my decomposition were feeding a plant; [in sustaining him] with the hundred green notes, with the frequenting of la Queca [...]; [in sustaining] Arce by means of Díaz

¹⁸²"It is like this: the penitent rents a room in a hotel, sends someone to buy clothes. All the clothes, including shoes, hat, handkerchiefs. Nothing is saved when we sweat misfortune. One must make a bonfire of the old clothes, it is necessary to destroy them; not out of love of one's neighbour, but because it is certain that the suit will drag its new owner down and will pursue us. I know categorical and impressive examples, I know of pursuing clothes that crossed continents to return their venom. A brush of contact is enough. The old clothes destroyed, with brand-new master and accessories in our power, it is necessary, with your ears' pardon and the occasion's, to take a very hot bath and drink a glass of Epsom salts. Though variants may be admitted, according to particular idiosyncrasies. The penitent sleeps, wakes with a smile, adorns himself and sets out to live, as new as a newborn, as foreign to his past as to the heap of ashes he leaves behind him. I can pledge my word". (191–192)

Grey”. (192) For this reason such a “death” implies the minimisation of his aesthetic dimension. A dimension that will have to be reopened by the new being (Arce) on finding himself obliged to give meaning to what he feels. In this way ethics and aesthetics are meshed with mutual implications.

Such a death signifies an imitation of the state of immanence that is free of every dilemma in the abandonment of consciousness and of time. It is the death drive that descends to the membrane between the real and reality so as to transfer the nature of the world of myth, that old homeland of the most primitive imagination, to the finitude of one’s own “flesh”: “I, the bridge between Brausen and Arce, needed to be alone, I understood that isolation was indispensable to me in order to be born again, that only alone, without will or impatience, could I come to be and to recognise”.

The death drive impelled by the will will signify a new life drive: Eros and Thanatos. “Free of anxiety, renouncing all search, abandoned to myself and to chance [...], I dissolved myself so as to permit the birth of Arce”. (202)

From this process of existential annulment he will emerge with the help of fiction itself: “Until on the afternoon of a Sunday Díaz Grey came to free me from the obsession, did for me and through himself what I could not do, leapt a year of his time, abandoned Santa María as though cutting off an arm, as though it were possible to move away from the provincial city and its river, placed Elena Sala in a past that was never going to happen”. (206)

It will be at the end of the bad weather of the storm, of the “end of the world”, that he feels how “solitude went on extending itself sweetly toward the balcony, toward the moment when it would oblige me to look at myself, isolated, naked and without distraction, when it would order me to act and to convert myself through action into any other, into a perhaps definitive Arce who could not be known beforehand”. (218) The process of mutation: “Here we are, here is this newly born man of whom I know for now only the rhythm of the pulse and the smell of the sweated chest”, (222) will be fulfilled, nevertheless, only by means of the crime as a resolved act of his new ethical dimension attained within his already created and inhabited aesthetic dimension: “it will not be I who kills her [la Queca], it will be another, Arce, nobody”.¹⁸³

Curiously, the crime that would round off the process of self-creation opens a new phenomenon: that of the transmutation by which Brausen-Arce “passes” into Santa María in flight from the law. After the desire to kill Ernesto first and the failure to do so, (111) then la Queca,¹⁸⁴ and in the end his failure, since la Queca will die at Ernesto’s hands, a new journey will begin: to go from Buenos Aires to Santa María; that is, the journey from reality to fiction.

Only a Brausen made Arce, that is, made fictional, can “really” penetrate his imagined world. Likewise, an autonomous Díaz Grey, free of Brausen, far now from representing him and exempt from his creator’s trap insofar as he has become “prey” to the trap of himself, will take flight to

¹⁸³“I did not know when, I was not interested in finding out why, I was going to return to la Queca’s flat and would kill the man, Ernesto”. (220)

¹⁸⁴“I can kill her, I am going to kill her. It was the same sensation of peace I had felt on entering Gertrudis’s body when I loved her, the same plenitude, the same enraged current that quieted all questions”. (172–173)

Buenos Aires after “fictional” crimes committed in Santa María; that is, he will go from fiction to reality. Movements that in turn signify journeys in the ontological transgression of reality and fiction, connected by a single event: carnival. The way for the journeys of being.

Chapter 3. Ontological dimensions: the journeys of being

We are the prey, the hunter, and the trap.

Silvio Mattoni¹⁸⁵

After the agony of a Brausen “resolved to suppress Díaz Grey even if it were necessary to flood the provincial city”, (221) of “sustaining Arce through [him]” (192) (fiction sustaining fiction), his vanishing strikes with the equivalence of “death” in Santa María: “[the doctor] was dead and I lay dying on the sheets [...], I dragged my decomposition to Díaz Grey, Elena Sala, the husband, the ubiquitous desperate one, the city I had raised with an inevitable slope toward the friendship of the river” (221).¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, while fiction shares the agony of its creator God-Brausen, it signifies at the same time the beginning of its total autonomy. A passage to its autopoiesis. It is not a death but a resurrection. A symbolic decease by which the world of Santa María will advance under its own inertia and by the will of its inhabitants, with their respective traps.

The attitude “prudent, fearful of frightening the phantasmal newborn that floated”, (226) reveals in that new being, Arce, the loss of his role as God so as to become also a son of fiction. A new man who will know who he “really” is, “who that other is”, (227) only through his protection of Ernesto, la Queca’s murderer, as a symbol of the safeguarding of his new identity resolved in a single act: the crime, understood as the definitive taking-up of his new valuation before the world (the ethical dimension): “renouncing all search, abandoned to myself and to chance [...], I dissolved myself so as to permit the birth of Arce”. (202)

The crime will open Arce’s ontological position of “being-in-the-world”, carrying him to his transmigration, that is, driving him to Santa María. And it is he who must have “step[ped] back to examine the motionless Queca”. A moment “inevitable and that could be neither deferred nor hastened”. (192) It was Arce who had to murder, an impossible act for the ascetic Brausen.¹⁸⁷ And

¹⁸⁵ (Introduction) Georges Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 10.

¹⁸⁶ The city’s “inevitable slope toward the friendship of the river” marks its oneiric and abysmal character. The willow that grows at the edge of the cliff has signified, from Romanticism to Nietzsche, a metaphor of human nature which, vacillating in its death drive, leans over its own interior. Santa María, the accursed city, grows inevitably upon Brausen’s cliff, an abyss of water, because as Bachelard saw: “a body of water is always a mirror” [my translation]. *Poética del espacio*, p. 183.

¹⁸⁷ A characteristic of crime, a term proper to penal law, is that within a modern society it permeates every sphere of public life. This is not fortuitous, given that modernity, self-proclaimed as civilisation, institutes itself in the creation of its opponent: barbarism. It is enough to bring to mind Karl Marx’s “Praise of Crime”: “[...] The criminal produces not only crimes but also penal laws, and with this the professor who gives classes and lectures on those laws, and he also produces the inevitable manual in which this same professor throws his lectures onto the market as ‘commodities’ [...]. The criminal produces besides the whole of the police and criminal justice, prosecutors, judges, juries, jailers, and so on [...]. The criminal produces besides an impression, in part moral and in part tragic according to the case, and in this way renders ‘services’ by arousing the moral and aesthetic sentiments of the public. He produces not only Manuals of Penal Law, not only Penal Codes and with them legislators in this field, but also art, literature, novels and even tragedies, as is shown not only by Schiller’s *The Robbers* but also by *Oedipus Rex* and *Richard III*. The

the crime reveals an ontological quality of transgression upon a reality regulated by law. The search for the criminal, from such a view, implies asking: what has the crime been? And to that end: where is the corpse, the trace? The symbol of the corpse, as will be seen further on, has the value of serving as a vehicle for the criminal and for the law that pursues him. For this reason the “perfect crime” Stein reveals to Brausen takes on relevance, directed as it is toward the total annulment of himself and his renewal without any vestige: the crime, in this way, is carried out upon being.

In this way Ernesto, in killing la Queca, anticipating Arce’s eagerness, put to death everything the former Juan María B. had deposited in her: “from adolescence, all the words drowned by laziness, by lack of faith, by the feeling of the uselessness of speaking”. (236) Put another way, Ernesto managed, in killing Enriqueta, to strike the final blow to the existence of Juan María Brausen. It was the prostitute’s demons, “they”: “those who separated me from Arce, those who denied me the totality of the irresponsible air, of the atmosphere of the brief life”. (201) In consequence, Arce experiences the need for the false protection of the lover Ernesto; a creature he takes to Santa María so as to make him a participant in his creation in “flight” from justice, this last a representation of the rational world.¹⁸⁸ A passage from reality to fiction, an apparent escape that occurs not outward from Buenos Aires but inward into his abysses, for which “la Queca would be, more powerful than the living, protecting me”. (261) Because she, a woman of sensibility and pleasure, dies without knowing “the truth” about who Arce is. In dying believing in his fictional identity, she arrives at the metaphysical dimension of creation. Her death comes to represent the ontological reconciliation achieved through the communion of being with its total dimension. She alone, therefore, is capable of “protecting him”.

In this way Arce can experience “that I was waking, not from this dream but from another incomparably longer one, another that included this one and in which I had dreamed that I dreamed this dream [...]. Now the world was before me, disposed for my five senses”. (238)

Brausen remained buried in Arce’s skeleton. An Arce who feels himself a new man: “with no need of sympathy”, (239) for whom Ernesto represents his own corpse in a kind of translation of the deceased Brausen: “he is nothing more than a part of me, a sick part, that can kill me and that it is prudent to look after”. (244) Arce takes possession of his identity, from which “all the others have lost their individuality, they are parts of me”, (244–245) insofar as the world now functions according to his will and representation.

criminal breaks the monotony and the everyday security of bourgeois life. In this way he saves it from stagnation and lends it that uncomfortable tension and that agility without which the goad of competition would be blunted [...]. Therefore the criminal appears as one of those natural ‘counterweights’ that produce a correct balance and open a total perspective of ‘useful’ occupations” [my translation]. Karl Marx, *Historia Crítica de la Teoría de la Plusvalía*, vol. I, México, FCE, 1945, p. 217. One of those literatures nourished by crime has been the crime or detective novel, on which Onetti has drawn and whose values may be seen throughout his work. The novel as a genre, in its symbolic work upon reality, already has the capacity to recast the sense of crime within a new symbolic order.

¹⁸⁸Such an act “will place him automatically outside the law, which he desires since it constitutes an effective way of denying the world governed by the spirit of seriousness” [my translation]. Reyes E. Flores, *Onetti: tres personajes y un autor*, Madrid, Verbum, 2003, pp. 91–92.

It is for this reason that the crime acquires an ontological value of transgression and restitution of being. A crime that signifies violence upon the weave of one world in order to travel to another: a chink of madness inflicted by imagination. If Queca designates the world of the sensations, her murder therefore takes on the symbolic materialisation of her body, to which Brausen-Arce gives a name (Santa María) so as to be able to inhabit it, to attend it as though he “penetrated” in an act of love, in another order, into the Queca-breast of his abysses. Because “the will to penetration”, Bachelard sees, “carries us to the knot of reciprocity where images are ‘impulsional’”, a will that leads to a “dynamic existence which represses static existence so clearly that passivity is no longer anything but nothingness”. Such an image, in a poetics of the earth, “elevates, augments; it gives the becoming of the augmentation of the self”.¹⁸⁹ In this register, Georges Bataille sees that “crime is necessary for the return of the mythic order”.¹⁹⁰

So it is that, after “everything had disappeared without pains or the possibility of nostalgia”, (222) and before the definitive escape with Ernesto toward Santa María, Arce completes a last task in the rite of burying his old “I”: going to seek out Stein so as to take his leave, with irony and renewed vigour, of that man who no longer represents his old bond of friendship.

Lady Macbeth, a name significant in the extreme,¹⁹¹ will be the woman with whom Arce finds old Stein. “But there is something that is not your style”, Stein manages to recognise in the face and bearing of the new Arce: “something aggressive, something certain, something definitively anti-Brausen”. (253) And in transtextual dialogue he recalls “the verses” (253) of Shakespeare’s tragedy: “here’s the smell of the blood still”, (253)¹⁹² while Arce carries with him the case holding Ernesto’s remains: shoes, clothes; that is, objects that betray his murderous identity. And here Ernesto’s peculiarity lies in his simultaneously representing the role of murderer and of corpse. That is, subject and object of the work of a demiurge Arce. In Ernesto the deaths of Queca and of Brausen cohabit. Therefore the true criminal is Arce in his creative capacity. Because he who creates is, in part, a criminal, in doing violence to an immanent state: “In the beginning was the Word”, writes John,¹⁹³ and the Word was God, demon, word, *logos*, the coming-to-be of the human, *humus* that signifies transgression and violence upon a nature at rest: crime. And the relation between “John” as apostle, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and “Juan” as Brausen is given in the tension between “he who professes by means of the word” and “he who creates through it”. Brausen is thus the one who professes his own creation as God of himself.

¹⁸⁹Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, p. 45 [my translation].

¹⁹⁰Georges Bataille, *Teoría de la Religión*, p. 86 [my translation].

¹⁹¹If Macbeth, in Shakespeare’s play, is induced to crime by his wife, Stein, in *A Brief Life*, is led by Lady Macbeth to the betrayal of his wife, Miriam Mami. The green colour of the gloves (which cover the hands of the one who directs the action) forms a symbolic bridge between one work and the other insofar as it marks Stein’s character and the atmosphere of the chapter “Lady Macbeth”.

¹⁹²William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Madrid, Titivillus, 2015, version by Tomás Segovia, p. 460. [Translator’s note: the line quoted, “here’s the smell of the blood still”, is Lady Macbeth’s in *Macbeth* (V.i), not from *Hamlet*. The citation appears to be in error; the standard English wording is given here.]

¹⁹³First verse of the Gospel of Saint John, *Biblia*, Bilbao, Desclee de Brouwer, 1976.

Arce, therefore, fiction “made man”, like a God who descends to earthliness, cannot but fictionalise: “it occurred to me that it would be impossible for me to stop lying for the whole night, and that in this way I transformed the world, disinterestedly, for the sheer pleasure of the game”. (254) Recognising that: “the word can do everything”. (254) Arce, the Macbeth of Santa María.

Thus this reborn man can read his own remains in his dialogue with Stein: “because each one accepts what he goes on discovering of himself in the gazes of others, he goes on forming himself in living-with, he is confused with the one the others suppose and acts in accordance with what is expected of that non-existent supposition”. (257)

Consciousness at its zenith, celebrated by an incarnate imagination and with the daring of another will and another ethics, will lead him to pronounce on the only authentic way of living, in a reproach upon inauthentic life: “it is not fundamentally a question of mediocrity but of cowardice. It is also a question of blindness and forgetting; of not having awake in every cell of the bones the consciousness of our death”. And as Heidegger already saw, the only possible mode of an authentic life, that is, of appropriating being, is given through an acute, awake and pitiless consciousness of death, from which a project of life becomes possible insofar as it generates a vital sense.

For this reason, for Brausen: “[what] is important is to finish, with this past, with the previous one”. (259) An annihilation of a form of being and therefore of living. A leave-taking that will have the vestige of the letter, every missive being a brief play with time, for which: “I am encouraged by the idea that you will be able to stop reading me whenever you wish, but that nobody can prevent me from writing”. (269) A view that lets a poetics of Onetti’s own be glimpsed.

Now, the farewell overcome and the rite of burying Brausen in his own flesh accomplished, at this degree of fiction and self-fiction Arce will concretise with the pencil what imagination has generated in the evanescent. That is, he will raise in his Buenos Aires reality the plans of Santa María so as to “arrive” there: to “do for Díaz Grey something more than think him”: (282)

Empecé a dibujar el nombre de Díaz Grey, a copiarlo con letras de imprenta y precedido por las palabras, calle, avenida, parque, paseo; levanté el plano de la ciudad que había ido construyendo alrededor del médico[...] y me sentí estremecer por la alegría [...]; veía la estatua de Díaz Grey apuntando con la espada hacia los campos del partido de San Martín [...]; veía las parejas en el atardecer del domingo y en la plaza, las muchachas que llegaban con muchachos por la avenida Díaz Grey [...], los enormes árboles del parque Díaz Grey [...]; veía los hombres salir de la confitería Díaz Grey [...]; veía los coches de los colonos trepar hacia Santa María [...] por la carretera Díaz Grey [...]. (263)

I began to draw Díaz Grey’s name, to copy it in printed letters and preceded by the words street, avenue, park, promenade; I raised the plan of the city I had been building around the doctor [...] and I felt myself shudder with joy [...]; I saw the statue of Díaz Grey pointing with its sword toward the fields of the district of San Martín [...]; I saw the couples in the Sunday dusk and in the square, the girls arriving with boys along Díaz Grey avenue [...], the enormous

trees of Díaz Grey park [...]; I saw the men coming out of the Díaz Grey tea rooms [...]; I saw the settlers' carts climbing toward Santa María [...] along the Díaz Grey road [...]. (263)

Because if at the beginning of the novel Brausen, like a foetus of his own being, could not "see", Arce "saw" everything he named. A new vision given by that other state of consciousness proper to volitional imagination, which is founded beyond the phenomenon of the perceptions.

Immediately after: "I signed the plan and tore it up slowly", (263) since fiction and its inhabitants were so true and so "mine as my skeleton, inseparable, foreign to adversity and to circumstances", (263) that the plans form their own weave. Neither Brausen nor Arce "writes"; rather, they dream. The space of Santa María occupies his "skin", for the poetic act grants the creator a new sensibility for seeing, in the visible, the invisible.¹⁹⁴

The new air of Santa María, "a smell of a new thing such as I had never felt", (264) reaches Arce on opening the window at dawn with Ernesto, both ready to cross the frontier, perhaps that of reality, and so to attend, in an ontological transgression, upon fiction. A journey by which the dimensions of reality are disturbed at their limits: "We take any train; we are in no hurry to cross the frontier but we are in a hurry to leave Buenos Aires. We are going to reach Bolivia, but I do not know when; we have to make many detours first, to the east, to the west; we have to make many marches and countermarches, comings and goings". (267) A crossing that can be achieved through carnival, which happens, opportunely, at both ontological levels (Buenos Aires and Santa María), and by which the characters circulate and transcend from one to the other: "'These people are already at carnival,' said Ernesto when we advanced toward the centre of the restaurant hall [in Santa María]". (291)

To arrive "on the other side", whether of fiction or of reality, amounts to entering another part of oneself unknown until then, crossing the dominions of reason instituted as "immovable reality" and, in darkness, continuing to advance.¹⁹⁵

Carnival, from an ontological perspective, has breath enough to open the ways toward existential

¹⁹⁴The bond between Novalis's magical idealism and Onetti's modern imagination remains significant despite their considerable differences (poetry against novel; the closed world of myth against the open modern world). Novalis puts it thus: "The world must be romanticised. Thus one recovers the primitive sense. To romanticise is nothing more than a qualitative potentialisation. In this operation the inferior self is identified with a superior self [...]. By giving the commonplace a higher sense, the vulgar a mysterious aspect, the known the dignity of the unknown, the infinite an infinite appearance, that is how I romanticise everything" [my translation]. Novalis, *Fragmentos I Sobre el poeta y la poesía*, in *Escritos Escogidos*, Madrid, Visor, 1984, p. 112.

¹⁹⁵Following Silvia Ragusa: "Carnival is a representation that possesses neither stage nor divisions between spectators and performers. All commune with the action, all are participants. It is not contemplated nor represented; rather it is lived, one exists by way of carnivalesque life, which is diverted from its normal course, it is 'life upside down'" [my translation]. Silvia Ragusa, *op. cit.* I understand carnival, in consequence, as an ontological transposition (of being and of existence) that gives the possibility of transmuting, in which life and work correspond insofar as the stages are blurred, so that creator and his creatures may cohabit in the action, all of them turned into "characters" of a plot at the same level.

transgression. Not for nothing does Bakhtin¹⁹⁶ see in this fact something more than a cultural event: they are “two ways of conceiving existence”.¹⁹⁷ A world turned upside down where the duplicity of identity can occur as a way of widening the limits of being, which within a rational and logical world would be inadmissible, because such an extension does not occur upon the same plane of reality: being unfolds its limits into another human dimension, as a contiguity inward.

For this reason it is relevant that the novel should be woven entirely between one carnival and another, “between the woman’s past carnival and the narrative’s future carnival”,¹⁹⁸ where this last signifies the incarnation of the doors of perception,¹⁹⁹ opened at last, so as to be able to cross their threshold, the parturition of existence: a journey from the real to the imaginary; from the exterior (la Queca’s flat) to the interior (Santa María, “Mother of God-Brausen”). Because Juan María, as Ludmer notes, already represents the masculine-feminine duality. “Juan” as the apostle who pronounced “In the Beginning was the Word” and “María” who gestated it. Juan María Brausen is reborn from his duality: Juan María Arce. As la Queca had previously warned him, she the metaphysical womb from which he was to be reborn: ““Arce, you’re called? I like it, but Juan María is a woman’s name. Don’t be cross””. (103) The masculine and the feminine in unity, like a yin-yang of creative reconciliation. “Brausen, the one who ‘gestates’ and ‘creates’, is a masculine Santa María”.²⁰⁰ This new space represents a new sensibility, or better said, sensuality.²⁰¹

It is not fortuitous that carnival should take place, in Judaeo-Christian culture, prior to the coming of the Messiah: God made flesh, Son of his own creator; one and the same: “[Arce] thought of Juan María Brausen, went on joining slippery images to reconstruct him, felt him so near, amiable and incomprehensible, I remembered that I had felt the same of my father”. (288) Arce verifies, as Brausen in his time did in the flat next door that he used to imagine, that Santa María: “what I remembered of the city or had imagined of it was there, came to every glance, exact at times, dissembled and elusive at others, [and] I asked myself how far I was responsible for the pairs of light eyes that grazed the prows, the sails, the capricious names of the boats” (286). A gaze, in sum, that in looking creates; that is, believes:

Todos eran míos, nacidos de mí, y les tuve lástima y amor; amé también, en los canteros de la plaza, cada paisaje desconocido de la tierra; y era como si amara en una mujer dada a todas las mujeres del mundo, las separadas de mí por el tiempo, las distancias, oportunidades fallidas,

¹⁹⁶Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y en el Renacimiento. El contexto de François Rabelais*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1990.

¹⁹⁷“Medieval carnival possesses a joyful relativism, it laughs at the serious, at the official, at the institutional [...] so that popular laughter bursts into official culture. Thus seriousness and madness enter into a dialogue that ‘transforms both parties’” [my translation]. s.v. Carnaval. Helena Beristáin, *Diccionario de retórica y poética*, México, Porrúa, 2006, p. 80.

¹⁹⁸Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 34 [my translation].

¹⁹⁹Insofar as in la Queca there cohabit carnival (that of Buenos Aires) and flesh (*carne*, the voluptuousness through which Brausen enters the other carnival: that of Santa María).

²⁰⁰Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 34 [my translation].

²⁰¹Let us recall that “space” is understood not only as “territory” but as the spatiality proper to being.

las muertas y las que eran aún niñas. Junto a la charla de Ernesto me descubrí libre del pasado y de la responsabilidad del futuro, reducido a un suceso, fuerte en la medida de mi capacidad de prescindir. (289)

All of them were mine, born of me, and I felt pity and love for them; I loved too, in the flowerbeds of the square, every unknown landscape of the earth; and it was as though I loved, in one given woman, all the women of the world, those separated from me by time, by distances, by failed opportunities, the dead and those who were still children. Beside Ernesto's chatter I discovered myself free of the past and of responsibility for the future, reduced to an event, strong in the measure of my capacity to do without. (289)

An Arce, in the end, total, whose time belongs not only to the present but to the instant. The interior midday of before. Because the instant rises above linear becoming. Almost as flight, it signifies ascent; every ascent is also a descent. And perhaps in that fraction of present, being shows itself in its concealment. As Bachelard would say:

Time has only one reality, that of the Instant. In other words, time is a reality secured in the instant and suspended between two nothings. There is no doubt that time will be able to be reborn, but first it will have to die. It will not be able to transport its being from one instant to another so as to make of it a duration. The instant is already solitude... It is the most naked solitude in its metaphysical value. But a solitude of a more sentimental order confirms the tragic isolation of the instant: by a kind of creative violence, time limited to the instant isolates us not only from others but also from ourselves, since it breaks with our dearest past.²⁰²

Arce applies to Ernesto that formula of Stein's for the renewed man, the "perfect crime". New clothes and a new man for the escape, one that in itself lacked sense: "[...] the whole journey, what I called retreat and thought of under the name of flight, lacked an explicable purpose, and it, the roads, the side tracks, the villages, the dawns and the stops were only propitious and indispensable elements for my game". (281)

Arce does not flee from his real life but from the rational world. It is not, therefore, a matter of evasion but of attending upon that lost dimension of degraded modern man: his imaginative part. A journey not direct but, as in all creation, ambiguous:²⁰³ "[...] I established the time and the roundabout way necessary to reach Santa María through isolated places, hamlets and dirt roads, where it would be impossible for a Buenos Aires newspaper to fall into our hands". (284) Arce does not flee from the crime: he penetrates through the chink it has opened in the cloth of reality. The true crime is not the murder but having created Santa María and become God, and more than that: attending upon his own work. It will be reason that pursues him, like a phantom seeking to return

²⁰² Gaston Bachelard, *La intuición del instante*, México, FCE, 1999, p. 11 [my translation].

²⁰³ It is enough to bring to mind the theories on the work of creation, especially those of Luz Aurora Pimentel (*El relato en perspectiva*) and Paul Ricoeur (*Tiempo y narración*).

the demons to their abysses. A restitution of order and quiet, of an immovable and untouchable reality.

That irresponsible air of la Queca's flat now signifies the whole atmosphere of Santa María: "if the air of the boarding-house room was vulgar and unrecognisable, this stormy wind that came from the river and curled at our backs was the same wild air without history, barely altered by half a hundred anecdotes of heroic intent, that had been surrounding the episodes of Díaz Grey [...]". (291) Arce sees himself as a new man, without history: free.

Ernesto, for his part, son of his fiction, alterity incarnated in another, already senses that they have crossed an ontological dimension, that this was the flight: "There he is, lost, existing only in fear; obliged first to kill for me, now trapped in the hollow left by the disappearance of the life of a provincial doctor, invented by me; now he discovers the story I attributed to Díaz Grey, thinks the disheartened thoughts I made him think". (297)

It is important to note that Arce arrives in Santa María as "man" and not as God, in a time at once progressive and round, while he believes his invention, Díaz Grey, to have died: "[...] I thought that Díaz Grey had died long before that night and that his solitary meditations at the consulting room window and his encounters and wanderings with Elena Sala ought to be situated elsewhere, at the beginning of the century [...]". (297) There is, in this way, no intersection between creator and creature insofar as there is no recognition of one in the other.²⁰⁴ Both find themselves, after the check to reality and to fiction, at one and the same ontological level of existence. Neither superior to the other and equally forsaken; lacking a God to speak to, to reproach or to entreat. A vision of Onetti's that gives an account of the fact that man, son of God, has been abandoned to his own designs and that his Creator is clean of all responsibility for what befalls him. For this reason both Arce and Díaz Grey soon discover that "God is dead"²⁰⁵ and that only they, therefore, are responsible for their destiny. Moreover, it is symptomatic that Arce's arrival should occur at carnival, but not the one happening in Buenos Aires (reality), rather the one in Santa María; that is, at a carnival of fiction. A double symbolic play. A "mad world" outside the law; outside Brausen: "'Saturday is already carnival,' Ernesto announced. 'A dance here must be fun'". (290)

In this way carnivalisation, a mad world upside down, unites two fictions, that is, it communicates two dimensions that could be, given their natures, dissociated: the ontological "being-in-the-world" of Brausen and the metaphysical "being(other)-in(other)-the world(other)" of Arce. Dissimilar insofar as the first is found in the deepest "foundations" of being and expresses itself in everyday

²⁰⁴Contrariwise, Unamuno's *Mist* is based on the confrontation and dialogue of creature (character) and creator (author). We have, in this way, the Unamunian poetics on one side and the Onettian on the other. Visions of creation that refer, in turn, to visions of the human condition in a world with or without God. Harsher, perhaps, Onetti's poetics gives an account of the existential solitude of the man of the second half of the twentieth century before the fall of his narratives. We, inhabitants of the beginning of the twenty-first century, are the answer to such hopelessness.

²⁰⁵In Nietzsche's terms (*Así habló Zaratustra*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1992). "God" understood as a category. It will be singular to examine the phenomenon of the "death" of God as a supreme being proper to philosophical transcendental metaphysics within an imaginative poetic metaphysics.

life, in the finite and the ordinary, while the second remains on a universal, infinite and ideal plane.²⁰⁶ Both “real” and unified now, insofar as they signify the opening to the totality of Brausen/Arce and no longer Brausen / Macleod (or McLeod).

We see, in this way, an Arce who arrives at his imaginative and sensible dimension: “weary, desirous of the undecided storm above the river, desirous of any ending at all that would take from me the responsibility of attributing a sense to the month and a half of flight; [who thinks] of the single hundred-peso note, [and supposes] Ernesto’s reaction when he told him that the retreat, the game, had ended”. (287) A banknote as the last vestige of the world they were leaving: for beforehand, “I knew, without fears about future food and shelter, that the source indispensable to Arce’s life was the money hidden in the bank, the notes I had to conserve and spend gropingly”. (192) Ernesto has thus served as the vehicle from a “real” order (Buenos Aires), guarded by that banking Hermes, to another proper to fiction (Santa María), where the banknotes, like passports, have dissolved on arrival.

Finally, it is now Arce who awaits no longer the Santa Rosa storm over Buenos Aires but the storm of Santa María over that river “of strong and energetic currents”. Water falling upon water; a closed cycle of a liquid body that carries in its transformation the changes of the states of existence, in a circularity outside time and in turn made of pure time. Because the Santa Rosa storm that would save Buenos Aires from the heat and the suffocation fills the fluvial bodies of Santa María, relieving it in fiction. This is a journey from a terrestrial water to a water of intangible value.

On the other hand, if Díaz Grey was created at an eternal midday, time arrested at its summit, Arce arrives at his creation by night: “when they were lighting the lamps of the square” (286). A mouth open to nothingness, a revelation of the infinite where day and night lack sense. The firmament dark for reading in the stars, paraphrasing Lukács,²⁰⁷ the becoming of his destiny, but this time with no god at all. Blackness as the deep ocean of existence. And as Bachelard noted: “night is not a space. It is a threat of eternity”.²⁰⁸ In it, Arce vacillates between two forms of existence, two dimensions and two entities, insofar as he “lightens himself of all useless life and feels the abstract ambivalence of being and of non-being”.²⁰⁹ Night comes to represent the other midday of Brausen’s poetics: night is also a sun... a black sun of melancholy, as Nerval called it; or midnight sun, for Novalis. Arce advances in Santa María at the same time as he penetrates the night. The passage is equivalent between one and the other. The centre of the mythical city will be governed by a midnight that reveals the other nature of midday, the other instant of creation; the two faces of Brausen’s being: Díaz Grey-Arce. And only darkness lets the depth of things be seen; only night reveals the stars.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶In philosophy, these spheres are marked by fundamental ontology (Heidegger) and transcendental metaphysics (Kant).

²⁰⁷György Lukács, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁰⁸Gaston Bachelard, “Instante poético e instante metafísico”, in *El derecho de soñar*, p. 229 [my translation].

²⁰⁹*Ibidem*, p. 226 [my translation].

²¹⁰If for Lukács (*op. cit.*) the men of antiquity could read their becoming in the starry sky, for modern man (whose nature is made manifest in the novel as genre) the darkness of the starry sky reveals no certainty but, on the contrary,

For this reason his arrival occurs, not fortuitously, in the chapter called “Thalassa”: Goddess of the Sea, in ancient Greek.

From the river of Santa María that communicates two dimensions, to the deep sea of the well of being and of fiction. In Thalassa birth and death nest, the flow of existence and its stasis. Symbolically, Thalassa represents the alterity of water: fire, not as an element alien to it but as its necessary counterweight in order to exist: burnt water. A dialectic of primitive elements that marks the eternal return of being, where departure becomes arrival. This sea of burnt water opens as the great mother of existence. And it is striking that that dialectical force of primitive imagination (creation and destruction), dictated by the water-fire tension, should already have been represented by at least one civilisation likewise of primitive value: the Mexica, for whom *atl-tlachinolli* (burnt water) occurs in the “confluence and intersection of two rivers, one of divine liquid or water (*teuatl*), which is equivalent to blood, and another of fire”.²¹¹ Such burnt water has, without doubt, a warlike reference “in a society for which war could come to be a ritual act”.²¹² Ritual attempts not only to open communication with the world of myth (the divine plane) but to have that plane descend to the earthliness of men. For this reason the warlike direction of *atl-tlachinolli* must be understood as a mechanism of conquest not only of physical territories but of existential levels. A war of this kind, as rite, aims to be an act of peace; that is, of communion between the world of men and that of the gods; a sacred war. In this case, the burnt water of Thalassa shows Brausen’s conquest, through Arce, of a territory (Santa María) in its incorporation as his new flesh.

In consequence, if we opened the novel with an embryonic Brausen under the shower and with his body covered in drops of water, if imaginatively he creates a river along which morphine travels like an oneiric Charon, Thalassa comes to represent the entire sea of the Ulysses that he himself is, insofar as the sea upon which he undertakes the journey now signifies that of his interiority. From the unchangeable body of his existence, it is now a body of water immeasurably infinite: that of his being. There would be no way of navigating it without descending, nor any form of descending without losing the consciousness of wakefulness.

Into Thalassa (a body of salt water) all rivers flow (bodies of fresh water): no longer the current but time arrested, for a journey without return.²¹³ And still water gathers all times into one alone: the instant. An instant that has the peculiarity of finding itself outside monotony and outside becoming. Not for nothing, “water is the matter of imagination”.²¹⁴ In the work of the creative imagination, water reveals its two natures: origin of life and its destruction: “water is also an invitation to die: it

existential emptiness. Within a creative poetics (Santa María), the starry sky marks the measure of a journey for which no destination is traced.

²¹¹José Alcina Franch, “Lenguaje metafórico e iconografía en el arte mexica”, in *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, UNAM, no. 66, 1995, p. 22 [my translation].

²¹²*Idem*.

²¹³“Our lives are the rivers / that flow down to the sea, / which is dying”, Jorge Manrique reminds us. *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*, Madrid, Castalia, 1983, p. 48 [my translation].

²¹⁴“Water, in grouping images and dissolving substances, helps imagination in its task of de-objectification, of assimilation” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 25.

is an invitation to a special death that allows us to reach one of the elemental material refuges”.²¹⁵ The tension between life and death is that of transformation. The creation of Santa María occurs in the “destruction” of Brausen, understood as transformation into Arce. Such is the other eroticism of his life. In Thalassa the rivers of his ontological and everyday time arrive. Because if, as Bachelard sees, “a river is terrestrial water”²¹⁶ (whose character is therefore ontological), the sea becomes metaphysical totality, immensity. Salt water represents, in this way, the myth that descends to the body and that can be inhabited daily. Salt has a human, terrestrial value and at the same time a divine one. Thalassa is, consequently, the place where the morphine turned milk of the missing breast flows out. What was a hollow now becomes a gravid concavity.

The novel is created from its beginning, therefore, among the play of bodies of water that converge into one alone: that of Brausen and his transformations. And each “character” of Santa María finally represents a part of him. The novel is told from his voice and his consciousness, his desires and sensations. To arrive in Santa María amounts, in consequence, to finding the union among his fragments. No longer a Brausen covered in drops of water, suffocated, but an Arce made of pure sea. From the breast to la Queca’s womb, Thalassa is the sea of the sensations, the feminine part of Brausen/Arce: María. Water is already intimately related to the feminine.²¹⁷ In a phenomenological language, “Thalassa” is the name of the well of being of Brausen/Arce, a deep sea through which he moves from the surfaces to the entrails of things (their intimate value): “immensity is in the depth”, in the journey from “sensible values to sensual values”.²¹⁸

In sum, among masks, disguises, the storm and carnival, Arce accompanied by Ernesto on one side, and Díaz Grey, the violinist, Óscar Owen and Lagos on the other, cross the frontiers in “flight” from justice.²¹⁹ Because those “fictional” characters also transmigrate, crossing the thresholds of the same carnival. For this reason, if Arce’s journey represents the journey from reality to fiction, the one undertaken by his imagined beings signifies in turn the journey from fiction to reality.

In this movement, after Brausen/Arce “lost the imaginative trace” of Díaz Grey, that is, after the provincial doctor took the course of his own life, Díaz Grey seeks himself in the symbolic mirror of his consciousness: “[...] I came to intuit my existence, to murmur ‘my Brausen’ with annoyance; he selected the dispassionate questions he would have to put to me if he came to find me one day.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 90 [my translation].

²¹⁶ Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 234 [my translation].

²¹⁷ “When we have understood that, for the unconscious, every combination of material elements is a marriage, we shall be able to realise the almost always feminine character attributed to water by naive imagination and by poetic imagination. We shall also see the profound maternity of waters” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 27.

²¹⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *Ibidem*, pp. 38–163 [my translation].

²¹⁹ The mask seen not as a concealment of identity but, recalling Greek tragedy, as the symbolic materialisation of those faces unrealisable for our common and daily countenance: the gesticulations of our *inferi*. As Heraclitus sees: “our souls smell of Hades” (Fragment 98, *op. cit.*, p. 105). In Hugo J. Verani’s words: “the masks [Brausen] assumes serve him to transcend his existence and to give shape to a new vital essence, that is, a new hope of continuity” [my translation] (*Onetti: el ritual de la impostura*, Caracas, Monte Ávila Editores, 1981, p. 104). A “will-mask”, Bachelard called it: “the object of a true human instinct” (“La máscara”, in *El derecho de soñar*, p. 199).

Perhaps he suspected that I was watching him; but needing to place me, he was mistaken in seeking me in the black stain of the shadows against the grey sky [...], he invoked my name in vain". (151)

Díaz Grey seeks the face of God as a desperate attempt to find himself. A moment of anxiety through which he takes on a "human" complexity beyond the "figural consciousness"²²⁰ determined by a creator. A delirium of persecution, as Zambrano would say, of "feeling oneself looked at while unable to see who looks at us".²²¹ Brausen is not in heaven... then where? Díaz Grey, as Brausen's Christ, son of God, seeks his Father and does not find him. Through the void in heaven, he will lower his gaze to his abysses: "lower your gaze, man, lower it toward the abyss, over which clouds of dust move",²²² as Christ exclaimed before the absence of his Creator. "All of us are orphans, neither I nor you have a father".²²³ Faced with the absence of a Brausen to relieve Díaz Grey's existence, the latter will feel the demons grow in his "imaginary" entrails.²²⁴

A fictional character, therefore, will in turn seek, paradoxically, to save himself.²²⁵ Because the trap comes upon him insofar as he inhabits a world without gods. We see Díaz Grey no longer as a "newly created" man and inhabitant of an "infant age" in full maturity (forty years), but as an entity that has in turn taken on consciousness, that recognises its spaces and asks about them, and that knows that: "the will would not serve me because it is a lie that persistence in prayer suffices for grace to descend. [That] equally a lie is this postponement, to some year or other, of the act of general inspection of spring that I could carry out right now and save myself, merely by walking downward to the place where the cow stood numb at dawn". (154)²²⁶

Díaz Grey will understand that salvation will not descend from the cosmos, but that he must seek it, perhaps build it, elsewhere. Not in the divine but among men. And if the great giver of sense is absent, "mute, blind and deaf before human lament",²²⁷ if life presents itself to him suddenly as a great senselessness in the midst of nothingness, the minimal sense will have to be found within such a collapsing consciousness and not in striving to return to the first age, to the closed and divine world.

²²⁰ A notion with which classical narratology understands the character. Cf. Luz Aurora Pimentel, *El relato en perspectiva*, p. 58.

²²¹ María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*, p. 7 [my translation].

²²² Jean Paul, "Discurso de Cristo muerto desde lo alto del Cosmos, diciendo que no hay Dios", trans. Andrés Sánchez Pascual, consulted 23 May 2020, <https://sites.google.com/site/loquenuncatedigo/textos>, p. 3 of 4 [my translation]. [Translator's note: the Spanish attributes this text to "Jean Paul Sartre". The "Speech of the Dead Christ from the Universe that There Is No God" is by Jean Paul, the pen name of Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, from *Siebenkäs* (1796), and belongs to the Romantic lineage Elías cites around it. The attribution appears to conflate the two names and is corrected here.]

²²³ *Idem.*

²²⁴ Novalis already made it clear that "where there are no gods, phantoms lurk", in this case Díaz Grey's phantoms. Rüdiger Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 116 [my translation].

²²⁵ Paradoxically, because he was, for Brausen, the promise of salvation.

²²⁶ "The cow at dawn" is probably a nod to Oliverio Girondo, to whom Onetti dedicates his novel.

²²⁷ Alfred de Vigny, "El monte de los olivos". Likewise, Nerval's later "Christ on the Mount of Olives" is significant (cf. Adriana Yáñez Vilalta, *Nerval y el romanticismo*, México, UNAM, 1998, pp. 137–159).

In this way, what was the certainty of an existence devised by a creator passes into delirium, only to flow out, finally, into the will: the will of love. Because only “[faint] reason will channel delirium into love”.²²⁸ A love no longer of God but of the very act of imagining: to love is an erotics. Out of Brausen’s fall, Díaz Grey will seek the face of love in Elena Sala and the violinist. Women as the dimension of his own eroticism. Díaz Grey, therefore, son of God, becomes, paraphrasing Jean Paul: “his own father and his own creator”.²²⁹

Díaz Grey, a creature crushed by the weight of his questions and by a feeling very like that of the first suffocated Brausen, puts into question not only the existence of Brausen the Creator but that of creation itself. Or, what amounts to the same, he interrogates, like any man, the sense of existing:

Es fácil; moverme mirando y oliendo [...]; tocar y ver en este cíclico, disponible principio del mundo hasta sentirme una, esta, incomprensible y no significativa manifestación de la vida, capricho engendrado por un capricho, tímido inventor de un Brausen, manipulador de la inmortalidad cuando el impuesto ejercicio del amor, cuando la circunstancia personal de la pasión. Saberme a mí mismo una vez definitiva y olvidarme de inmediato, continuar viviendo exactamente como antes pero cerrada la boca que ahora me abre la ansiedad. (154-155)

It is easy; to move myself looking and smelling [...]; to touch and to see in this cyclical, available beginning of the world until I feel myself one, this, incomprehensible and non-signifying manifestation of life, a caprice engendered by a caprice, timid inventor of a Brausen, manipulator of immortality when the imposed exercise of love, when the personal circumstance of passion. To know myself once definitively and to forget myself at once, to go on living exactly as before but with the mouth closed that anxiety now opens for me. (154–155)

Created once by Brausen out of pure sensible imagination, this provincial doctor emerges from that atmosphere as a primitive man who feels himself expelled from the “Old Paradise”,²³⁰ homeland of primal imagination, so as to interrogate and name each thing he sees: “to go on moving like an animal or like Brausen in his orchard so as to examine and name each tone of the green, each false transparency of the foliage, each tender branch, each perfume, each small balled-up cloud, each reflection in the river”. (154)

Díaz Grey is expelled, in the end, from pure and sensible imagination by the crack that the question, the doubt, institutes; perhaps that same doubt that separated primitive man from his old Eden so as to enter, without possibility of return, the mature age: the question that institutes itself as philosophy and that founds the bases of the modern age. From this angle of reflection, the search of Brausen

²²⁸ María Zambrano, *El hombre y lo divino*, p. 28 [my translation].

²²⁹ Jean Paul, *op. cit.* The theme of the “death of God” has signified a crucial rupture for the beginning of the modern age, treated by those poets in whom imagination takes on special significance and in whom Onetti finds his tradition: Hölderlin, Vigny, Novalis, Nerval, Jean Paul. [Translator’s note: see the note on the attribution of the dead-Christ text above.]

²³⁰ As Zambrano would say, only in man’s mature age do “the gods appear impassive, indifferent” [my translation]. *El hombre y lo divino*, p. 27.

and Díaz Grey by and through imagination has as its attempt the restitution of that primal sensibility eclipsed by enlightened reason. The trap thus survives in the mutilation of their creative dimension within a rational and utilitarian logic.

And in Arce's act of naming, he already makes use of the reason that "represents", by cause of no longer finding himself as "water in water", in Bataille's terms, in a state of immanence, but in a symbolic reality.²³¹ And only the human being, as against the rest of the species, names what he sees; represents a world to himself; that is, is born of himself. The world of Díaz Grey, like that of Brausen, is a world of words that in naming, create.²³² (Faced with this, if reality has a character of immobility, perhaps it is in this instituted and immobile image that the sense of the trap survives, and salvation in appealing to imagination, that is, to the dynamic capacity of the living image.)

Díaz Grey's questions, in the end, will find no answer before an absent God/Brausen. Surprised to be alive and "not to know what that means", as Brausen once said, conscious of his own life and with no guide to show him or dictate what to do and to feel, he will have to take the helm of his own existence, knowing that destiny is wholly his. A fictional man, therefore, who suddenly begins to dream. An imaginative fiction that imagines from within its own sensible ethical (aesthetic) dimension.

His crossing at Elena Sala's side, in search of Óscar Owen at the behest of the husband Horacio Lagos, will be the trigger of his own story. A journey that leads them to the encounter with the parish priest, God's representative, who, besides speaking to them of Óscar Owen and of his theory about pure and impure desperate men,²³³ assures them that if God exists, he is beyond human reach:

Cuando menciono el Reino de los Cielos, me limito a aseverar su existencia. No lo ofrezco a los hombres. Blasfemia y absurdo: un Dios con memoria e imaginación un Dios que puede ser conquistado y comprendido. Y este mismo Dios, esta horrible caricatura de la divinidad, retrocederá dos pasos por cada uno que avanzara el hombre. Dios existe y no es una posibilidad humana, sólo comprendiendo esto podremos ser totalmente hombres y conservar en nosotros la grandeza del Señor. (216)

When I mention the Kingdom of Heaven, I limit myself to asserting its existence. I do not offer it to men. Blasphemy and absurdity: a God with memory and imagination, a God who can be conquered and understood. And this same God, this horrible caricature of divinity, will step back two paces for every one that man advances. God exists and is not a human possibility;

²³¹"Inevitably, before our eyes, the animal is in the world like water in water" [my translation]. Georges Bataille, *Teoría de la Religión*, p. 27.

²³²It is enough to recall the relation between signified and signifier in the postulates of Saussure's modern linguistics.

²³³The theory of pure and impure desperate men is not without similarity to an authentic and inauthentic mode of life, where "desperate" may be read as the manifestation, on the ontic and everyday plane, of the anxiety that occurs at a deep ontological order.

only by understanding this shall we be able to be wholly men and to preserve in ourselves the greatness of the Lord. (216)

Such a wandering,²³⁴ in sum, is sponsored by the vitality of the fictional characters who now take on “real” existential relevance. Real insofar as, like any man, they watch the abyss grow within, and with surprise, between their flesh: “awake and asleep, he came to the moment when things began to surge out of the night”. (152)

In this way Díaz Grey moves within the attempt either to possess that woman, the representation of desire, Elena Sala, or to fulfil his duty of protection and companionship: “Díaz Grey was meditating on the impossibility of entering, consciously and of his own will, into the atmosphere, into the world of the woman”. (151) An ethical dilemma in which he oscillates and which leads him, at last, to his own trap.

Díaz Grey seeks, accompanying Elena Sala, that “well-dressed desperate man”, (183) Óscar Owen, addicted to morphine, in the hotel on the beach (whose owner “was old Macleod, a Macleod without the recent shave, stripped of the stiff collar and the expensive clothes, limited and stronger, more true perhaps”) (177) only to discover that Óscar Owen, who had also fled to Santa María “with no case, nor packages, nor anything, walking with his body so straight, with his head so raised [...]” (179), had withdrawn to Glaeson’s house, where Díaz Grey will meet for the first time “the violinist”, a woman for the contiguity of Gertrudis, Queca and Elena Sala.

Because 1) if Gertrudis was the mutilation of the sensible, 2) if Queca (a prostitute) represented that lost erotic dimension of Brausen’s, 3) if Elena Sala incarnated, for Brausen, within the creative aesthetic dimension, sensibility and desire, 4) in consequence the violinist comes to signify, this time for Díaz Grey (son of fiction and continuity of Brausen’s being), the summit of poetic and artistic sensibility, that is, the Orphic-Dionysian.²³⁵ Because all these women are but a single entity for the journeys of being; as Lagos had already made Díaz Grey see: “Look over there, doctor, see that white figure beside Óscar. She is Elena. Nothing is interrupted, nothing ends; though the short-sighted lose their way with the changes of circumstances and characters. But not you, doctor”. (314) And perhaps Díaz Grey, accompanying Elena Sala in search of Óscar Owen, the Englishman, was in reality seeking his own sensible dimension, which he found, finally, in the violinist, an Englishwoman.²³⁶

²³⁴In parallel diegesis, Brausen is occupied with his death and resurrection as Arce.

²³⁵Orpheus, son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, is the father of the lyre and of poetry; Apollo gifted him his lyre, made by Hermes himself. He alone manages to descend to Tartarus, to bewitch Charon and to lull Cerberus with his music in order to resurrect Eurydice, his beloved, without succeeding. Dionysus, for his part, son of Zeus and Semele, is the “twice-born”, half man and half god, representative of the sensual pleasures. The term “Orphic-Dionysian” therefore refers to the Eleusinian mysteries, which are a feast of knowledge. If Orpheus represents suffering, Dionysus represents purification. This image has been used, among others, by María Zambrano, to mark the character of creation, in which art reveals the knowledge of being and of death.

²³⁶“The doctor joins the girl, the young ‘English’ violinist he met while accompanying Elena in her search for the young Englishman; it is a transgressive, secret and defiant act” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

For this reason the provincial doctor's journey takes place in the sensible dimension manifested in the feminine. Symbolically, the encounter with the violinist amounts to the "meeting with the goddess" that Campbell already saw: "the mystical marriage of the triumphant soul of the hero [this time Díaz Grey] with the Queen Goddess of the World",²³⁷ a reconciliation of the individual being with the whole. The violinist "of asexuated profile" (198) signifies the sensible totality that Brausen had lost and that Díaz Grey found. A deep sensibility that can only be represented by music: an Orpheus (violinist) for a Morpheus (Díaz Grey); one born of music for one born of forms.²³⁸ While she plays the violin, Díaz Grey accompanies her on the piano in imagination. Díaz Grey's "temptation", under this reading, denotes the call and the attempt to recover his erotic and imaginative sensibility: to possess her amounts to possessing himself. To sleep beside the violinist, insofar as she is the incarnation of the musically sensory, amounts to sleeping at the edge of his own abyss.²³⁹

For this reason it is within the violinist, that is, within his own imagination, that Díaz Grey finds the total restitution of his being. And so, in his own lucubration, this provincial doctor conceives a love life beside the young artist, but one in which she would be his lover and not his wife. And happiness lies outside responsible air.²⁴⁰ A lover who calls him affectionately "Degé" ("a name she made from my initials": D.G.); an appellation for the illegality of their affections.

Díaz Grey smiles, in this way and within his imagination, "at the air that touched my teeth; [and] I do not want to think, I do not want to know what made my happiness nor what can destroy it. I remember, I could measure them exactly, the remains of alcohol that were left in the glasses". (206–207) Remains that carried him from his plane of "reality" to a reverie of intoxication. It is not in this case morphine, reserved for Brausen, but alcohol that is the means by which his unconscious flows freely, with which he wavers between wakefulness and dream. If Díaz Grey could, as he suspects, recover and reconstruct the remains of alcohol, he would return completely to consciousness. It was and was not the violinist (Orphic woman) who induced him into such a state: "'Degé...' she says; she takes a drink"; (208) the intoxication of the sensible. Music already signifies, in Bachelard's words, "the ontological vibration" of the human abyss.²⁴¹

In this way, if the violinist has, imaginatively, the role of lover, his wife will then be Elena Sala. A woman who was eroticism now becomes trap, as had happened to Brausen with the young and

²³⁷ Joseph Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 68 [my translation].

²³⁸ Music brings the ineffable: it descends to the abysses and induces the demons to meet it.

²³⁹ "I fall asleep at the edge of a woman: I fall asleep at the edge of an abyss", Galeano writes in his poem "La noche" [my translation].

²⁴⁰ On this point it is interesting how Onetti conceives his relation with literature within this passionate and irresponsible logic: "I have never been a slave to writing, as Vargas Llosa or García Márquez are. I have said it to them sometimes: what you have are conjugal relations with literature, you have to do your duty by your lady wife, whereas I have passionate relations with my lover; that is literature for me: a lover. When I feel that passion, I write, and when I do not, then I do not" [my translation]. Javier Goñi, "La literatura es mi amante", *El País*, 14 March 1993, https://elpais.com/diario/1993/03/15/cultura/732150002_850215.html, consulted 30 May 2020.

²⁴¹ Gaston Bachelard, "La dialéctica dinámica del ensueño mallarmeano", in *El derecho de soñar*, p. 156 [my translation].

adolescent Gertrudis: “I think of Elena Sala, my wife; I count the hours she has been waiting for me, I examine the solidity of the lie I am going to tell her”. (208)

Nevertheless, far from all premonition, the search for “salvation” in the violinist becomes also his trap: “As though definitively outside the treatment and outside Santa María, Díaz Grey was suffering the girl [the violinist] [...], he suffered her and pawed at her, he suppressed her and annihilated himself in her, he managed at times to arrest time with no other result than the conviction that it is not possible to happen within eternity”. (249)

Díaz Grey finds himself, finally, condemned by himself and not by Brausen: he himself must save himself. A doctor who signified Brausen’s salvation becomes a trap to himself. It is a translation that has its space within the very work of constructing fiction: “at dawn, beside a sleeping Elena Sala [...], he went on depositing near the bed, like a wristwatch, cigarettes, matches, the sharp objects he had received from clandestinity”. (250) Sharp objects with which Brausen cut the warp of his reality so as to fabricate Santa María itself are now the objects “Degé” receives in the clandestinity of fiction, like one who finds the threads of his own weave. Perhaps he sensed what Shakespeare’s Prospero once said: “we are such stuff as dreams are made on”.²⁴²

Díaz Grey notices himself, from within his lucubration with his violinist lover: “I think of Doctor Díaz Grey, motionless at this table, against one side of the stormy autumn night, watching the laughter, the pink interior of a girl’s mouth, made vain by the certainty of being capable of every injustice”. (208) Such a noticing of himself from imagination amounts to looking at himself through a concave and ambiguous mirror. A noticing that becomes desire, a wanting to be.

Through his imagination, Díaz Grey seeks to exempt himself. “Everything is possible, we can think; or think without sadness that we shall attain nothing of the possible and that this fatality does not worry us” (208), and he will strive so that salvation descends not from prayer but from action: “I love you and I say nothing”. (208) A doctor as imagined fiction thus raises his own spectre: “Until at dawn or the following day he verified that it was impossible to live in the small frozen hell peopled by the shunned lights, the shames, the glances of the servants, the smell of the bedclothes that surged up again with the sweat. [Degé] had to save himself and was punctually saved by the recovered intensity of his love [...]”. (250) Saved by the recollection of the violinist; that is, by the induction into creative dream through the musically sensory.

Meanwhile, in the line of his “real” existence which has begun to have history, Elena Sala dies of a morphine overdose. That same morphine that relieved Gertrudis; the same with which Brausen created this Elena Sala. She dies of morphine as though it were the *humus* to which she returned, inevitably, to the matter of her creation. And Elena, in seeking to open the doors of her perception with the help of this liquid, that is, through Morpheus, descends so deep into the well of her being that she can find nothing but death.

²⁴²In *The Tempest*, Act IV, scene i.

Elena dead, the great goddess of love never conquered by Díaz Grey, a (H)Elena of Troy if we add the H of la Queca's flat, will be the one who relates all these characters in the crime of trafficking morphine.

(H)Elena, known land for her husband Horacio Lagos. (H)Elena who gave identity to Óscar Owen (because only she could give him "that which we call personality"), (H)Elena: a communicating vessel with the violinist,²⁴³ relates them all because she "was extraordinary and only people like ourselves could understand her". (276) So Lagos announces.

These characters woven together through her, they seek the restitution of them all into a single unity, into a single body. A homage that rises as vengeance insofar as they turn against legality: "[Horacio Lagos] wants us to go to Buenos Aires and for you [Óscar Owen says to Díaz Grey] to sign as many morphine prescriptions as there are chemists. I drive the car; we go round all the shops in one day and we disappear [...] This is the homage, the vengeance I spoke of". (279)

This act is symbolic in the extreme. They are fictional beings in the crime of trafficking their own nature. A crime for which Óscar Owen needs to impregnate that same violent force that Ernesto exercised with Brausen, so as to open the weave of their "real" dimension and so that the homage may therefore have an interior value. Óscar Owen murders a policeman, a representative of the law: "I remember Lagos's greatness when he distributed instructions in an unavoidable childish language, when he showed himself capable of foreseeing everything except the soft gesture with which the Englishman rested his pistol on the body of the man who approached the car and tried to stop us". (310) A murder in the order of fiction that carries them, therefore, from "seeking to traffic" to "seeking flight".

Flight understood as the withdrawal from their reality; that is, as an escape from their "fictional" ontological dimension so as to find the limits of their "real" metaphysical dimension. It will be for this reason, and once again, carnival, that same one through which Brausen and Ernesto entered, at another time and yet the same, that is the means by which they achieve such a transfiguration: to touch the limits of Buenos Aires. Flight does not signify, to reiterate, an evasion toward another exterior spatiality. None of them is ever interested in crossing a political frontier; flight signifies a search for their identity in a journey inward. "Buenos Aires" is already barely the suppression of "Santa María de los Buenos Aires". The journey occurs as a restitution of what was lost.

In this way, under the code "Señor Albano", a code that indicated to them how near justice was, they move as in a game of chess, without being able to change the board. "Lagos, in the café's private room, invented the phrase 'is Señor Albano there?'" (304) as a telephone code, which itself augurs the futility of every attempt. Because when that day of carnival ended, every disguise would be a sign revealing their identity instead of concealing it. "Señor Albano" is Señor rational justice, the *Alba-no*, the no-dawn over the last day of carnival: "Señor Albano has not yet arrived". (300)

²⁴³ She had to be added because "[Lagos said to Díaz Grey] I needed the purity and the faith of this child". (280)

For this reason their “escape” seems “technically perfect”, says René. “But carnival ends today. As soon as the sun comes out tomorrow, they will not be able to move a finger in disguise”. (307)

“Of course, it is true, carnival ends. But I would have won an absolute security of twenty-four hours, I would have fortified the morale of my army and, during the time thus gained, I would organise the arrival at the frontier”. (308) Lagos objects.

In this way, faced with carnival, the disguises represent the possibility of transmuting: “Suddenly I imagine that everything, the flight, the salvation, the future that unites us and that only I can remember, [Díaz Grey pronounces] depends on our not making a mistake in choosing the disguise”. (301) Salvation depends on a covering; one for fiction. A covering that signifies unveiling.

Directed by Horacio Lagos, they will thus seek the perfect costume: “We need fancy dress. Something very special, very good”, says Díaz Grey. “For a ball”, the Englishman adds, and he laughs through the three words. “For now”, the violinist insists quickly. (301) Disguised in this way, Horacio Lagos as King, Óscar Owen as Halberdier, Díaz Grey as Bullfighter and the violinist as Dancer (dance being inherent to music), they will represent the duality of their existence. Because “the disguises do not merely define the possibility of another (another function) that the characters have, but dramatise their other half, what is denied in each one”,²⁴⁴ Ludmer notes.

It will be Horacio Lagos, the King, therefore, who directs the rest. He as King because, in that possible duality, he can wholly incarnate his alterity as “Horacio” and make of *carpe diem* a salvation, directing every step toward a new sensibility recovered and restituted. At last: “my turn has come, I am going to be king [...] If I were to direct a retreat... [...] Elena guides me, she directs our steps; Óscar’s, yours, mine”. (277) Horacio Lagos is distinguished by the clarity of what is happening:

Estamos en carnaval y debemos escondernos en el carnaval. Buscan a un hombre bajo y grueso, vestido de gris; a uno rubio y flaco con traje marrón; a un buen mozo que fuma pipa. Buscan a una muchacha de regular estatura, de ojos claros, nariz de dorso recto y sin señas visibles, aparte de las sutiles marcas profesionales que deja la práctica del violín. ¿No es así? Muy bien: los suprimimos como si sopláramos cuatro velas [...] Subsiste mi plan, nuestro plan; continuamos escondidos en la fiesta, hemos dejado de ser hasta mañana. (203-314)

²⁴⁴“Díaz Grey’s bullfighter costume refers to the assumption of his Spanish half, that of ‘Díaz’, and with it an element of play, aggressiveness and a plasticity that is not sad (not *grey*); the young violinist’s dancer costume is the other thing that can be done with music, no longer playing it but dancing it, and at the same time what was repressed in her childhood (‘I can see you, ten years earlier, hiding a pair of ballet shoes under your pillow [...] I can see you dance what they oblige you to play on the violin’). The halberdier costume underlines that the young man, formerly a fugitive and now a policeman’s murderer (as Ernesto was Queca’s), constitutes himself the custodian of Lagos ‘the king’ (and it is the inversion of Arce, guardian of the murderer Ernesto); as for Lagos, the king-buffoon of carnival, MOMO, it alludes to his process of ageing and decomposition that he wanted to arrest; he is now a dethroned and fallen king. But the king is, in reality, his majesty the I (Lagos says: ‘I, the king’): Lagos was the absolute other, the third character; his other is the I and there, disguised, he assumes it as king” [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

We are at carnival and we must hide ourselves in carnival. They are looking for a short, thick man dressed in grey; for a thin blond one in a brown suit; for a good-looking fellow who smokes a pipe. They are looking for a girl of ordinary height, light eyes, a straight-backed nose and no visible marks, apart from the subtle professional marks left by the practice of the violin. Is that not so? Very well: we suppress them as though we were blowing out four candles [...] My plan stands, our plan; we continue hidden in the festivity, we have ceased to be until tomorrow. (203, 314)

Because “that journey you made with Elena in pursuit of Óscar [Lagos says to Grey], is it not exactly the same journey that a dancer, a bullfighter, a bodyguard and a king can make this dawn, in a launch, from the Tigre”. (314) A sign that the expedition remains, in substance, the same.

The end of carnival amounts to the recovery of their bodies. Because carnival is not the flesh but its absence. A moment of leaving it so as to cleanse being, or the soul, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Horacio Lagos, Díaz Grey, Óscar Owen and the violinist will be surprised at dawn by the law with their costumes still on, costumes that no longer cover them but, perhaps showing their true nature, strip them bare. That is, they are surprised by reason with their flesh exposed. Because imagination, in its destructive and creative force, strips being naked. Carnival already signifies a de-carnalisation.²⁴⁵ “Fictional” beings with their flesh alive are poetic beings; that is, creators of themselves.²⁴⁶

In sum, after the “irrational” journeys undertaken by Arce on one side and Díaz Grey on the other, fiction has become “real” (insofar as it has taken on the ontological plane of reality); and reality, fictional (insofar as it has disturbed its metaphysical limits). In this way the ontological and the metaphysical dimensions, in perturbing each other, question the foundations of reality and of fiction, and with them human nature. Among the different levels of reality the characters travel in the continuity of their being, in an exploration of the different states of existence. This is perhaps the search for salvation: to cross the doors of perception in search of what is genuine in being.

Seen this way, is it possible to save oneself by imagining? If the trap lies implicit in the human condition, can we say that Brausen/Arce, Díaz Grey and the rest of the “characters” have been left free of it? Is there not, perhaps, in the destructive and creative force of imagination, a dialectic of salvation that reveals the dialectic of the human condition? What does imagination signify at this point? Such questions open the final chapter.

²⁴⁵“From It. *carnevale*, id., and this from *carnelevale*, an alteration of *carnelevare*, 14th c., compounded of *carne* and *levare*, ‘to remove’, it being the beginning of the Lenten fast” (Joan Corominas, *op. cit.*, p. 134). Etymologically, “carnival” signifies absence of flesh; literally, the removing of the flesh.

²⁴⁶Sabines would say: “We poets are ‘unfleshed’ persons, we go through the world without skin, with the flesh alive” [my translation]. Ana Cruz, “La poesía es un destino. Entrevista a Jaime Sabines”, *La raíz invertida*, 28 March 2016, consulted 30 May 2020, <http://www.laraizinvertida.com/detalle-1949-la-poesia-es-un-destino-entrevista-a-jaime-sabines>.

Chapter 4. Salvation and the dialectic of imagination

Hell is empty and all the devils are here.

Shakespeare²⁴⁷

The “flight” ends for Arce with the recognition: “‘You are the other one,’ said the man. ‘Then you are Brausen’”. (298) The law, which pursues them from Buenos Aires (Ernesto and him), identifies him, betrays his identity and, in the last instance, punishes.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that it was Arce himself who, like every criminal, sowed the traces so as to be found: “I am going to telephone you or come at nine”. (298) What would become of the murderer without recognition, without the gaze that identifies him, that is, that grants him identity?

Madness sponsored by imagination demands to be recognised, to be visible. Reason, in punishing it, reaffirms it. Only what is named exists. Paradoxically, subjectivity, on being inspected by the law, institutes itself; that is, it is normalised. Santa María no longer represents the criminal act of a destructive and creative imagination, but a “real” image, and therefore a sanctionable one, that is, a correctable one.

Here begins the dialectic of imagination as salvation for Brausen/Arce. Imagination, which was a path of access to the real, is institutionalised as reality. Because the law that pursues them is not that of Santa María but that of Buenos Aires.

Yet what would seem a failure in the matter of salvation brings with it another turn of the screw. Arce has managed to carry reason, without its suspecting so, into the abysses of imagination; once in the land of imagination, this will now be a poetic reason.

In this way, the law that apprehends the one and the other (Brausen and Ernesto) is nothing but the apprehension of a single individual in the multiple states of being²⁴⁸ in search of the return and the restitution of a “being-in-the-world” that has been transgressed and violated. It will be reason, a faint reason in the dominion of imagination, that institutes not only order but also the unification of being. It is reason that will make creation return to its creature. It is therefore a last appropriation of himself. Arce has travelled to Santa María with the foresight of being found, that is, of the return to his “reality”, which will nevertheless not be the same.²⁴⁹

And finally Brausen, on noting that the law has seized Ernesto (his duality), instead of trying to flee, walks toward it as though he awaited it. Arce asks to be looked at and notices: “this was what

²⁴⁷William Shakespeare, *op. cit.*, Act One, Scene II, spoken by Ariel.

²⁴⁸Cf. René Guénon, *Los estados múltiples del ser*, Barcelona, Sophia Perennis, 2006.

²⁴⁹The importance of the return already has a Novalian echo in Onetti, and in literature as a whole. For Novalis, what is significant about imagination is that “the mysterious path goes inward [but] whoever remains here triumphs only by halves. The second step must be an active gaze outward, an active and sober observation of the exterior world” [my translation]. Cited in Rüdiger Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 75. It is perhaps the return of Ulysses that marks the restitution of sense for the modern epic.

I sought from the beginning, from the death of the man who lived five years with Gertrudis; to be free, to be irresponsible before others, to conquer myself without effort in a true solitude". (298)

Brausen believes he recognises that voice: "which spoke to me and watched my eyes: it had sounded the previous night beside the curtain of the private room, directed at the painted woman who was eating grapes, at the little blond boy who was inaugurating life, at the aquiline profile of the fat man, defeated, in retreat". (298–299) Yet he barely alludes to its marks, because substantially he does not identify it. Brausen does not know who that man is, that stranger who now represents the law of Santa María. He has managed, finally, to transgress the nature of his reason in the transformation of himself.

It is Jorge Malabia (who has his development in the novel *Body Snatcher*, 1964). In naming him "Brausen" (without realising who he "really" is) and not "Arce" nor "God", he breaks the sacred image of the creator myth: all of them inhabitants of a profane world. Impeded by his ignorance of the new lands of his own sensibility, Brausen barely manages to relate Malabia to the voice in the Hotel Berna, and the rest of the diners who speak, curiously, about an escape: Díaz Grey, Larsen, María Bonita and Lanza. Brausen does not notice his creatures.

And for such a dimension of his, faint reason does not correct the abysses, as enlightened reason would; it limits itself to pointing out, metaphorically,²⁵⁰ what it sees: "Santa María where for our sins we are", (295) Malabia pronounces, because that creation has been erected out of Brausen's *infern*, where each creature contributes its phantoms. Santa María is the name of an abyss: imagination already produces demons, creates its own traps. Brausen will be judged under the laws of Santa María; the laws of his fiction which, perhaps, has ceased to belong to him.

The foundation of the journey lies in the search of being for another identity that is at the same time his own. "To be and not to be at one and the same time",²⁵¹ Heraclitus would say. A widening of the frontiers of his existence. Because Brausen notices that he is condemned to the impossibility of salvation within his own identity: "I want to tear off my clothes like a winter skin". (125) The fictional other signifies an extension of the limits of his individual being. Brausen crosses his body with imagination. An existential body. The only possible path of salvation, from this reading, must be found in the transgression of his human exactness, for which Brausen notices that: "I had waited all my life without knowing it and that if I had been conscious of this waiting I would have shortened it, perhaps by years". (200)

It is a matter of a breadth and a journey through the different states of existence within a single being. As Brausen himself would say: "the thing is that people believe they are condemned to one life, until death. And they are only condemned to one soul, to one way of being. One can live many times, many lives more or less long". (187) Is this not perhaps "the brief life"? The consciousness not of biological finitude but of existential lives; the possibility of deciding. Because: "then death

²⁵⁰Metaphorical language, far from excluding reason, widens its dominions beyond the merely "rational". "Fundamental metaphors", María Zambrano calls them, are proper to a poetic reason, that is, a creative and sensible one.

²⁵¹Heraclitus, Fragment 49, *op. cit.*, p. 101 [my translation].

does not matter, not as definitive annihilation”. (188) Perhaps the true human desire is to live not one life but several; not consecutively, however, but simultaneously. To exist from multiple states of being in the experience of a single life that gathers them all and that are, at one time, independent. If being signifies possibility, imagination is channelled as the will to be within that possibility.

In a parallel line, Díaz Grey, his alterity lost within him, awaiting the arrival of the law, thinks of the violinist, of the space that opens between the “real” one and the “imagined” one; that is, between the desired and the possessed:

Estamos separados por todo lo que vivimos juntos y ella ignora; y la palabra usted mantiene sensible esta separación, impide que ella llegue a saber y olvide. Estamos separados por tres días de frío o viento, por el minuto en que yo me acerqué a una ventana de hotel para mirar el mal tiempo en la calle mientras ella me esperaba acurrucada en la cama; estamos separados por el regreso en taxi de la casa de citas de Palermo, por la voz Degé, por la visión vertical que obtuve de su cara mientras ella se apoyaba en mi hombro, por la gentileza con que me informó que es natural encontrar dificultades cuando se regresa a la vida; separados por mi seguridad de que existía una frase exacta para definir la sensación de su cuerpo desnudo. (280-281)

We are separated by everything we lived through together and that she does not know; and the word *usted* keeps this separation palpable, prevents her from coming to know and forget. We are separated by three days of cold or wind, by the minute in which I went to a hotel window to look at the bad weather in the street while she waited for me curled up in the bed; we are separated by the return by taxi from the house of assignation in Palermo, by the voice Degé, by the vertical vision I obtained of her face while she leaned on my shoulder, by the graciousness with which she informed me that it is natural to encounter difficulties when one returns to life; separated by my certainty that there existed an exact phrase to define the sensation of her naked body. (280–281)

Separated, in the end, by the hollows of his imagination in the doubt of being saved through his desire or condemned in the annihilation of the imagined before reality: “Because all this that we lived through together, all this intimacy she does not know, will only be able to go on being worth something to me if I keep the *usted*, if I do not name her, if I do not permit the birth of a new intimacy that will make the previous one disappear”. (281) Perhaps for this reason “the violinist” is never named. Unappealable as she is unrepresentable, like the goddess of Love who cannot be apprehended in an image or a name. An Eros whose face must not be seen. Eroticism is already invisible, not visible to the ordinary.²⁵²

²⁵²Eros, in love with Psyche against the will of Aphrodite, his mother, takes Psyche to his palace, where he forbids her to see him. Eros and Psyche can love each other only by night and in darkness. Nevertheless Psyche, impelled by her sisters’ envy, feels curious to see him so as to verify that he is not a monster. And so, while Eros sleeps, Psyche lights him, only to realise the beauty of her beloved. But a drop of oil falls on Eros’s face; he wakes and, disappointed, leaves her. Cf. Apuleius, *El asno de oro*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2014.

Faced with this hesitation, Díaz Grey (Degé, as the violinist called him within his imagination), the sensible manifestation of the metaphysical midday, now incarnates time and its consciousness. Having left the world of myth, he inhabits a space with History:

escucho los tictacs desparejos de una veintena de relojes a mi espalda, sobre mi cabeza, vibrando en el escaparate, cerca de mi vientre; invento el golpeteo de las máquinas que no oigo, las que están en la caja fuerte, en las vitrinas, en la luz verdosa de un pequeño acuario, sin poderes para evitar que el latido de los relojes mire y corroa este tiempo y los que soy capaz de recordar y suponer [...]; desde todas partes saltan las campanadas del mediodía, martillan y cantan los carillones. Camino hacia atrás hasta que choco con un reloj de pie; tembloroso, me aplico a sudar todo el miedo que acumulé, sin saberlo, desde ayer, mientras se prolonga el estrépito, mientras agonizan en mi memoria los últimos sonidos de los relojes. (310)

I hear the uneven tick-tocks of a score of clocks at my back, above my head, vibrating in the display case, near my belly; I invent the tapping of the machines I do not hear, those that are in the safe, in the cabinets, in the greenish light of a small aquarium, powerless to prevent the beat of the clocks from watching and corroding this time and those I am capable of remembering and supposing [...]; from everywhere the chimes of midday leap out, the carillons hammer and sing. I walk backward until I collide with a standing clock; trembling, I apply myself to sweating out all the fear I accumulated, without knowing it, since yesterday, while the din goes on, while the last sounds of the clocks lie dying in my memory. (310)

Wavering like a flame burning above time, his trap “beats” from within his interiority. A passage that runs from the pre-ontological to the ontological, from which he will suffer the anxiety of his finitude while he hears: “the battalion of tick-tocks that attacks the clarity of midday, pushes it, wears it away”. (311) His eyes impassive before the time that corrodes his entrails: “without thoughts, without intervening, foreign to time and to light, I witness the struggle until it ends, until the metals and the glass of the dials begin to reproduce and distribute among themselves the reflection of the first lamp that is lit in the street”. (311) It is significant that time should invade Díaz Grey before the beginning of night, that symbol of eternity. Díaz Grey will thus become a dodger of time, as though perhaps in his role as bullfighter, like that Díaz de Vivar, he had to measure the weight of every action.²⁵³

Nevertheless, as against Brausen, the provincial doctor and the violinist are not captured by the police when it arrests the others: “when I manage to make out among the trees, treading lightly on the grass, fleeting men in straw hats who venture indecisive greetings, I irresistibly prefer not to wait for Señor Albano on the bench and I get to my feet”. (317) It is perhaps that last will of Díaz Grey’s not to be found by the law that is the door to a more subjective and therefore more radical salvation, one unexplorable for consciousness. This provincial doctor will never be able to be found

²⁵³As happens in *Hopscotch*, where such “dodging” has the impression of play, of game and of dance.

by Brausen's faint light. And he always signified the possibility of what was denied to his creator: to be total.²⁵⁴ "I can move away calmly; I cross the little square and you walk at my side, we reach the corner and go up the deserted tree-lined street, fleeing from nobody, seeking no encounter, dragging our feet a little, more from happiness than from weariness". (318) Nevertheless, could it be said, then, that Díaz Grey and the violinist save themselves together? A man who was fiction, in what direction does he turn his steps?

To bring the sense of salvation down to earth at this degree, it will be necessary to ask, within *A Brief Life*, where do the characters look when they seek to save themselves, where do they throw their being beyond the visible of their journeys? Is love not perhaps the fibre upon which they play and stir themselves: the fire where eroticism burns to warm their imagination? Repeatedly, throughout the novel, Brausen appeals to love in the act of creating Santa María, especially when he already finds himself within it:

Periódicos viejos y tostados se estiraban en la ventana de la fonda y me defendían del sol, yo podía desgarrarlos y mirar hacia Santa María, volver a pensar que todos los hombres que la habitaban habían nacido de mí y que era capaz de hacerles concebir el amor como un absoluto, reconocerse a sí mismos en el acto de amor y aceptar para siempre esta imagen, transformarla en un cauce por el que habría de correr el tiempo y su carga, desde la definitiva revelación hasta la muerte; que, en último caso, era capaz de proporcionar a cada uno de ellos una agonía lúcida y sin dolor para que comprendieran el sentido de lo que habían vivido. (285)

Old and toasted newspapers stretched across the window of the inn and defended me from the sun; I could tear them and look toward Santa María, and think again that all the men who inhabited it had been born of me and that I was capable of making them conceive love as an absolute, of recognising themselves in the act of love and accepting for ever this image, of transforming it into a channel along which time and its burden would run, from the definitive revelation until death; that, in the last instance, I was capable of providing each one of them with a lucid and painless agony so that they might understand the sense of what they had lived. (285)

Santa María is the city encircled by a river of morphine, of milk, of time; finally, of love. Brausen/Arce attributes to love an essential factor that serves as the cornerstone of all creation. Love is born as a revelation of finitude, by which desire rises as motor, a being-as-project, Heidegger would say, within being-towards-death.

For this reason Brausen glimpses love for Santa María as a path of salvation. He who had already suffered his death before Gertrudis's body: for it was the impossibility of play, that is, of imagining, that marked the definitive rupture: "Seduction is impossible", he says to Gertrudis, "it does not

²⁵⁴"The doctor is single, Brausen married; the doctor visited, Brausen a visitor; the doctor looks at midday, Brausen looks at the night; the doctor does not manage to auscultate the heart, but he looks at (and is seduced by) Elena Sala's breasts; Brausen auscultates through the wall and cannot see" [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

matter now why, it may be because of all that. Fundamentally, it seems to me, because we can no longer play". (130)

Such an importance of love as salvation comes from a demiurge on a greater plane, from an Onetti who recognises of creation: "I have said many times and in many ways that to write is an act of love. And without euphemism".²⁵⁵ "Let us be clear: as a writer I can say that my kingdom is not of this world. As a poor needy fellow, I can be indignant at or laugh at the fair in the square, so noisy today. But what matters is love; the novel is love, and whenever I have it truly it happens that she is naked".²⁵⁶

Under this poetics, Díaz Grey, Brausen's first fictional movement, is moved not only by desire as sexual appetite but as a search to be recognised in the eroticism of Elena Sala and of the violinist; that is, of love. And as Octavio Paz already saw: "the agent that moves both the erotic act and the poetic one is imagination [...], desire is the father of fantasy".²⁵⁷ Perhaps only in love, imagination at its height, does being widen its limits beyond its own will and its attempts. These are enlarged by the desire of another being toward one's own interior. An encounter of solitudes. To exist in the other, for as Zygmunt Bauman sees: "love is the survival of the I through the alterity of the I".²⁵⁸ An "I" that transcends into a "you" insofar as the question "who am I" opens onto a "who are you". Duality and union. If Brausen and Díaz Grey find themselves trapped within the ontological limits of their being, love opens a bridge toward the other: "the I that loves expands by giving itself to the loved object".²⁵⁹ Eroticism warms the human soul. And here the role of the violinist-dancer (the contiguity of Gertrudis and Elena Sala) becomes fundamental. She represents the tension not only of music and of dance but of myth and of rite; in a symbolic ontology, music is to myth what dance is to rite. In this sense she symbolises the sensible metaphysical nature of imagination and at the same time its physical, corporeal incarnation. Díaz Grey "saves" himself with her, evading the law, as a metaphor of a salvation that survives in the tension between the two human natures (one physical and the other metaphysical) which, distinct, seek reconciliation. Díaz Grey's erotic attraction toward the violinist thus takes on the impulse to see those two parts of himself restored. Not for nothing, for Joseph Campbell²⁶⁰ the end of the hero's journey manifests the most critical moment of the whole course, where the "cosmic dancer" comes to represent the desire that links life and death. Finally, salvation occurs not in total death but in resurrection; that is, in the return. The violinist-dancer signifies, in this way, the return through himself, in which the journey takes on sense. An end of the crossing that manifests the other intimacy of life: that of death.²⁶¹ In this way,

²⁵⁵ Juan Carlos Onetti, "Ida y vuelta", in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, p. 196 [my translation].

²⁵⁶ Juan Carlos Onetti, "Onetti en el tiempo del cometa", in *Requiem por Faulkner*, p. 207 [my translation].

²⁵⁷ Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, pp. 10–15 [my translation].

²⁵⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Amor líquido. Acerca de la fragilidad de los vínculos humanos*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2018, p. 28 [my translation].

²⁵⁹ *Idem*.

²⁶⁰ Joseph Campbell, *El héroe de las mil caras*.

²⁶¹ Cf. Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y las ensöaciones del reposo. Ensayo sobre las imágenes de la intimidad*, México, FCE, 2006, p. 73.

does Brausen not perhaps manage to “save himself” through his creation (and in the beginning his alter ego) Díaz Grey-violinist? Does not the image of creation already bring “the imagining being and the imagined being to their closest”?²⁶² Finally literature, like every work, “is the only space where all debts are settled”.²⁶³ Understood thus, Brausen’s salvation in being captured by the law, on one side, and Díaz Grey’s in his evasion, on the other, show the dialectic and the contradiction of two forms of plenitude that converge in a single existential flesh of multiple faces: “a hero with a thousand faces”.²⁶⁴

Nevertheless, what meaning does love have for Brausen and Díaz Grey? Both of them fictional, they carry what would seem a concept into the terrain of sensibility. That is, they move not in its theoretical speculation but in its sensible living. Perhaps this is the ground of their journeys and transgressions. Perhaps the doors of perception have as their key a specific susceptibility: the happiness of sensuality in the transcendence of the instant.²⁶⁵ That is, happiness understood as the love that descends into experience. In this way, through love, Brausen can move from everyday sensibility to poetic sensuality, from which the ordinary tragic can be revoked as a possibility of change within an aesthetic order. Because if what Nietzsche conceives about eroticism is true (“the feeling of the tragic increases and diminishes with sensuality”),²⁶⁶ we can see in Brausen a tension between suffering and relief in which liberation is woven into the existentially tragic.

It will be through creation that Brausen manages to perceive and even to capture his sensations and the whole weave of his reality, so as to unweave it and weave it within a new exegesis. Love already speaks by hiding itself, an Eros that shows itself “beyond the forms”. And the metaphorical nature has the mystery of gathering a metaphysical aspiration within an ontological charge. Santa María thus becomes a “beyond of forms” for an opening onto a “beyond of the physical”. An ontological breadth in transcendent lands.

In consequence, Brausen, a seeker, through Díaz Grey first and Arce later, of a meta-sensible world in which to find his totality denied in ordinary everydayness, does not, symptomatically, seek “love” in the order of ideas. Brausen crosses the “seas” of his existence toward a creative, total and infinite dimension, seeking, contradictorily, the affections and carnality: eroticism and voluptuousness. I say “contradictorily” because the metaphysical order, in its universal nature, does not answer to the flesh nor to its desires; free of the body, it is an ideal order.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, p. 11 [my translation].

²⁶³ Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 140 [my translation].

²⁶⁴ Cf. Joseph Campbell, *El héroe de las mil caras*.

²⁶⁵ To put it in Bataille’s terms (*La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 92).

²⁶⁶ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Más allá del bien y del mal*, aphorism 155.

²⁶⁷ Philosophy, inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle, is founded on metaphysics, for which concepts have universal value insofar as they are not limited to specific phenomena. The *Topos Uranus* (Plato, “Book X of the *Republic*”) is par excellence that ideal place, insofar as it belongs to the ideas, which becomes unattainable, while ours is barely an imitation, where art is found three times removed from the pure idea. In this sense, “ideal love” or “platonic love” cannot be carnal or realisable; a conception that has no place in Onetti’s poetics.

Perhaps for that same apparent contradiction between an ontological nature and a metaphysical one, Díaz Grey, a dream made flesh, does not manage to possess either Elena Sala or the violinist other than in his imagination, these being ideals of love, of eroticism and of sensuality;²⁶⁸ a sign perhaps of the impossibility of apprehending his own evanescence. And imagination, in its deepest state, becomes ungraspable.

Nevertheless, Brausen's creative dimension is not founded upon reason; that is, it is not a philosophical metaphysics but, sponsored by imagination, a poetic metaphysics. If the first is denied the senses and corporeality, the second is made of desire and of the affections.

Therefore love, at this degree, signifies sensibility. How much do the feelings owe to the sensations? Brausen manages, in consequence, to place salvation on the plane of the sensible by way of happiness. Because it does not matter what idea he may speculate about it; in the end happiness must be felt; that is, brought down to the terrain of the body. Perhaps for this reason Brausen experiences the fear of ceasing to desire la Queca as a fear of seeing his desiring capacity annihilated: "I was afraid of ceasing to desire her and I turned over in the bed so as to evoke, without seeing her back, her stature, her dress of uncreasable linen, the image of la Queca naked, surrendered, the small mouth open and thickened". (168) To desire her, in the end, from the imaginary evocation of desire itself. Even conscious that she was, perhaps, the only door into the world of sensible happiness: "I was prepared to pay a hundred adolescent Gertrudises with two breasts and the totality of this Brausen, as the price for the repetition of the moment in which la Queca was beneath my chest, bent over the table, helping me with her hands, or to look again in her face, solid, palpable, at the cowardice and the abjection". (111)

From this focus, perhaps life is worth the trouble for a single moment of happiness: the happiness of the absurd, as Brausen thinks. (149)²⁶⁹ Because he came to know, in his long process of waking to consciousness through waking to imagination, that love, happiness and the sensations share one and the same territory, for which he was prepared to play to its final consequences. As he said in his time to his wife, when they found themselves "alone, performing, experimenting, trying to understand a simple human situation": (135) "we lack the greatness necessary to put another objective in the place of happiness". (134)

In this way, the dialectic of salvation is implicated in the dialectical spirit of imagination before the human condition, which Brausen experiences as a being: "Bound like Prometheus to the rock, like the dog to the bitch, like our immortal souls to divinity". (162–163)

Salvation has, in this register, a dialectical character because, as Bataille sees: "we cannot be happy without entering into the perspective of anxiety";²⁷⁰ the very anxiety from which one cannot flee. Let us recall that anxiety is that which we ontologically are and is implicated, as Heidegger saw,

²⁶⁸"In *A Brief Life* the violinist is possessed only in fantasy and in the future by Díaz Grey" [my translation]. Josefina Ludmer, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

²⁶⁹As Albert Camus sees: "happiness and the absurd are two children of the same earth [...]. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" [my translation]. *El mito de Sísifo*, pp. 159–160.

²⁷⁰Georges Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 87 [my translation].

in the structure of “being-in-the-world”. Nevertheless, it shows itself only to the man who looks into his abysses. The inauthentic mode of being renounces, by contrast, happiness, insofar as it has renounced beforehand looking at itself. You cannot save yourself without first descending and losing yourself in the abyss of misfortune: “Charon’s boat always heads for the infernal regions”.²⁷¹ It is a lie, in this way, that happiness is found in the unconsciousness of living without noticing. As Heraclitus would say: “If happiness consisted in bodily delights we should have to call oxen happy when they find vetch to eat”.²⁷² And while it is true that, in the perspective of happiness, one cannot dispense with a biochemical order of sensible pleasure in the play of the perceptions, it is also true that one cannot reduce the great complex of happiness to that alone. It is not unconsciousness but the flow of the unconscious amid wakefulness by which the deepest imagination finds a way outward and shows itself. To live in a permanent state of reverie, that is, of perpetual creation. Eroticism burns from the ontological anxiety of being alive.

The problem of happiness in an open world is already its character of radical subjectivity, of utopian completion. A longing for totality which, in the use of consciousness, is translated as plenitude, in which totality takes place in the opening of the interior dimensions. In this way the ephemeral character of happiness is meshed, inevitably, with that of hope: the hope of salvation. A hope whose phenomenon does not occur “prior to knowledge [as] a mental frame of the not-yet-conscious”, as Spinoza pronounced,²⁷³ but in the higher strata of consciousness. For this reason it remains relevant that the hope which Brausen/Arce/Díaz Grey confront should display communicating vessels with that same hope in which Onetti participates: one foreseen at the end of the modern world. It is a matter of hope no longer with a capital letter, but of the hopes that take hold in the dialectic of an imagination that enters also into another state: the dialectic of imagination in a world of images.²⁷⁴

And it is for this dialectic of imagination that the static image becomes the reification of what was once living imagination. For this reason, for creative imagination the rupture of images is necessary. A rupture that occurs as incessant search and dissatisfaction. Onetti himself considers it so: “Beyond my books there is no Santa María; if Santa María existed it is certain that I would do the same as I do today. But, naturally, I would invent a city called Montevideo”.²⁷⁵ A dialectical imagination which, in creative work, takes place in the reverie of the will: a creative space between consciousness and the unconscious.²⁷⁶ A reverie that shows man immensity, the absolute beyond the promise of

²⁷¹“There is no ferryman of good fortune. Charon’s boat is, then, a symbol bound to the indestructible misfortune of men, which crosses the ages of suffering” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 124.

²⁷²Heraclitus, Fragment 4, *op. cit.*, p. 97 [my translation].

²⁷³Agnes Heller, “La situación de la Esperanza al final del siglo”, in *El péndulo de la modernidad*, p. 233 [my translation].

²⁷⁴The Hope with a capital letter that modernity forged comes down in the world with the Holocaust and the two World Wars. Such a “discrediting” gives way, in so-called postmodernity, to the multiple hopes with a small letter. In this it is important to see that “the contrast between the modern and the postmodern is not a contrast between hope and hopelessness”, but a change of horizons. It is a matter of the fall of the modern narratives toward a new cultural logic. *Ibidem*, p. 238 [my translation].

²⁷⁵Juan Carlos Onetti, “Literatura. Ida y vuelta”, in *Réquiem por Faulkner*, p. 197 [my translation].

²⁷⁶“Since reverie is always considered under the aspect of a relaxation, those dreams of precise action that we shall designate as reveries of the will are passed over. And then, when the real is there, with all its force, with all

attaining it: “When I mention the Kingdom of Heaven, I limit myself to asserting its existence. I do not offer it to men”, (216) the parish priest reminds us. Through that middle state between wakefulness and dream, Brausen opens onto the ineffable in himself. Reverie is already, in Bachelard’s language, the contemplation of being gathered at last in the loss of its contours, unencompassable to itself like the sensations that flood it. In this way poetic reverie signifies a creative intoxication that descends in order to ascend; what Nietzsche called the Apollonian-Dionysian.²⁷⁷

In such a reverie of the will (or creative dream, as Novalis called it), Brausen/Arce’s imagination takes on being. Or, what amounts to the same, his being becomes pure imagination in the act of creation: a descent into the *humus* of his abysses, by means of which he attends upon his erotic intimacy directed toward a Superman. And can we not find a correlation between Brausen’s transformations and those of Zarathustra: Brausen, the camel; Díaz Grey, the lion; Arce, the child?²⁷⁸

In this way Arce conquers himself by means of the creative will that was once incipient desire. He is the last transformation of man into superman through what Nietzsche calls the “creative spirit”: a maker of forms, of images. Arce signifies an ultra-man insofar as he incarnates the imagination that was evanescence. And imagination, as we have already seen, represents a human phenomenon and at the same time a superhuman one; the senses already “are and are not of this world”.²⁷⁹

Brausen’s transformations thus manifest the mutations for transcending, in which the threshold of a metaphysical world takes on ontological reality: to become a superman in a state of freedom and imagination, that is, of incessant rupture, because eroticism signifies dynamism, never repetition. In this way Santa María is Arce, and the reverse.²⁸⁰ And here is the other side of the dialectic of salvation: the attempt at a new reification. Because salvation, perhaps found, does not signify a promise of immutability. He who has appropriated himself can also forget himself again, on which Onetti pronounces: “I believe that all people have a zone of purity. Sometimes it has died in them for ever. Sometimes, mysteriously, it is reborn”,²⁸¹ and it is in that mystery that the work of imagination at once unveils and relieves the human condition. Because if man, as Heidegger sees, is given from an inauthentic mode, it will be each man’s work to leave such a state on the way to his conquest:

its terrestrial matter, one can easily believe that the function of the real discards the function of the unreal. The unconscious impulses are then forgotten, the oneiric forces that ceaselessly discharge themselves into conscious life. We shall therefore need to redouble our attention if we wish to discover the prospective activity of images, if we wish to situate the image even ahead of perception, as an adventure of perception” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, p. 10.

²⁷⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *La poética de la ensoñación*; Friedrich Nietzsche, *El nacimiento de la tragedia griega*.

²⁷⁸ Camel as a metaphor of the man who kneels to receive the load of imposed values he must obey (Gertrudis, the duty of love, of happiness, of work) and who, like Brausen, flees, in an attempt to save himself, toward the desert so as to be transformed into a lion in the midst of the solitude so longed for and previously lost (the absence of intimacy in his flat). Lion as a metaphor of the will to confront the imposed values (a confrontation with himself) through the “I will” (the will to be Díaz Grey). Child, finally, in Arce, who rises with his own values. A new ontological state whose essence is given in play; that is, in imagination restored to its primitive state, to man’s infancy.

²⁷⁹ Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, p. 10 [my translation].

²⁸⁰ Noel Arnaud would say: “I am the space where I am” [my translation].

²⁸¹ Juan Carlos Onetti, “La literatura. Ida y vuelta”, in *Requiem por Faulkner*, p. 193 [my translation].

“it will be each man’s work to know himself and to be sensible”,²⁸² Heraclitus would say; to find his zone of purity, what is proper to his being.

For the above, it is symptomatic that, in *A Brief Life*, Brausen should be the only “character” who undergoes a series of mutations in order to find himself. That is, only he moves from an inauthentic mode of existence to one in which what is proper is himself. He alone, lodged in the impersonal world, opens his eyes so as to keep himself awake and to un-veil himself, that is, to keep vigil over his being. Jorge Ruffinelli classifies Onetti’s characters in this way: “If one were to make a typology of Onetti’s characters, a primary separation into two groups could be admitted [...]: those who accept and live their own mediocre life without questioning, and those who rebel before their reality precisely because they possess a tragic lucidity”.²⁸³

Seen this way, perhaps the key to Brausen’s happiness lies not only in creating images but in his capacity to do violence to them, in his force of constant self-destruction. Brausen will be at all times a reborn man. The spirit of imagination already implies renewal. On this, Bachelard’s notion of the imaginative phenomenon is revealing:

imagination is not, as the etymology suggests, the faculty of forming images of reality; it is the faculty of forming images that surpass reality, that sing reality. It is a faculty of superhumanity. A man is a man in the proportion in which he is a superman. A man must be defined by the set of tendencies that impel him to surpass the human condition.²⁸⁴

As we can see, happiness signifies for Brausen a state always still to be attained rather than a condition. For this reason, the danger of the search for happiness that Brausen confronts during his crossing, as does Díaz Grey, lies in managing to differentiate it from the resources that make it possible: money, objects, travel tickets, work. Faced with this, it was not the film treatment converted into a cheque but imagination that Brausen penetrated; imagination alone signifies means and end simultaneously.

This whole perspective of Onetti’s on salvation and happiness has a profoundly Stoic echo. A Stoicism in which the figure of Seneca stands out, for whom “true happiness consists not in having everything but in desiring nothing”.²⁸⁵ For this reason it is symptomatic that the title *A Brief Life* of Onetti’s novel should bear a similarity to Seneca’s *On the Shortness of Life*,²⁸⁶ a work in which the consciousness of death and of the absurd interrogates authentic life and its bond with the vital. The phrase “brief life” is already woven from that Latin sentence (*vitam brevem esse, longam artem*) that Seneca in turn takes from Hippocrates, father of modern medicine, and which in full, of Greek

²⁸² Heraclitus, Fragment 116, *op. cit.*, p. 106 [my translation].

²⁸³ Jorge Ruffinelli, “Notas sobre Larsen”, in *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, nos. 292–294, 1974 (101–117), p. 103 [my translation].

²⁸⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 31 [my translation].

²⁸⁵ Seneca, *Sobre la felicidad*. Available in the Biblioteca de Clásicos Grecolatinos at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130624233716/http://www.cayocesarcalgula.com.ar/grecolatinos/seneca/felicidad.html>.

²⁸⁶ Seneca, *Sobre la brevedad de la vida*, trans. Francisco Socas Gavilán, Andalucía, Junta de Andalucía, 2010.

origin, runs thus: “Life is short, and art long; the crisis fleeting; experience perilous, and decision difficult. The physician must not only be prepared to do what is right himself, but also to make the patient, the attendants, and externals cooperate”.²⁸⁷ Symptomatically, such a sentence, which found an echo in Díaz Grey (Brausen’s fictional doctor), is found transferred into the French song (music) by Fikret Kızılok that Miriam Mami, Stein’s partner, sings, and which Arce (the other fiction alongside Díaz Grey) will whistle: “La vie est brève / un peu d’amour / un peu de rêve / et puis bonjour. / La vie est brève / un peu d’espoir / un peu de rêve / et puis bonsoir”. (161)²⁸⁸ Moreover, Daniel Balderston has already stressed the intertextual plays on “the brief life” both within and outside the novel.²⁸⁹

In consequence, if the key to appealing to salvation in this state of death and resurrection of a Stoic cast is found in sensible happiness, what is its nature and its contradiction? In what way does Brausen manage to penetrate the threshold of the perceptions so as to re-create himself? And, moreover, how far does reconfiguring oneself amount to changing the exterior world? How far does metaphysical totality modify the ontological circumstance? Put another way, how can Santa María return and bear upon the Buenos Aires of the old Brausen?

Here it is important to note that, from the beginning of the novel, Queca calls her reality a “mad world” not as a pronouncement but as an interpretation: “As though she were translating it” (the maxim with which the novel begins, as though this were the key to opening it). That is, she transformed and inhabited her own space. The world was her will and her representation, in Schopenhauer’s terms.²⁹⁰ Understood thus, Brausen finds himself before titans, because if, as Bachelard sees along this Schopenhauerian line: “if the world is my will, it is also my adversary; the greater the will, the greater the adversary”,²⁹¹ then Santa María must be erected at double the height from a suffocated Buenos Aires.

As may be noted, la Queca’s nihilist phrase already anticipates the philosophical poetics (philosophical insofar as it becomes a praxis of life) of Brausen himself. A nihilism understood as an exaltation of the will, ethical and therefore aesthetic, before a world that shows itself devoid of sense. Nihilism, seen in this way, does not imply a renunciation of living but a transforming attitude; that is, of interpreting at will in the refusal to accept reality as dogma. Because if the real subsists

²⁸⁷ In the Greek original: Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὀξὺς, ἡ δὲ πείρα σφαλερὴ, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπὴ. δεῖ δὲ οὐ μόνον ἑαυτὸν παρέχειν τὰ δέοντα ποιεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν νοσέοντα, καὶ τοὺς παρεόντας, καὶ τὰ ἐξώθεν. Consulted at: <https://citas.in/frases/81945-hipocrates-el-arte-es-largo-la-vida-breve-la-ocasion-fugiti/>

²⁸⁸ Life is brief / a little dream / a little love / and then, good day! / Life is vain / a little sorrow / a little hope / and then, good night!

²⁸⁹ Daniel Balderston, “Arte y alusión en La vida breve”, Alicante, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2016. Digital edition from *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21-26 de agosto de 1989*, Barcelona, Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992, pp. 429–433. Available at: <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/arte-y-alusion-en-la-vida-breve/>.

²⁹⁰ *El mundo como voluntad y representación* (México, FCE, 2003).

²⁹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 239 [my translation].

as mystery, reality therefore takes on the force of a hermeneutics.²⁹² A Hermes who guards what is hidden, before which imagination comes as a poetic phenomenology so as to manage to perceive otherwise.²⁹³ For this reason the importance of managing to cross the doors of perception lies in modifying not exterior reality but the conception we hold of it, and so recasting ourselves before it.

As Brausen himself would say: “it is not the facts that matter, but what we feel”.²⁹⁴ And finally, what are facts if not interpretations? Since reality does not signify a fact *per se* but a construction, Brausen, in interpreting it anew, transforms it. A view, without doubt, of Novalian echo, for whom: “if you cannot turn thoughts into exterior things, turn exterior things into thoughts”.²⁹⁵

Brausen, in penetrating his everyday trap (money, wife, work), not only realises its lack of sense but is also shown by it the senselessness of life itself, the existential void before which Brausen wavers at the helm of his vessel, only to discover that it will be imagination, the path of access to the deepest in himself, that is the way of keeping awake before the song of the sirens of inauthenticity. Like Ulysses on his voyage, he binds himself with the ropes of imagination so as not to fall into the ocean of surfaces; with imagination he “subjects”²⁹⁶ himself.

This nihilism that Brausen auscultates conceals, in turn, the secret of the search for happiness. In la Queca he already arrives at the two greatest sensory phenomena of existence: life and death.²⁹⁷ That is, he attends, by the carnal way (in the redoubt of carnival), upon the mystery of being. Is being not perhaps surrounded by non-being, to which Brausen returns in order to unstitch himself and be reborn as Arce? Such a sensory summit, the encounter with his erotic dimension, cannot be reduced to simple hedonism. Brausen’s voluptuousness, illuminated by the tremulous flame of imagination, clears the interior immensity that can only be revealed in the carnal instant. Nevertheless, the paradox Brausen confronts is that of how to keep happiness from signifying an evanescence reduced solely to sensible pleasure.

²⁹²As Ricoeur sees, if “ontology is not possible except as phenomenology, [then] phenomenology itself is only possible as hermeneutics” (Paul Ricoeur, *Tiempo y Narración, III. El tiempo narrado*, México, Siglo XXI, 1996, p. 721) [my translation].

²⁹³See the note on Hermes, the hermetic and hermeneutics in Chapter 2. [Translator’s note: the Spanish reads “see note 95”. Chapter 4 restarts its numbering at 1, so the reference points outside the chapter; on the evidence of the surrounding argument the target is the Hermes note in Chapter 2, and it is named descriptively here so that it survives renumbering.]

²⁹⁴Juan Carlos Onetti, *La vida breve*, p. 231. For Zambrano: “Feeling constitutes us more than any other of the psychic functions; one might say that the others we have, whereas feeling we are” [my translation]. [María Zambrano, “Para una historia de la Piedad”, in *Aurora: papeles del Seminario María Zambrano*, Barcelona, no. 1, 2012 (64–72), <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Aurora/article/view/260744>, consulted 14 June 2020, p. 65.]

²⁹⁵Rüdiger Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 77 [my translation].

²⁹⁶Let us recall that “subject” has been the modern category par excellence for naming “man”, which must be read as the one who is conscious of himself and of his world. Nevertheless, we shall find its critique in Heidegger, who points out that this category has been sponsored from the enlightened reason that reduces the human condition to pure consciousness and to reason (Kant). Here is one of the many points of departure for his “phenomenology of being” in: *Kant y el problema de la metafísica* (México, FCE, 1981). What is fundamental in man, Heidegger says, is not reason (*episteme*) but being (*Dasein*).

²⁹⁷Cf. Georges Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 92.

His great achievement therefore consists in extrapolating the act of love with la Queca to the founding of Santa María, in a manner not only of keeping alive a desire whose nature is ephemeral but of inhabiting it in its duration. Because what matters to Brausen about carnality is not its sexual fruit but its erotic one. Proof of this is given when Raquel, Gertrudis's younger sister and Brausen's old lover, visits him once he has been reborn as Arce, and he not only fails to recognise her at once but finds in her something that repels him; she is pregnant, and "the belly that grows on her amounts to the breast they cut from her sister". (230) Put another way, Brausen seeks to make of the sexual instant a lasting erotics.²⁹⁸ Does art, as creative expression, not manage to keep desire alive in its struggle against time? *Ars longa, vita brevis*. Santa María is an eternal midday for the hours of everydayness. A mythical provincial city, it thus represents the poetics of sensible excitation within a transcendence that wells up from the instant at the same time as it surpasses it. An instantaneous transcendence whose force, imposing for consciousness and uncontrollable for the senses, shows itself only once, like lightning in the storm: a snapshot of revelation.

Finally, only Eros can communicate the ontological dimension with the metaphysical, or what amounts to the same, find totality in the everyday, eternity in the ephemeral and plenitude in transit. For this reason Brausen will very soon note, in the exercise of imagination, that the universal is found veiled within the ordinary singular. Seen thus, Santa María takes on the force of the instant that endures, voluptuousness incarnated in the body that transcends the physical; a provincial city founded by "the maniacal task of constructing eternities with elements made of fleetingness, transit and forgetting". (83)

Carnality as eroticism thus signifies a path of knowledge. Brausen manages to converge fiction and self-fiction in his own flesh so as to find, within himself, the lost breast that was himself. The poetic instant already has a metaphysical perspective.²⁹⁹ The freedom so longed for must be found, in this way, in the exaltation of the senses in a descent through the well of his being.

Understood thus, the work of salvation lies in inhabiting his interior immensity. An immensity to which anxiety is inherent, but also totality. An intimate immensity, Bachelard would say.³⁰⁰ And perhaps one can only imagine with plenitude from intimacy, that intimacy Brausen had lost; a loss, therefore, that suffocated him. For this reason Brausen, awake from his existential trap, comes in search of his intimacy so as to find himself, because as Bachelard notes: "the search for intimacy is a dialectic that no unhappy experience can arrest",³⁰¹ for in it are found the hidden values of being; in it imagination "goes to the bottom of things, as if it had to find, in a final image, the rest of imagining".³⁰²

²⁹⁸"The erotic act detaches itself from the sexual act" [my translation]. Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, p. 13.

²⁹⁹Cf. Gaston Bachelard, "Instante poético e instante metafísico", in *El derecho de soñar*, p. 222.

³⁰⁰Cf. Gaston Bachelard, *La poética del espacio*.

³⁰¹Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y las ensoñaciones del reposo. Ensayo sobre las imágenes de la intimidad*, p. 66 [my translation].

³⁰²Gaston Bachelard, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, p. 20 [my translation].

Salvation is not found, from this focus, only in the mind or, what amounts to the same, it is not a salvation achieved with pure mental speculation. Imagination occurs not only as a phenomenon of the psyche but of the whole body. A breath of sensations, it recasts corporeality, because there are demons that inhabit the abysses of the flesh. The instant, seen in this way in pursuit of a sensible salvation, reveals being and its reality.³⁰³ There is no consciousness of self without an anticipated consciousness of death. Yet if the instant reveals time, it also exceeds it: it becomes ardour. A way toward play with eternity, apprehended by the creative word, because as Paz saw:

the poetic word is never completely of this world: it always carries us beyond, to other lands, other skies, other truths [...]. The dual condition of the poetic word is no different from the nature of man, a temporal and relative being but always launched toward the absolute. [...] In every instant it wants to realise itself as totality, and each of its hours is a monument to a momentary eternity.³⁰⁴

The salvation sought, finally, in the sensual happiness of love, has the weight of serving as a poetics of transcendence. Consciousness in a state of extreme lucidity is equivalent to a state of unconsciousness: the threshold of reason touches the limits of madness. The lucidity of dream and of wakefulness are two extremes of one and the same phenomenon: two paths of access to being. Brausen's pitiless consciousness presents itself to him as an intoxication.

Love, lodged in the dialectic of imagination, thus represents a phenomenon of superhumanity. Through it Brausen finds the possibility of transcending himself: of penetrating his metaphysical dimension in the nature of myth, that is, in access to the real that dwells in him. Because myth, as Mircea Eliade saw, reveals a metaphysical position.³⁰⁵ Put another way, Brausen repositions, through imagination, his ontological position before his world. And such a poetic sensibility has the capacity to enter the unknown, in the last instance the unknown that he himself is, that forgotten essential value.

It is important to note that myth, more than a historical time, signifies for man his imaginative dimension, a type of sensibility. As Mircea Eliade points out, myth has a present-day currency in the need for rites; that is, for narratives.³⁰⁶ Through the time of myth, being becomes round. In consequence, the aesthetic dimension (*aïsthetikê*) does not refer, as modern philosophy has taken

³⁰³"If my being takes consciousness of itself only in the present instant, how can one not see that that instant is the only terrain on which reality is put to the test? [...] How could the present instant not imprint its mark upon reality?" [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *La intuición del instante*, p. 12.

³⁰⁴Octavio Paz, *El arco y la lira*, México, FCE, 2006 (facsimile edition), p. 187 [my translation]. Paz of course refers to the poem as against the novel. It would be worth studying their dissonances in depth.

³⁰⁵"The symbol, the myth, the rite, at different levels and by the means proper to them, express a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that may be considered in itself as a metaphysics" [my translation]. Mircea Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno*, pp. 15–16.

³⁰⁶Mircea Eliade, *Mito y realidad*.

it, solely to beauty. Properly understood, it signifies sensibility.³⁰⁷ In this sense Brausen recasts his aesthetic dimension, that sensibility he holds of himself before his world, by reconfiguring his ethical position. Creative imagination crosses both thresholds simultaneously.³⁰⁸

In this way, through the work of the creative imagination, Brausen manages to find in fiction a form of authentic salvation insofar as he glimpses and reads in it the problem of his ordinary existence. It is a consciousness that not only dismantles immediate reality but also looks at fictional reality in a search for, and a construction of, the new foundation of the identity of his being. For this reason Brausen discovers himself symbolically at this other degree of referentiality: “I knew then what I wanted to resurrect now with the name of Díaz Grey. I knew the masculine speed of the girl (a young Gertrudis), her pitiless manner of suppressing the prologue, the phrases and gestures that are not fundamental”. (37)

Fiction and self-fiction become for him another way of examining himself. The acuteness of imagination in Brausen will lead him not only to construct fiction out of his reality but to find in fiction his own remains. Finally, Brausen imagines from the ruins he carries within. Santa María, perhaps a mirror of water, does not reveal his face directly and clearly but, as in all creation, reflects it ambiguously. It is a gaze that does not remain on the surfaces but approaches the depth where being drowns (voluptuousness) but is also reborn.

Salvation, on the other hand and notwithstanding its relation with the world of myth, has no religious-theistic sense. Yet the only way of access to it is given in the arrival at the metaphysical dimension, whose nature is always divine. God, understood as a metaphor of the sensible and no longer only as an abstract category, will be the maximal being of that meta-human dimension. Put another way, man will be the only God of himself. In this way, through religious paths (writing, love, intoxication, as Onetti would say: forms of rite) it will be possible to inhabit myth, that is, to strive for an erotic salvation. Myth, therefore, lodged in human earthliness. In the parish priest’s words:

Yo besaré los pies de aquel que comprenda que la eternidad es ahora, que él mismo es el único fin; que acepte y se empeñe en ser él mismo, solamente porque sí, en todo momento y contra todo lo que se oponga, arrastrado por la intensidad, engañado por la memoria y la fantasía. Beso sus pies, aplaudo el coraje de aquel que aceptó todas y cada una de las leyes de un juego que no fue inventado por él, que no le preguntaron si quería jugar. (216)

I shall kiss the feet of the man who understands that eternity is now, that he himself is the only end; who accepts and insists on being himself, simply because, at every moment and against

³⁰⁷The strict sense of aesthetics, from the Greek *αἰσθητική* (*aisthetikē*), is that of “sensation”. If man’s position in the cosmos is a position that is always aesthetic, culture may be translated as a specific sensibility.

³⁰⁸Understood thus, “the aesthetic dimension” comes to recast the imaginative capacity of the individual and with it his critical and creative faculty for a reality that goes beyond the one instituted by the capitalist mechanisms of mass production. The aesthetic dimension is, fundamentally, a human dimension, whose loss leads to the severing of the possibility of sensible totality. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, “La dimensión estética”, in *Eros y civilización*, Madrid, Sarpe, 1983, pp. 163–182.

everything that opposes him, dragged along by intensity, deceived by memory and by fantasy. I kiss his feet, I applaud the courage of the man who accepted each and every one of the laws of a game that was not invented by him, who was not asked whether he wanted to play. (216)

A parish priest who, recognising God's existence, confines himself to man's salvation on Earth. The experience of man on the way to salvation in an opening onto the divine occurs not in the search for paradise but in the experience of being as return.

Consequently, the note Brausen finds from Gertrudis announcing her departure for Temperley, written on the back of a card bearing "The Great Invocation",³⁰⁹ carries hidden within it the key to his salvation, of which Brausen understands "almost all the words that were in capitals": "From", "God", "Let", "Will", "Love", "Power", "Plan", "Earth". (It is worth noting that such an invocation belongs to no religion in particular; on the contrary, it is a universal prayer that gives an indication of man's place in the cosmos.) Those key words will be the condition of Arce's life in his search to save himself in a creative happiness unleashed in the poetics of knowing that: "the whole science of living lies in the simple softness of settling into the hollows of the events we have not provoked with our will, not forcing anything, being, simply, every minute". (246) A poetics that reveals an attempt to approach the natural pre-ontological harmonic state. That is, to touch, through eroticism, the limits of the human condition in the return to its foundation.³¹⁰ Such work implies, through imagination, descending to the sensible membrane that separates while it communicates the real, given and inaccessible, with reality as construct (the house of being). Here lies the dialectical force between trap and salvation, where the trap consists in the human condition and salvation in standing outside it, in the acceptance of living without will, outside all ethical dilemma, imitating immanence.³¹¹ And Onetti, nourished by a literary tradition for which imagination is the cornerstone, allows us to read here a dialogue at low pulse with Kafka's *The Trial*, where Mr K., in his will to die like a dog, beyond all negative reading, was perhaps attempting to save himself by managing, through imagination, to stand outside the human condition that had pursued and exhausted him to the point of absurdity. A will strengthened by his belief that he was suffering an unworthy death before a life he took to be authentic. Finally the question remains: of what was Mr K. guilty? Or with Dostoevsky's *A Writer's Diary*, where he noted: "Since, to my questions about happiness, it is declared to me in answer, by means of my consciousness, that I cannot be happy except in that harmony with the great whole which I neither conceive nor shall ever be capable of conceiving, it

³⁰⁹"The New Invocation / From the point of Light within the Mind of God / Let light stream forth into the minds of men. / Let light descend on Earth. / From the centre where the Will of God is known / Let purpose guide the little wills of men / The purpose which the Master knows and serves. / Let light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth". (234) [Translator's note: the Spanish edition prints the English original followed by a Spanish translation, since the capitalised words Brausen recognises are English. The English edition needs only the original.]

³¹⁰"Eroticism is a rhythm: one of its chords is separation, the other is return, a coming back to reconciled nature [...]. A return to primordial reality [...], an understanding not intellectual but sensible: a knowledge of the senses" [my translation]. Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, p. 28.

³¹¹"Through death we participate in the cosmic tragedy, through birth we participate in the biological adventure, through existence we participate in the human destiny" [my translation]. Edgar Morin, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

is evident...”.³¹²

Under such a view, “the crime” that drives every action in the novel acquires the value of “the murder of reality [for which] the corpse has never been found”.³¹³ And imagination, by contrast, becomes the search for the criminal, only to discover that “one is oneself murderer and victim”,³¹⁴ within a “society without narratives”.³¹⁵

Brausen attends, in consequence, upon the primal force of his most subjective and radical imagination (incarnated in Díaz Grey), where the most radical freedom (Arce) may also well up unbidden.³¹⁶ An access given, as I have stressed, in the act of love with la Queca, because perhaps it is in the *petite mort* that Brausen touches the limits of his being; that is, his ontological limits in their metaphysical proximity. Brausen penetrated into his own depth, he remains suspended in totality.³¹⁷

Hence love, in the order of the sensible and of happiness, accompanies Brausen’s being on its journeys from the ontological to the metaphysical. Love would be, for him, the other face of his imagination: the hidden countenance of subjectivity. Finally, a poetic phenomenology (*A Brief Life*) is already a phenomenology of love. A phenomenology for which the other (Gertrudis, la Queca, Elena Sala, the violinist) is no longer other. Because as Hannah Arendt makes clear, love plays outside the political, in this case outside Brausen’s public tensions of power. Paraphrasing Foucault,³¹⁸ I would say that if the body signifies, within a modern society (Macleod Advertising), a political field reduced to its useful capacity, through love that body becomes, for Brausen, a territory of the encounter of being: an appropriation of unveiling. The amorous battle takes place, this time, in another order, a symbolic one that happens in the mystery between the carnal and the evanescent.

Seen thus, for Brausen the other no longer represents a territory of combat where his identity is in danger and must be defended, but an encounter with totality, or with nothingness; a restitution of unity. And being already signifies incompleteness; ontologically limited, it cannot be total. Before such a feeling of fragmentariness, imagination rises as a search that builds on the threshold of evanescences. To imagine means to empower oneself. If man is condemned to live on an ontological plane through the senses, salvation is glimpsed in being able to inhabit another plane whose nature exceeds that limit; a metaphysical dimension. Only imagination manages to communicate one plane with the other. As we saw at the beginning of the novel, if the senses, as receivers of the exterior world, are limited to one plane of existence, volitional imagination attends upon them at the same

³¹²Cited in Albert Camus, “Kirilov”, in *El mito de Sísifo*, p. 137 [my translation].

³¹³Jean Baudrillard, *El crimen perfecto*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2000, p. 7 [my translation].

³¹⁴“In the last instance, the murderer and the victim are one and the same person. We can conceive the unity of the human race only if we can conceive, in all its horror, the truth of this essential equivalence” [my translation]. Éric Gans, cited in Jean Baudrillard, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³¹⁵Cf. Néstor García Canclini, *La sociedad sin relato. Antropología y estética de la inminencia*, México, Debolsillo, 2010.

³¹⁶Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, *La institución imaginaria de la sociedad*.

³¹⁷“Voluptuousness for man is already animality” [my translation]. Bataille, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura*, p. 83.

³¹⁸Cf. Michel Foucault, *Vigilar y castigar. Nacimiento de la prisión*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1976.

time as it goes beyond them in the possibility of reconfiguring the interior world. Imagination is thus the faculty of creating ontological realities.

In such a register, through erotic (creative) love, Brausen no longer sees himself as an ontologically limited being but as a metaphysically liberated one: Santa María is the other made space. An aesthetic liberation that implies liberation in an ethical order, that is, of Brausen's valuation before his world; an aesthetic perspective reveals a personality. Not for nothing, for Nietzsche (with whom we can weave a dialogue with *A Brief Life*): "what is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil".³¹⁹

A Brief Life is woven, along this line, between the "thirst" for otherness, in Paz's words, and the "water" of creation as recovered intimacy, in which the masculine and feminine tension survives, Juan and María; that is, creator and creature.³²⁰ Because love, the flame of imagination, is also an imaginary that impels us to imagine.

At this degree, the limits of imagination show the limits of being. Brausen discovers that imagination is not in the surfaces but in the depths. Or what amounts to the same, the expression of imagination he can access and apprehend as a volitional act has its depth in the abysses of his "human condition". Imagination (as phenomenon) is already in itself inaccessible in a total way from a state of consciousness: it is within Brausen's will, but also outside his dominion. Nevertheless, in the work of gaining access to it, he discovers it, if as a faculty, then also as his being. Because as William Blake saw: "imagination is not a state: it is the human existence itself". Imagination is the "land" in which Brausen's identity puts down its roots.

Consequently Brausen, a traveller of the sensible, realises that while imagination is the seed of the house of being,³²¹ it also signifies a crack, a "fissure in the ontological edifice",³²² that is, a wound of reality: the door of madness that calls him to the "mad world". Imagination thus rises upon the Orphic-Dionysian so as to re-veal what is hidden in his interiority: the Dionysian-Apollonian. And it is in this procedure that the questioning of the ontological foundation of reality and of fiction takes place. Because as Unamuno had already warned: "When a man... dreams something, which exists more: he as the consciousness that dreams, or his dream?" To which we may say: which is more real, Brausen or Arce, Buenos Aires or Santa María, the trap or salvation?

From this angle of reflection, if we look in perspective and panoramically, we shall still realise that that provincial city made with the matter of water (*A Brief Life*, 1950) ends up consumed by flames (*Let the Wind Speak*, 1979), thus revealing its tension between water and fire, that is, between creation and destruction: a renewal of the spirit of imagination. Imagination already signifies violence and rupture, a radical negative force, as Žižek called it, channelled, through love and eroticism, into

³¹⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Más allá del bien y del mal*, aphorism 153.

³²⁰"The consciousness of being alone is always the nostalgia of being two" [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, "Fragmentos de un diario", in *El derecho de soñar*, p. 233.

³²¹In Heidegger's terms (*Ser y tiempo*).

³²²Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*

creative dynamism. Water and fire are two mythic elements whose natures oppose and complement each other: “water is the tomb of fire and the tomb of men”.³²³

Santa María, a mythical city, rests in the depth of the sea (Thalassa), always at risk of being scorched by itself. And founded by and through water (fresh and salt), the way of salvation for its inhabitants is found in love, that is, in the flame of eroticism.³²⁴ fire is love and water is depth. Life and death, Eros and Thanatos. A wound of finitude and eternity. A contradiction in which Brausen-Arce-Díaz Grey struggles. Only when he reaches the fire of eroticism does he find himself submerged in the oceanic depth of his abysses. “The interior of man has a marine entrail, and whoever dreams at the edge of a sleeping water”, Bachelard says, “never recovers from it”.³²⁵ Who dares turn his gaze toward such a well of anxiety? “The soul is so great a matter! One does not dare contemplate it”.³²⁶ Brausen submerges himself only to note that the deepest dream is light as a bird.

Understood thus, *A Brief Life* is channelled into Thalassa. A sea that is love: man’s burnt water. Because the whole plot is played out between finitude and eternity, between pieces of life and totality. Is that not perhaps salvation? A dismemberment of the soul before the concave mirror of fiction, so as to make of sensibility a communion beyond the flesh and at the same time beyond the body. A search at the doors of perception in the midst of the question of being. Man, neither animal nor God, is already the drama of the being who seeks the reconciliation lost perhaps for ever.

Brausen shows us that to be a man means to be a threshold (every threshold is a wound); an inhabitant of a space always in between: between reality and fiction, dream and wakefulness, hope and failure, desire and anxiety.³²⁷ Brausen speaks on the threshold of being. Because unlike the hero who seeks to find, this demiurge seeks to create, in the knowledge that there is, in the world of men, no salvation upon which he might set out. It must be created out of himself. For this reason his *poiesis* leads to an autopoiesis. A creation for which he would be prepared, like Prometheus on his rock, to assume all suffering so that it may live: a Santa María that is himself.³²⁸ For this reason that being “bound like Prometheus to the rock”, (162) far from all negativity, has the greatness of the will to confront the absurdity of life so as to live it in an authentic way. In this manner Brausen/

³²³Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 123 [my translation].

³²⁴“The original and primordial fire, sexuality, raises the red flame of eroticism, and this in turn sustains and lifts another flame, blue and tremulous: that of love. Eroticism and love: the double flame of life” [my translation]. Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, p. 7.

³²⁵Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 141 [my translation].

³²⁶*Ibidem*, p. 86 [my translation].

³²⁷“Eros is neither a god nor a man: he is a demon, a spirit that lives between the gods and mortals. He is defined by the preposition *between* [...]. He is the son of Poverty and of Abundance, and this explains his nature as an intermediary: he communicates light with shadow, the sensible world with the ideas. As the son of Poverty, he seeks wealth; as the son of Abundance, he distributes goods. He is the desiring one who asks, the desired one who gives. Love is not beautiful: he desires beauty. All men desire” [my translation]. Octavio Paz, *La llama doble*, p. 42.

³²⁸Prometheus, titan creator and protector of humanity, steals the Olympian fire so as to hand it to mortals and allow them to grow in civilisation. Zeus, enraged by such an act, condemns him to remain bound to a rock where an eagle gnaws his liver each day. Prometheus being immortal, during the night his liver regenerates so as to be devoured the following day. After a time, Zeus attempts to negotiate with him to withdraw the fire from among mortals and so avoid such a cruel punishment. Nevertheless Prometheus refuses, preferring to suffer eternally for his creation.

Arce assumes himself as the titan who protects his genuine intimacy after granting it the divine fire. An intimacy that will found his new imaginary civilisation: Santa María and its men. Brausen/Arce will thus mediate between the animality of men (“like the dog to the bitch”) and their aspiration to the gods (“like our immortal souls to divinity”). (163)

In such a poietic logic, Brausen, a visitor of his ontological threshold, moves between the words that designate and the sensations that inhabit. “Things and words bleed from the same wound”.³²⁹ And as Eduardo Bécerra already saw, “Santa María, ‘the accursed city’ or ‘the city beside the river’, was destroyed not by fire but by the word that designates it. Yet it is not for that reason any less true. Because what is truth at this stage?”.³³⁰ To which we may still ask: does love, made of words, not exceed words themselves? Does love not gather divinity and animality? As Edgar Morin saw: “love proceeds at the same time from the word and precedes the word”;³³¹ it founds reality, but it also surpasses it, destroys it.

Thalassa, the end of *A Brief Life*, shows the reunion of Morpheus and Orpheus. Eros and Psyche. Divinity and Mortality. That is, the bond between Díaz Grey and the violinist. The encounter of Arce with Brausen. A bridge between fatality and salvation, fragmentariness and totality: the one and the multiple; a tension between the primitive elements and the *arche* (ἀρχή). Such a communion of opposites is achieved through love in pursuit of a salvation that, while it lives, is always a promise. And if the spirit of imagination is dialectical, so too is that of love. As Joaquín Xirau sees: “love is the dialectical force that aspires to surpass plurality so as to arrive at unity [...]; like dialectic, love leads us to the doors of being [...]: by its effort, it raises the inferior forms to the superior forms of existence”.³³²

A Brief Life, like every living being, is born in water, and water, like the human soul, is an element of transition: “an essential ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth”.³³³ Thalassa represents the excess of being, its overflowing, experienced from voluptuousness; an overspilling of the senses: “water that is going to well up everywhere, in being and outside being”.³³⁴ Thalassa strips bare Brausen’s depth: the labyrinth of his existence. He, born of water, finds his renewal in fire.

In this way the dialectic of imagination, revealed in the dialectic of eroticism, brings with it the tension between trap and salvation, showing their depths not visible in the everyday. Lodged in Brausen’s daily becoming, they answer to an ontological order. Put another way, the trap lies veiled in Brausen’s most hidden being, in his condition as a man, and salvation can only be achieved in the

³²⁹Octavio Paz, *El arco y la lira*, p. 29 [my translation].

³³⁰Eduardo Bécerra, *op. cit.*, p. 241 [my translation].

³³¹Edgar Morin, *Amor, poesía, sabiduría*, Montevideo, Trilce, 1996, p. 23 [my translation].

³³²Joaquín Xirau, *Amor y mundo*, México, El Colegio de México, 1942, p. 12 [my translation].

³³³“The being consecrated to water is a being in vertigo. It dies every minute, ceaselessly something of its substance collapses. Everyday death is not the exuberant death of fire that crosses the sky with its arrows; everyday death is the death of water. Water always runs, water always falls, it always concludes in its horizontal death [...] the death of water is more dreamlike than the death of earth: the sorrow of water is infinite” [my translation]. Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 15.

³³⁴Gaston Bachelard, *El agua y los sueños*, p. 70 [my translation].

descent into such an abyss. A work that leads Brausen to unfold his ontological and metaphysical dimension, that is, his ethical and aesthetic one, which he kept in forgetting insofar as what was forgotten was his being. Consequently both Díaz Grey and Arce represent new forms of existence in which Brausen's being moves among distinct levels of fiction, or levels of reality. Such journeys signify, in turn, transgressions between reality and fiction: a widening of the rationally bound being.³³⁵ Brausen, become imagination himself, is erected as the ontological tree that opens its crown to the metaphysical thresholds. And "Arce" is also the name of a tree, the maple, whose flower is found not in the crown but in its sap: in the metaphorical blood of itself. The sweetness of love wrapped in the hardness of the will. Arce is a tree, a tree of water, and it is known that: "a tree is a whole universe".³³⁶

Understood in this way, the plot of this novel, the hermeneutic return from which salvation takes on sense occurs in the disturbance of the reader's reality, of that non-textual referent to which the fictional being returns to the being that we are. "Señor Albano", the last chapter of *A Brief Life*, has the importance, on one side, of marking the narrative freedom of Díaz Grey, who has taken on the force of the narrative; a symptom of the existential totality of what was once a midday dream. On the other, of appealing to a "you" toward the violinist that at the same time calls upon the reader. In this way, if the novel was Brausen's voice,³³⁷ in the Díaz Grey-violinist tension there lies hidden the existential freedom of the reader, his ontological dominion.

And the transpositions between levels of reality persist within *A Brief Life*, to the degree of finding ourselves before an Onetti in the "deception" of "Brausen Advertising":

El hombre que me había alquilado la mitad de la oficina se llamaba Onetti, no sonreía, usaba anteojos, dejaba adivinar que sólo podía ser simpático a mujeres fantasiosas o amigos íntimos. [...]. No hubo preguntas, ningún síntoma del deseo de intimar; Onetti me saludaba con monosílabos a los que infundía una imprecisa vibración de cariño, una burla impersonal. Me saludaba a las diez, pedía café a las once, atendía visitas y el teléfono, revisaba papeles, fumaba sin ansiedad, conversaba con una voz grave, invariable y perezosa. (204)

The man who had rented me half the office was called Onetti; he did not smile, he wore spectacles, he let it be guessed that he could only be agreeable to fanciful women or intimate friends. [...]. There were no questions, no symptom of the desire for closeness; Onetti greeted me with monosyllables into which he infused an imprecise vibration of affection, an impersonal mockery. He greeted me at ten, asked for coffee at eleven, attended to visitors and to the

³³⁵Not for nothing, for the Romantics: "we transform and increase ourselves and others through imagination" [my translation]. Cf. Rüdiger Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³³⁶Gaston Bachelard, *El aire y los sueños*, p. 277 [my translation].

³³⁷Attending to Kundera, for whom "the novel is not a confession of the author but an exploration of what human life is within the trap the world has become" (*La insostenible levedad del ser*), I might say that Brausen, as character, narrates himself in search of authentic sense within his circumstantial trap. To recount oneself constitutes a way of seeking oneself.

telephone, went through papers, smoked without anxiety, conversed in a grave, invariable and lazy voice. (204)

In such a transposition and appeal, if we bring to mind the Ricoeurian notions of the triple mimesis,³³⁸ it may be understood that the value of the fictional narrative lies in its serving as a symbolic mediator between a world of before and a world of after, within a weave that grants sense. Because the singularity of the fictional narrative within a “human plot” lies, consequently, in its capacity to recast temporal experience and with it the notion of oneself.³³⁹ And here is the order of trap and salvation, in which imagination mediates between one and the other in the resignification of the world and of experience, insofar as the fictional narrative reconfigures our sensible experience. Because narration, understood thus, is the means by which man comes to be, insofar as it grants sense and meaning to a chaotic world. As Luz Aurora Pimentel would say, the journey of fiction runs from a world that makes narratives to narratives that make a world.³⁴⁰ For this reason the experience of imaginary worlds acquires a “real” character that goes beyond the “reality” instituted.

Through Brausen’s heuristic we can note that the trap is found in the fact that whoever loses his erotic dimension has lost himself as a man, and salvation in his search for it as a restitution of superhumanity. Brausen, in his journey inward, disturbs our interior life. The act of reading already implies an ontological foundering in which our being finds continuity insofar as it can be another.³⁴¹ A confrontation with another form of living that interrogates and opens our own. An act in which the mind is obliged to create its own interior images that unveil the interiority of the one who imagines. And it is these private images that grant an authentic existence in the face of the traffic of impersonal and predetermined images with which we are invaded each day. “Fictional narratives” oblige us to leave the automatisms of the ordinary world toward a new perception, as the Russian Formalists saw.³⁴²

Seen thus, the novel as a genre lends dynamism, for an open society, to a world that in its aspiration to objectivity finds itself constantly at risk of losing its sense. Because the objectivity of the novel, that rational feature of its own, far from obeying the rationalisation of a mechanised world, is the manifestation of an Apollo who gives sense to the sensible experience of an anguished Dionysus. For this reason its importance, like Brausen’s film script, lies not in a useful value but in an interior

³³⁸Where mimesis II is that proper to the narrative (configured time), which lies between mimesis I (prefigured time) and mimesis III (refigured time).

³³⁹“Narration has its full sense when it is restored to the time of the acting and the suffering of mimesis III: *mimesis praxeos* [...]. Narration re-signifies what has already been pre-signified on the plane of human action” [my translation]. Paul Ricoeur, *Tiempo y narración I*, pp. 113–154.

³⁴⁰Luz Aurora Pimentel, *El relato en perspectiva*, p. 7.

³⁴¹Cf. Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *De la estética de la recepción a una estética de la participación*, México, UNAM-FFYL, 2005.

³⁴²Of course the Russian Formalists, in their eagerness to define literature by attending solely to language, could not see other aspects in it, such as its symbolic value. And while it is true that not all literary language is given in a poetic language, at least all *poiesis* implies a creation. The sober language of the novel is already the language of a representation. Cf. Terry Eagleton, *Una introducción a la teoría literaria*, pp. 14–20. Cf. Tzvetan Todorov (comp.), *Teoría de la literatura de los formalistas rusos*, México, Siglo XXI, 2010.

one, in the revelation of an intimate space that leads us to understand that, whether we wish it or not, we all inhabit imaginary places. Because to be a man means to be fiction.

Conclusions

Do not, my soul, aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.

Pindar³⁴³

Along the line of this thesis (imagination as a process of salvation in Brausen), I have drawn on the trap–imagination–salvation tension so as to observe in what way *A Brief Life* (a novel that represents Brausen’s voice) is woven into the mutations of its protagonist, which run from the founding of Santa María to the annihilation of his existence as Juan María Brausen and his rebirth within a new ontological frame: Juan María Arce.

It was found that Brausen, in search of salvation, finds in imagination a mechanism for recasting his reality and recasting himself before it. In this process he notices that imagination implies existence itself. Understood thus, Brausen becomes creator, work and creature simultaneously.

The four chapters that make up this thesis were configured around a central objective: to examine every edge of the trap–imagination–salvation tension, beginning from the mystery that envelops Brausen’s transit from his existence within the trap of everyday life to an “other” existence (erotic and imaginative) as a mechanism of salvation, or of exit from the trap, in search of happiness understood as a full life. In this sense, neither does Brausen’s existence content itself with what everyday life offers, trapped in its consistency made of immediate means and ends, nor is love limited to the satisfaction of sexual appetite. In both cases the Onettian wager is oriented toward overcoming the “brief life” by means of the creative imagination, in the direction of generating the total life. In philosophical terms, the transit of which we speak runs from the fundamental ontological to the transcendental metaphysical: transcendental imagination as ontological salvation.

The first chapter gives an account of how the sense of Brausen’s existence and its implication as trap is verified along a double line: an ontic one (whose expression is given in the everyday: wife, work, money) and an ontological one (which Brausen does not manage to perceive insofar as he has forgotten himself, in the deep sense). Two lines which, finally, link as one alone, given that the trap Brausen experiences in his everydayness is the manifestation of a deeper necessity. Brausen confronts two paths: 1) his existential failure, equivalent to a renunciation of the imaginative act that creates an alternative; 2) the development of a creative imagination in search of the project that may give sense to a life of his own, before the consciousness of finitude and emptiness revealed in his suffocating circumstance.

Reality is of course a weave made of imaginaries, and as such changing and dynamic. Yet it presents itself to Brausen as an immovable image, so that his existence and his surroundings seem to him

³⁴³“Pítica III”, Epode, in *Odas y Fragmentos*, Madrid, Gredos, 1984, p. 157. [Translator’s note: this note is numbered 343 in the Spanish edition. That is exactly one more than the total of all preceding footnotes (54 + 54 + 76 + 62 + 96 = 342), which indicates an automatic number that was never reset when the chapter sequences were restarted. It is given here as note 1 of the Conclusions, consistent with every other section. Worth correcting in the Spanish edition.]

unmodifiable. Hence the sense of the trap. Yet from this there will also derive the “way out” as salvation, beginning from Brausen’s awakening to the creative imagination, which leads him in turn to an awakening to consciousness, where the possibility opens of “leaving” the trap and rehearsing a salvation operated in and from the depth of his being. The bridge, therefore, between a trap at an ontic degree and another at an ontological one is found in the intimacy Brausen had lost, where the ablation of Gertrudis’s breast was barely a representation of his own erotic and sensible severing.

In the second chapter I explored the mechanisms or processes of creating an alternative “reality”, such as Santa María and Díaz Grey, and at the same time those of self-creation, such as Arce. Both lines oriented toward overcoming his immediate reality so as to raise from it a second existential rank. With this, Onetti lets it be seen that imagination does not constitute an effort of flight but, on the contrary, of penetrating existence to its depths.

It has been seen, therefore, that all *poiesis* leads to an autopoiesis, since Brausen’s work of creation induces him to a self-creation, so as to link a plane of direct referentiality (Buenos Aires) and a metaphorical one (Santa María) within his own body (Juan María Arce). Seen thus, it has been possible to observe that imagination does not signify only a mental speculation but a recasting of the whole body. In consequence, that eroticism incarnates a living and highly creative imagination.

These two imaginative sensibilities (creation and self-creation) bear upon distinct levels of his immediate reality. While Santa María is founded in a speculative metaphysical dimension, in which Díaz Grey signifies the possibility of the translation of Brausen’s being, Arce manifests a carnal ontology. La Queca, the displacement of Gertrudis’s severed eroticism, becomes the vehicle by which Brausen passes from an ordinary living to another that seeks totality. A totality made of the fleetingness of existence, which rises up before the consciousness of finitude. For this reason both Díaz Grey and Arce, as “imagined characters”, manifest the ontological possibilities in which Brausen’s being can recast itself. Creation and self-creation have thus been erected as a struggle for a salvation at a deep order: a descent that is given as an ascent. That is, salvation carries with it the mystery of the ontological and the metaphysical in a play in which trap and salvation are made of the same matter: Brausen’s skin. These processes let us see, without doubt, a poetics of creation belonging to Onetti himself, implicated in a suffocated Brausen, since the procedures to which Brausen submits himself and his reality reveal a poetics of the novelistic act of broad existential perspective, in which fiction repositions reality and man before it. Put in literary terms, behind the technical or poetic resources there lies hidden the author’s metaphysics, his conception of the world.

The third chapter goes deeper into a peculiar occurrence of great impact within the novel and within Onetti’s poetics. These are the journeys the characters make from one dimension to another. The displacement that Arce and Ernesto carry out from Buenos Aires to Santa María, on one side, and that of Díaz Grey, Lagos, Óscar Owen and the violinist from Santa María to Buenos Aires, on the other, has the importance of problematising the ontological foundation of reality, as well as of repositioning the metaphysical dimension as a new existential degree. Journeys linked, without doubt, by carnival; that is, in the tension between the carnal and the evanescent.

What is distinctive is found in the shading given to flight. The motor that drives the journeys takes place in the search for the restitution of the totality of the rationally bound being. The journeys already imply a transmigration. Crime, an essential factor, plays the double role of serving as the appropriation of a new ethical and aesthetic valuation, while at the same time opening, upon the weave of “reality”, a chink of madness inflicted by imagination. A chink by means of which the characters can pass. In this way crime comes to signify the fissure in the ontological edifice of being; a fissure that opens the possibility of an ultra-sensible mutation that will have to flow out into a new form of existence, this time metaphysical, though not for that reason unreal.

An important phenomenon in this translation is the mutual unrecognition between creator and creature (a view set against Unamuno’s, especially in *Mist*). On this, emphasis has been placed on the fact that the Onettian trap unveils, in the creative act, a conception of modern existence. Seen thus, the characters’ unrecognition and their transgressions mark the dialectical character of man in his nature as a “seeker” within a world that offers not answers but questions.

At the close of this exploration, if creation and self-creation in their intersection have signified for Brausen an effort of liberation, in a fourth and last chapter a balance has been drawn in the matter of salvation. Brausen places salvation in the order of the sensible, where he attends upon the doors of his perception so as to reconfigure the sensations he holds of himself and of his world. Without doubt it is in this struggle for a sensible salvation that eroticism reaches its greatest scope, in bearing upon that territory impossible for the consciousness of wakefulness and the light of reason. At this degree, it has been noticed that the limits of knowing (epistemic) mark in turn the limits of being (ontological), and that perhaps the only form of widening such thresholds is given in the imaginative force, whose “tremulous light” advances upon what is unknown in man so as to recast ordinary existence. In this order, metaphorical language has the power to appeal, as has been said, to a metaphysics, one that points toward man’s transgression toward a superman as the only possible way of salvation from a deep ontology. Arce, understood thus, incarnates a new aesthetic valuation insofar as he inhabits a Santa María that was once sensed in advance.

Along this path, salvation flows out, as in Thalassa, into the depth of love as eroticism, which manages to build a bridge between the ontologically abysmal and the metaphysically suprasensible that survives from the Juan–María duality of Brausen/Arce. Santa María, then, is founded by love. Here has been found the restitution of the lost breast that was the *pathos* of his misfortune. And salvation was to be found within the trap and not outside it. This new form of erotic existence, made possible by the creative imagination, implies an authentic mode of being, insofar as what is “authentic” is the being Brausen had left in forgetting.

Here another phenomenon within *A Brief Life* has been found: salvation signifies such insofar as it can become a new “hell”. This contradiction, beyond Onetti’s raw vision, has the depth of proposing that every mode of authentic existence can be forgotten again, and that salvation is lodged within the dialectical spirit of imagination itself: reification and renewal. This opens, without doubt, a proposition about human consistency within the modern cultural logic. If salvation is found in an

appeal to the world of myth, that primary sensibility of imagination, modern man is condemned to the impossibility of return, a contrariety that survives in the dialectic of the closed world of myth and the open world of modernity, of which the novel as a genre gives an account. Salvation, as has been seen, is not found in striving after a false return to the Old Paradise, but in finding the creative rites within everydayness; that is, in finding divinity on earth so as to be gods of ourselves: creator and creature simultaneously. A search given in appealing to immanence not as definitive repose but as a motor of life within the mystery of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Through this dialectical spirit, it must be stressed that the novel is not woven into a perfect circle proper to myth, but into a creative ellipsis that marks the return as departure.

This complex plot within the novel has as its residue, without doubt, an appeal to the reader, in whom salvation is problematised within that extradiegetic referent. Seen thus, it has been set out that the novel constitutes itself as a poetic phenomenology of imagination, veiled within a rich symbolic hermeneutics. A phenomenology in which the dialectic of imagination takes on the dialectical nature of the Sanmarian sensibility.

To conclude, I can affirm that this work implied a link between the theory of literature and philosophy, because Brausen, as a character, along with being the son of a circumstance (the anecdotal), is also the son of a human and existential depth. There lies his ontological depth. On this, Onetti has been named as one of the few existentialist writers in Latin America. I do not know whether “existentialist” in the strict sense, since such a condition has a clearly set out philosophical thread in which the novel becomes an exploration of a specific philosophical thesis, whereas Onetti’s work, without being a standard-bearer of that lineage, descends upon the imaginative phenomenon so as to unfold the fundamental question of life lodged within the most common situations. Faced with this, Onetti undoubtedly renders the problem of man and his existence. And it is along this line that I understand Onetti as a peculiar writer within the novelistic tradition of Latin America. Peculiar in a triple sense, for at the same time as he (1) works with imagination in the elaboration of his works, plots and characters, (2) he makes of imagination the instrument by means of which these last resolve the vicissitudes of their everyday existence, (3) thereby opening a window from which he looks at and approaches imagination as a problem (gnoseological and ontological). *A Brief Life*, for all these reasons, represents the novel of Onetti’s in which the imaginative poetics reaches its greatest scope.

In this way, while it is true that literature departs from the imaginative phenomenon, it is also true that, within literary becoming, certain works and authors stand out who make of imagination the central problem of their poetics, revealing in it an existential dilemma. And so I have understood that if imagination has represented a philosophical problem (Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others, as this work shows), it has been no less so for literature, an imaginative expression that finds in this dilemma its own traditions. Traditions which, within enlightened modernity, take hold both in Cervantes (the novelistic genre) and in the Romantics (in whom philosophy and poetry converge), and these in turn in a gaze toward a classical modernity (Greece and Rome) in pursuit of a mythical world that the new industrial modernity was leaving behind.

Such traditions, of course, cover a broad spectrum in which Marcel Proust finds a place as much as William Shakespeare, Miguel de Unamuno as much as Jean-Paul Sartre, Kafka as much as Hermann Hesse, the *poètes maudits* as much as the avant-gardes, Huxley as much as the Counterculture, and a long and debatable etcetera. And it is along this line that it has seemed right to me to add, from Latin America, Juan Carlos Onetti, without excluding figures such as Julio Cortázar or Ernesto Sábato, of course. It is enough to cast a panoramic glance to realise that Onetti feeds on a tradition that sees imagination as a problem of modern man, at the same time as he renews it, thus nourishing a Ricardo Piglia or a Juan José Saer, authors for a new cultural state: that of postmodernity.

For the above, placing the focus on the genre of this work, *A Brief Life*, my last reflection concludes that the novel has the force of a great praise of imagination. A modern genre par excellence, it takes on the modern dialectic of a man who, riven, seeks the restitution of his parts. At bottom, what the novelistic hero pursues in undertaking the journey into the interior of himself is to overcome the ignorance with which, as humans, we conduct ourselves in everyday life, without understanding the real dimension and the transitory and changing nature of phenomena.

The novel as a genre is meshed with imagination as a struggle against the colonisation of a subjectivity degraded within a public life devoid of intimacy. From this perspective, Onetti's greatness lies in vindicating the sense of imagining within a rational cultural logic, in expressing that every creative act has its root in the world of myth, and with it that man's totality must be found within a primal sensibility. Onetti already has the achievement of founding in Latin America, with his novel *The Pit* (1939), as Mario Vargas Llosa sees it (*El viaje a la ficción*, 2008), the modern novel of the city, a symbolic territory that marks a new state of existence. Because if Carlos Fuentes (*La nueva novela hispanoamericana*) saw in *Pedro Páramo* (1955) the closing with a "golden key" of rural literature, anchored in the Revolution, and within it the keys to the new Spanish American novel, Onetti's work represents, in harmony, the next decisive step toward a new way of narrating.

For all the above, I have seen that there is in Onetti, beyond the common pessimism with which his work is usually viewed, a vindication of the sense of failure and of imagination placed within the everyday reality of our world. And, nourished without doubt by a high Romantic spirit, in which the figure of Novalis stands out, he marks in turn his difference. If the Romantics saw in imagination a form of return to the world of myth, Onetti comes to set out the possibilities of that closed world within an open existential form proper to modernity. Onetti is already situated at the crumbling of the modern bourgeois line, so that the failure of his characters gives an account also of a defeat at a greater order: that of a project upon which the human being launched himself from the French Revolution onward and which has constituted a way of living and of feeling. Onetti publishes *A Brief Life* in 1950.

I am left with some questions. How far do a character's failures correlate with those of a greater plot? How far is the possibility of our salvation limited by the possibility of personal realisation within the constraints of a world-system? Must the possibility of imagining not first exist in order to imagine? Are our imaginaries not curtailed by global constraints? Questions that take hold in a

single one: what is the situation of hope at the beginning of this century? We, children of a devastated world, where shall we find totality? Brausen, like an Onetti, a Díaz Grey, ourselves and how many more, come to this world as marionettes of no god, thrown equally into the metaphysical existential void in a *No Man's Land*, to allude to Onetti's novel (1941). The periphery of Onetti's characters shows us in turn the periphery of our human condition. We, like them, find ourselves condemned to build our own "hell" that might signify a salvation in search of happiness.

Nevertheless, and because Brausen reveals to us that hopelessness has its opening move on the board of desire, we undertake, like him, the journey from the tragic to the transcendent; his search already lets us see that imagination reveals us as men. Through his crossing, we search again in eroticism for our sensible capacity so as, before the absurdity of living, to dream once more. The being burns in imagination.

∞

Bibliography

Source titles are given in the language of the edition consulted, as in the Spanish edition. Only the apparatus (translator, editor, place, date and access notes) is rendered in English.

ADORNO, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer, *Dialéctica de la Ilustración. Fragmentos filosóficos*, trans. Juan José Sánchez, Madrid, Trotta, 1998.

AINSA, Fernando, *Las trampas de Onetti*, Montevideo, Editorial Alfa, 1970.

ALCINA FRANCH, José, “Lenguaje metafórico e iconografía en el arte mexica”, in *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, UNAM, no. 66, 1995.

ANDERSON, Perry, *Los orígenes de la posmodernidad*, trans. Andrés Bredlow, Madrid, Akal, 2016.

APULEIUS, *El asno de oro*, trans. Lisardo Rubio, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2014.

ARGULLOL, Rafael, *El héroe y el Único*, Madrid, Taurus, 1999.

ARISTOTLE, *Poética*, trans. Juan David García-Bacca, México, UNAM, 2000.

BACHELARD, Gaston, *El agua y los sueños. Ensayo sobre la imaginación de la materia*, trans. Ida Vitale, México, FCE, 1978.

———, *El aire y los sueños. Ensayo sobre la imaginación del movimiento*, trans. Ernestina de Champourcin, México, FCE, 1985.

———, *El derecho de soñar*, trans. Jorge Ferreiro Santana, México, FCE, 1985.

———, *La intuición del instante*, trans. Jorge Ferreiro Santana, México, FCE, 1999.

———, *Lautréamont*, trans. Angelina Martín del Campo, México, FCE, 1985.

———, *La poética de la ensoñación*, trans. Ida Vitale, México, FCE, 1982.

———, *La poética del espacio*, trans. Ernestina de Champourcin, México, FCE, 2000.

———, *La tierra y las ensoñaciones del reposo. Ensayo sobre las imágenes de la intimidad*, trans. Rafael Segovia, México, FCE, 2006.

———, *La tierra y los ensueños de la voluntad*, trans. Rafael Segovia, México, FCE, 1991.

BAKHTIN, Mikhail, *Estética de la creación verbal*, trans. Tatiana Bubnova, México, Siglo XXI, 2012.

———, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y en el Renacimiento. El contexto de François Rabelais*, trans. Julio Forcat and César Conroy, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1990.

BALDERSTON, Daniel, “Arte y alusión en La vida breve”, Alicante, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2016. Digital edition from *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de His-*

panistas: *Barcelona, 21–26 August 1989*, Barcelona, Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992, pp. 429–433. Available at: <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/arte-y-alusion-en-la-vida-breve/>

BATAILLE, Georges, *El erotismo*, trans. Antoni Vicens and Marie Paule Sarazin, México, Tusquets Editores, 2008.

———, *La felicidad, el erotismo y la literatura. Ensayos 1944-1961*, trans. Silvio Mattoni, Buenos Aires, Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 1994.

———, *Teoría de la Religión*, trans. Fernando Savater, Madrid, Taurus, 1998.

BAUDRILLARD, Jean, *El crimen perfecto*, trans. Joaquín Jordá, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2000.

BAUMAN, Zygmunt, *Amor líquido. Acerca de la fragilidad de los vínculos humanos*, trans. Albino Santos, Barcelona, Paidós, 2018.

———, *La cultura en el mundo de la modernidad líquida*, trans. Lilia Mosconi, México, FCE, 2013.

BAUMAN, Zygmunt, and Leonidas Donskis, *Ceguera moral. La pérdida de sensibilidad en la modernidad líquida*, trans. Antonio Francisco Rodríguez Esteban, Barcelona, Paidós, 2015.

BECERRA, Eduardo, “Santa María de Onetti: autodestrucción y ficción literaria”, in *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*, no. 02, 1991, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, pp. 219–241.

BECKETT, Samuel, *Esperando a Godot*, trans. Ana M. Moix, México, Tusquets, 2009.

BÉGUIN, Albert, *El alma romántica y el sueño*, trans. Mario Monteforte Toledo, México, FCE, 1954.

BERISTÁIN, Helena, *Diccionario de retórica y poética*, México, Porrúa, 2006.

BERLIN, Isaiah, *Las raíces del romanticismo*, trans. Silvina Marí, México, Taurus, 2015.

BEUCHOT, Mauricio, *El ser y la poesía. El entrecruce del discurso metafísico y el discurso poético*, México, Universidad Iberoamericana, 2003.

BLOCH, Ernst, *El principio esperanza*, trans. Felipe González Serra, Madrid, Trotta, 2007.

BUBER, Martin, *¿Qué es el hombre?*, trans. Eugenio Ímaz, México, FCE, 2018.

BURROW, John, *La crisis de la razón: pensamiento europeo entre 1848-1914*, trans. Jordi Beltrán, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001.

CALVINO, Italo, “Niveles de realidad en la literatura”, in Enric Sullá (ed.), *Teoría de la novela. Antología de textos del siglo XX*, Barcelona, Crítica, 1996, pp. 197–201.

CAMPBELL, Joseph, *El héroe de las mil caras*, trans. Luisa Josefina Hernández, México, FCE, 1959.

CAMUS, Albert, *El mito de Sísifo*, trans. Esther Benítez, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999.

CASSIRER, Ernst, *Antropología filosófica*, trans. Eugenio Ímaz, México, FCE, 1963.

CASTORIADIS, Cornelius, “El descubrimiento de la imaginación”, in *Los dominios del hombre: las encrucijadas del laberinto*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 1988.

———, “La época del conformismo generalizado”. Lecture delivered in English (trans. Celso Sánchez Capdequí) during the symposium *A Metaphor for our Times*, Boston University, 19 September 1989. Available at: <https://www.briega.org/es/opinion/epoca-conformismo-generalizado>

———, *La institución imaginaria de la sociedad*, Buenos Aires, Tusquets Editores, 2007.

CERVANTES, Miguel de, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, México, Real Academia Española, Alfaguara, 2004.

COLLI, Giorgio, *El nacimiento de la filosofía*, trans. Carlos Manzano, México, Tusquets, 2009.

COROMINAS, Joan, *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, Biblioteca Románica Hispánica, directed by Dámaso Alonso, Madrid, Gredos, 1973.

CRUZ, Ana, “La poesía es un destino. Entrevista a Jaime Sabines”, *La raíz invertida*, 28 March 2016, consulted 30 May 2020, <http://www.laraizinvertida.com/detalle-1949-la-poesia-es-un-destino-entrevista-a-jaime-sabines>

CULLER, Jonathan, “¿Qué es la teoría?”, in *Breve introducción a la teoría literaria*, trans. Gonzalo García, Barcelona, Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 2000, pp. 11–28.

CURIEL, Fernando, *Onetti: obra y calculando infortunio*, México, UNAM, 1980.

DEBORD, Guy, *La sociedad del espectáculo*, trans. Colectivo Maldejo, Sevilla, Editorial Doble J, 1967.

EAGLETON, Terry, *Una introducción a la teoría literaria*, trans. José Esteban Calderón, México, FCE, 1998.

ELIADE, Mircea, *El mito del eterno retorno*, trans. Ricardo Anaya, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2011.

———, *Lo sagrado y lo profano*, trans. Luis Gil, Madrid, Guadarrama, Punto Omega, 1981.

———, *Mito y realidad*, trans. Luis Gil, Barcelona, Kairós, 2017.

AESCHYLUS, “Las Suplicantes”, in *Tragedias completas*, ed. José Alsina Clota, Madrid, Cátedra, 1995.

FAULKNER, William, *El ruido y la furia*, trans. Ana Antón-Pacheco, Madrid, Cátedra, 2011.

FERRO, Roberto, *Onetti, la fundación imaginada. Parodia del autor en la saga de Santa María*, Córdoba, Argentina, Alción Editora, 2003.

FICHTE, Johann Gottlieb, *Ensayo de una crítica de toda revelación*, trans. Vicente Serrano, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2002.

FISCHER, Ernst, “El arte y el capitalismo. El espíritu del romanticismo”, in *La necesidad del arte*, trans. J. Solé-Tura, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1973.

- FLAUBERT, Gustave, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Germán Palacios, Barcelona, Cátedra, 2010.
- FLORES, Reyes E., *Onetti: tres personajes y un autor*, Madrid, Verbum, 2003.
- FOUCAULT, Michel, *Vigilar y castigar. Nacimiento de la prisión*, trans. Aurelio Garzón del Camino, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1976.
- FREUD, Sigmund, *El malestar en la cultura*, trans. Ramón Rey Ardid and Luis López-Ballesteros y de Torres, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999.
- FUENTES, Carlos, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*, México, Joaquín Mortiz, 1969.
- GARCÍA CANCLINI, Néstor, *La sociedad sin relato. Antropología y estética de la inminencia*, México, Debolsillo, 2010.
- GILMAN, Stephen, *La novela según Cervantes*, trans. Carlos Ávila Flores, México, FCE, 1993.
- GONZÁLEZ VALERO, María Antonia, *Un tratado de ficción. Ontología de la mimesis*, México, Herder, 2010.
- GOÑI, Javier, “La literatura es mi amante”, *El País*, 14 March 1993, Madrid, https://elpais.com/diario/1993/03/15/cultura/732150002_850215.html, consulted 30 May 2020.
- GRAVES, Robert, *Dioses y héroes de la Antigua Grecia*, trans. Lucía Graves, México, Tusquets, 2011.
- GUÉNON, René, *Los estados múltiples del ser*, trans. Esteve Serra, Barcelona, Sophia Perennis, 2006.
- GUTHRIE, William Keith Chambers, *Los filósofos griegos. De Tales a Aristóteles*, trans. Florentino M. Torner, México, FCE, 1994.
- HARARI, Yuval Noah, *Homo Deus. Breve historia del mañana*, trans. Joandomènec Ros, México, Debate, 2016.
- , *Sapiens. De animales a dioses. Una breve historia de la humanidad*, trans. Joandomènec Ros, México, Debate, 2016.
- HARSS, Luis, *Los nuestros*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1966.
- HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Lecciones sobre la historia de la filosofía III*, trans. Wenceslao Roces, México, FCE, 1955.
- HEIDEGGER, Martin, *Arte y poesía*, trans. Samuel Ramos, México, FCE, 1973.
- , *Ser y tiempo*, trans. Jorge Eduardo Rivera, Madrid, Trotta, 2009.
- , *Kant y el problema de la metafísica*, trans. Gred Ibscher Roth, México, FCE, 1981.
- , and Eugen Fink, *Heráclito*, trans. Raúl Torres Martínez, México, FCE, 2017.
- HELLER, Agnes, *El péndulo de la modernidad*, trans. María del Carmen Ruiz de Elvira, Barcelona, Península, 2000.

- HERACLITUS, “Fragmentos”, trans. and comp. Juan David García-Bacca, in *Los presocráticos*, México, FCE, 1979.
- HESSE, Hermann, *El lobo estepario*, trans. Manuel Manzanares, México, Colofón, 2008.
- HOMER, *Odisea*, trans. José Luis Calvo Martínez, Madrid, Cátedra, 2005.
- HUSSERL, Edmund, *Ideas relativas a una fenomenología pura y una filosofía fenomenológica*, trans. José Gaos, México, FCE, 1962.
- JAMESON, Fredric, “La nueva lógica cultural del capitalismo tardío”, in *Teoría de la posmodernidad*, trans. Celia Montolio Nicholson and Ramón del Castillo, Madrid, Trotta, 2001.
- JAY, Martin, *La imaginación dialéctica. Una historia de la Escuela de Frankfurt*, trans. Juan Carlos Curutchet, Madrid, Taurus, 1974.
- JOYCE, James, *Ulises*, trans. Francisco García Tortosa and María Luisa Venegas Lagüéns, Madrid, Cátedra, 2009.
- KAFKA, Franz, *El castillo*, trans. Miguel Sáenz, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2014.
- , *El proceso*, trans. R. Kruger, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1984.
- KANT, Immanuel, *Crítica de la razón pura*, trans. Pedro Ribas, México, Taurus, 2006.
- KUNDERA, Milan, *El arte de la novela*, trans. Utopía Zea, Barcelona, Tusquets Editores, 2006.
- , *La fiesta de la insignificancia*, trans. Beatriz de Moura, México, Tusquets Editores, 2014.
- , *La insoportable levedad del ser*, trans. Fernando Valenzuela, México, Tusquets Editores, 1996.
- LAPOUJADE, María Noel, *Filosofía de la imaginación*, México, Siglo XXI, 1988.
- , *Homo imaginans I*, Puebla, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, La Fuente, 2015.
- LA RUBIA PRADO, Francisco, *Unamuno y la vida como ficción*, Madrid, Gredos, 1999.
- LIPOVETSKY, Gilles, *El imperio de lo efímero*, trans. Felipe Hernández and Carmen López, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1990.
- , *La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo*, trans. Joan Vinyoli and Michèle Pendanx, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1990.
- LLEDÓ, Emilio, *Filosofía y lenguaje*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2008.
- LUDMER, Josefina, *Onetti. Los procesos de construcción del relato*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1977.
- LUKÁCS, György, *Teoría de la novela. Un ensayo histórico filosófico sobre las formas de la gran literatura épica*, trans. Micaela Ortelli, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Godot, 2010.
- MANRIQUE, Jorge, *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*, Madrid, Castalia, 1983.

- MARCUSE, Herbert, *El hombre unidimensional. Ensayo sobre la ideología de la sociedad industrial avanzada*, trans. Antonio Elorza, Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1993.
- , *Eros y civilización*, trans. Juan García Ponce, Madrid, Sarpe, 1983.
- , *La dimensión estética. Crítica de la ortodoxia marxista*, trans. José-Francisco Yvars, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2007.
- MARTÍNEZ GONZÁLEZ, Víctor Hugo, “El humanismo radical de Juan Carlos Onetti”, in *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, vol. 9, January–June 2015, pp. 160–179. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=4262/426240376007>
- MARTÍNEZ, Elena M., *Onetti: Estrategias textuales y operaciones del lector*, Madrid, Verbum, 1992.
- MARX, Karl, *Historia Crítica de la Teoría de la Plusvalía*, vol. I, trans. Wenceslao Roces, México, FCE, 1945.
- MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice, *Fenomenología de la percepción*, trans. Jem Cabanes, Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1994.
- MILOSZ, Oscar W., *La amorosa iniciación*, Toluca, Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 2002.
- MORIN, Edgar, *Amor, poesía, sabiduría*, trans. Editorial Seix Barral, Montevideo, Trilce, 1996.
- , *El método. V. La humanidad de la humanidad. La identidad humana*, trans. Ana Sánchez, Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 2003.
- MUÑIZ-HUBERMAN, Angelina, *El siglo del desencanto*, México, FCE, 2002.
- NERVAL, Gérard de, “Cristo en los olivos”, in Adriana Yáñez Vilalta, *Nerval y el romanticismo*, México, UNAM, 1998.
- NOVALIS, *Fragmentos I Sobre el poeta y la poesía*, in *Escritos Escogidos*, bilingual edition by Ernst-Edmund Keil and Jenaro Talens, Madrid, Visor de Poesía, 1984.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *Así habló Zaratustra*, trans. Juan Carlos García Borrón, Barcelona, Planeta-Agostini, 1992.
- , *El nacimiento de la tragedia o Grecia y el pesimismo*, trans. Andrés Sánchez Pascual, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2000.
- , *Más allá del bien y del mal*, trans. Andrés Sánchez Pascual, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2005.
- ONETTI, Juan Carlos, “Bienvenido, Bob”, in *Narraciones*, Madrid, Visor Libros, 2005, pp. 9–28.
- , *Dejemos hablar al viento*, Madrid, Debolsillo, Punto de lectura, 2016.
- , *El pozo*, Madrid, Debolsillo, Punto de lectura, 2016.
- , *La vida breve*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1999.

- , *Para una tumba sin nombre*, Madrid, Debolsillo, Punto de lectura, 2008.
- , *Requiem por Faulkner y otros artículos*, Buenos Aires, Arca/Calicanto, 1976.
- , *Tierra de nadie*, Madrid, Debolsillo, Punto de lectura, 2016.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, José, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2005.
- PAZ, Octavio, *El arco y la lira*, México, FCE, 2006 (facsimile edition).
- , *La llama doble*, México, Seix Barral, 1993.
- , *Las peras del olmo*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1974.
- , *Tiempo nublado*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1983.
- , “Traducción y metáfora”, in *Obras completas*, vol. I, México, FCE, 1994.
- PICÓ, Josep (comp.), *Modernidad y postmodernidad*, trans. Francisca Pérez Carreño, José Luis Zalabardo, Manuel Jiménez Redondo, Antoni Torregrossa and Inmaculada Álvarez Puente, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1988.
- PIMENTEL, Luz Aurora, *El relato en perspectiva*, México, Siglo XXI, 1998.
- , *El espacio en la ficción. Ficciones espaciales. La representación de espacios en los textos narrativos*, México, UNAM-Siglo XXI, 2001.
- PINDAR, “Pítica III”, in *Odas y Fragmentos*, trans. Alfonso Ortega, Madrid, Gredos, 1984.
- PLATO, *Libro X, de la República*, in *Diálogos, IV*, trans. Conrado Eggers Lan, Madrid, Gredos, 1988.
- PORZECANSKI, Teresa, “La ficcionalización de ‘lo real’: en torno a la metáfora incesante”, in *Armas y Letras*, Revista de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, no. 57, pp. 6–15.
- PULIDO BLANCO, Jorge Enrique, “‘La ontología sólo es posible como fenomenología’. En torno a la fenomenología de Martin Heidegger”, in *Franciscanum* 163, vol. LVII, 2015, pp. 87–123.
- RAMA, Ángel, “El narrador ingresa al baile de máscaras de la modernidad”, in *Juan Carlos Onetti*, Hugo Verani (ed.), *El escritor y la crítica*, Madrid, Taurus, 1987.
- RICOEUR, Paul, *Historia y narratividad*, trans. Ángel Gabilondo and Gabriel Aranzueque, Barcelona, Paidós, 1999.
- , *La metáfora viva*, trans. A. Neira Calvo, Madrid, Trotta, Ediciones Cristiandad, 2001.
- , *Teoría de la interpretación. Discurso y excedente de sentido*, trans. Graciela Monges Nicolau, México, Siglo XXI, Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995.
- , *Tiempo y narración. I. Configuración del tiempo en el relato histórico*, trans. Agustín Neira, México, FCE, 1995.
- , *Tiempo y narración. II. Configuración del tiempo en el relato de ficción*, trans. Agustín Neira, México, FCE, 1995.

- , *Tiempo y narración. III. El tiempo narrado*, trans. Agustín Neira, México, FCE, 1996.
- RIVARA KAMAJI, Greta, *El ser para la muerte. Una ontología de la finitud*, México, Monosílabo, 2018.
- RUFFINELLI, Jorge, “Notas sobre Larsen”, in *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, nos. 292–294, 1974, pp. 101–117.
- SAFRANSKI, Rüdiger, *Romanticismo. Una odisea del espíritu alemán*, trans. Raúl Gabás Pallás, México, Tusquets, 2011.
- SÁNCHEZ VÁZQUEZ, Adolfo, *De la estética de la recepción a una estética de la participación*, México, UNAM-FFYL, 2005.
- , *Estética y marxismo. I*, México, Ediciones Era, 1983.
- , *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, México, Siglo XXI, 2005.
- SARMIENTO, Domingo Faustino, *Facundo*, México, Siglo XXI, 2004.
- SARTRE, Jean-Paul, “Discurso de Cristo muerto desde lo alto del Cosmos, diciendo que no hay Dios”, trans. Andrés Sánchez Pascual, consulted 23 May 2020, <https://sites.google.com/site/loquenuncatedigo/textos>.
- , *El hombre y las cosas*, trans. Luis Echávarri, Buenos Aires, Losada, 1960.
- , *El ser y la nada*, trans. Juan Valmar, Buenos Aires, Losada, 2008.
- , “Lo imaginario”, in *Psicología fenomenológica de la imaginación*, trans. Manuel Lamana, Buenos Aires, Losada, 1976.
- SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de, *Curso de lingüística general*, trans. Amado Alonso, Buenos Aires, Losada, 1945.
- SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur, *El mundo como voluntad y representación*, trans. Pilar López de Santa María, México, FCE, 2003.
- SENECA, Lucius Annaeus, *Sobre la brevedad de la vida*, trans. Francisco Socas Gavilán, Andalucía, Junta de Andalucía, 2010.
- , *Sobre la felicidad*. Available in the Biblioteca de Clásicos Grecolatinos: <https://web.archive.org/web/20130624233716/http://www.cayocesarciligula.com.ar/grecolatinos/seneca/felicidad.html>
- SHAKESPEARE, William, *Hamlet*, trans. Tomás Segovia, Madrid, Titivillus, 2015.
- , *La tempestad*, trans. Manuel Ángel Conejero Dionís-Bayer, Madrid, Cátedra, 2007.
- STEINER, George, *Heidegger*, trans. Jorge Aguilar Mora, México, FCE, 2013.
- , *La poesía del pensamiento. Del helenismo a Celan*, trans. María Condor, México, FCE, Siruela, 2012.

- SUBIRATS, Eduardo, *Culturas virtuales*, México, Ediciones Coyoacán, 2001.
- ANON., “Cuestionario a Juan Carlos Onetti”, in *Anthropos, Juan Carlos Onetti. Una escritura afirmativa del hombre urbano. La creación literaria como camino de liberación*, no. 2, November 1990, pp. 23–24.
- ANON., *Evangelio de San Juan*, Biblia, Bilbao, Desclee de Brouwer, 1976.
- ANON., “Hay otra ilustración: la realidad de la convivencia humana”, in *Anthropos, Miguel de Cervantes. La invención poética de la novela moderna*, Madrid, no. 98/98, July–August 1989, pp. 127–128.
- TODOROV, Tzvetan (comp.), *Teoría de la literatura de los formalistas rusos*, trans. Ana María Nethol, México, Siglo XXI, 2010.
- TOURAINÉ, Alain, “Las luces de la razón”, in *Crítica de la modernidad*, trans. Alberto Luis Bixio, Buenos Aires, FCE, 1994.
- UNAMUNO, Miguel de, *Niebla*, Santiago de Chile, Universitaria, 1986.
- , *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*, Madrid, Verbum, 2019.
- VARGAS LLOSA, Mario, *El viaje a la ficción*, Madrid, Alfaguara, 2008.
- VATTIMO, Gianni, *Introducción a Heidegger*, trans. Alfredo Báez, Barcelona, Gedisa, 1998.
- VERANI, Hugo J., *Onetti: el ritual de la impostura*, Caracas, Monte Ávila Editores, 1981.
- VIRGIL, *Eneida*, trans. Javier de Echave-Sustaeta, Madrid, Gredos, 1992.
- WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel, *Análisis de sistemas-mundo*, trans. Carlos Daniel Schroeder, México, Siglo XXI, 2006.
- XIRAU, Joaquín, *Amor y mundo*, México, El Colegio de México, 1942.
- YÁÑEZ VILALTA, Adriana, *El tiempo y lo imaginario*, México, FCE, 2011.
- ZAMBRANO, María, *El sueño creador (Los sueños, el soñar y la creación por la palabra)*, Universidad Veracruzana-México, Xalapa, 1965.
- , *El hombre y lo divino*, México, FCE, 1973.
- , “La Crisis del Racionalismo Europeo”, in *Pensamiento y Poesía en la Vida Española*, México, La Casa de España en México-FCE, 1939.
- , “Para una historia de la Piedad”, in *Aurora: papeles del Seminario María Zambrano*, Barcelona, no. 1, 2012 (64–72), <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Aurora/article/view/260744>, consulted 14 June 2020.
- ŽIŽEK, Slavoj, *El espinoso sujeto. El centro ausente de la ontología política*, trans. Jorge Piatigorsky, México, Paidós, 2001.