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# RAMÓN LÓPEZ VELARDE, A LAND SAILOR ON A CHANDELIER-SHAPED BOAT

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***Abstract**: The poetry of Ramón López Velarde —Mexico's national poet— is rich in maritime metaphors and other symbolic elements related to the ocean. Words such skiff, coast, archipelago, anchor, etc., are frequent throughout his work. What is surprising about his abundant maritime metaphors is the fact that López Velarde never saw the ocean. Our poet was born in Jerez, a tiny village in the state of Zacatecas, hundreds of kilometres away from Mexico's coastline. In spite of this, López Velarde constructs his own poetic universe against a backdrop formed by the sea and other similar metaphors. The ocean is that vastness that allows him to express his ardent Catholicism, his oft-quoted dualism, and his obsession with the female body. This discussion is based on some of his poems, namely The Chandelier, a lamp — in the shape of a ship— which illuminates the church of San Francisco, in San Luis Potosí. At the helm of this chandelier-ship, López Velarde sets off on a voyage towards his own ethic, and aesthetic, identity*.

***Keywords**: Latin American postmodernist poetry, maritime metaphors, dualism*

López Velarde's poetry is at the very antipodes of most early modernist poets of his generation. In striking contrast to their sophisticated cosmopolitism, his literary output is characterised by dualism, an idealization of the Mexican province, an unremitting obsession with the chastity of unassailable women and a staunch brand of Catholicism, which is inextricably connected with his aesthetics and his general outlook on life. His Catholicism explains, to some extent, his conservative reaction against modernism and much of what this movement represents: namely, foreign (Protestant) influence.

Some critics, notably Guillermo Sheridan, describe him as an example of Latin American literary postmodernism, which marks the transition from the twilight of modernism to the rising novelty of the avant-garde movements (199). Hervé Le Corre notes that the term *postmodernism* used by critics to refer to this transitional period is rather problematic as its limits are far from clear and definite (10). To this, he adds that even López Velarde, who apparently epitomises postmodernism, was subject to several conflicting classifications, which describe him as a modernist, only to reclassify him as paradigmatic of postmodernism (11).

However, to many of his critics, López Velarde seems to be little more than a poet who sang the praises of provincial Mexico, "of a subverted Eden", ravaged by the bloodshed that was the uprising that started in 1910. Admittedly, this is a rather monochromatic and unidimensional view, one that reduces his poetry to images of old spinsters playing dirges on the piano or quaint villages dotted with Catholic churches. There is no denying that provincial life is central to his literary production. That said, there is a lot more to this than meets the eye. He was also keenly interested in modernity and scientific development, yet hopelessly superstitious. In "Espantos" (*Ghosts*), one of the essays of *Don de febrero* (*Boon of February*), he admits: "I have equal respect for a physicist who understands that shade results from light



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travelling in straight line, and for a savage that worships his own shadow […]. I believe in both palmistry and vaccination" (398).[1]

Despite this confession, he is still regarded as totally uninterested in his times. Nobel Laurate Octavio Paz describes Ramón's literary universe in these unflattering terms:

> As a poet, his work is scarce, concentrated and complex…To these, another adjective should be added: *limited*. His subjects are few [...] the drama of knowledge is nowhere to be found among them. […] The relationships between dreaming and wakefulness, or between language and thought, consciousness and reality […] are hardly important to him.
>
> (Paz 80)

One exception to this rather shallow outlook that limits Ramón's poetry to idyllic villages and his deification of the female body life is the late José Emilio Pacheco, one of the leading voices in Mexico's contemporary letters. Pacheco has this to say about Ramón:

> […] he is his own executioner, so overwrought by his own being that he takes a step back and also an ironical look at himself. Weaned on an outdated rhetoric, an inhabitant of a poor country ravaged by a civil war, López Velarde is a contemporary of a host of contemporaries, of whom he might have never heard: Jules Laforgue's sorrowful buffoonery, which makes Ramón resemble a young T. S. Eliot. Also, his unavailing protest against "painful nature" likens him to the early Vallejo. Moreover, his aversion to both family life ("workshop of dejection, source of sorrow, nursery of despair") and to prolonging pain by fathering a child are similar to Kafka's.
>
> (Pacheco 588–589)

Another critical voice rising against the received wisdom that relegates López Velarde's poetry to his most blatantly obvious imagery is that of Guillermo Sheridan, arguably López Velarde's best biographer, who launches this caustic attack:

> Was it Robert Browning who defined poetry as that which was first lost in translation? López Velarde, so it seems, is yet to be translated into Venezuelan or Argentinean. On the maps tracing the history of our continental letters, his name is a little more than a road sign rusting under the leaking eaves of an off-the-beaten-track village some adventurous tourists may have visited and still others may have heard of (among them: Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges, Ricardo Molinari, Nicanor Parra). One consequence of this is the ceaseless repetition of a handful of glib platitudes that obscure, rather than show, López Velarde's true star.
>
> (Sheridan 192)

Ramón may be provincial or cosmopolitan; however, nothing can contest the fact that no coastline appears on the map of Jerez, the quaint village in Northern Mexico, where he was born. In this God-forsaken, landlocked corner of the country, there is no recondite lighthouse to guide the odd sailor, no wave breaking on the main square. These cartographic facts notwithstanding, the sea does play a significant role in López Velarde imagery. Mier notes the following:

[1] The source of Ramón López Velárde's poems and texts in prose is Martínez, *Ramón López Velarde: Obras*.



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> Instead of a solar poet, as it has been suggested, in opposition to lunar poets such as Lugones or Jules Laforgue, whose influence has often been shown, López Velarde displays an indefatigable penchant for liquid metaphors. The sheer abundance of images where blood constitutes a pivotal element can be seen rather as an expression of continuum of the aqueous. This leaning, this passion for aquatic metaphors is the backdrop against which the corporeal and the erotic, and his attachment to space and land, eventually converge.
>
> (Mier 35)

Padilla Uribe notes that water is to such an extent important as a metaphor in López Velarde that it permeates his aesthetics as a whole (26). Water in its various forms – seas, ocean, even rain – is at the very basis of one of the most important features of his literary work: his oft-quoted oscillation. Noyola uses this concept as a metaphor to illustrate his characteristic dualism, the conflicting forces at play in his universe (63). Ramón is trapped in the midst of this oscillation, at once attracted and repelled by opposites. One of the most outstanding features of his entire literary production, his dualism adopts various forms: the ebb and flow of seas, the connubial presence of opposites (soul-flesh, sinner-saint), among others. Juan José Arreola considers Ramón's dualism as essential to human existence, both physically and metaphysically (68). The presence of these contradictory elements is found in countless passages of his work: a never-ending, but harmonious, dialogue of the opposites that populate his being. Allen W. Phillips, one of López Velarde's most authoritative and knowledgeable critics, describes this oscillatory movement in his seminal "Tres procedimientos velardeanos" (Three Procedures in López Velarde):

> In the midst of an unceasing to and fro, resulting from his devotion to symmetry, he feels the attraction of evil and good forces in equal measure. Alternatively confronted by chastity and sensuousness, he finds himself unable to choose one or the other. This explains the angst-laden drama unfolding in his soul, his unquenchable thirst for everything and the main reason for his pervasive fear of capsizing.
>
> (Phillips 555)

Capsizing is indeed one of his many maritime metaphors. Despite never having set foot on a beach, Ramón's oscillatory movement finds in the use of maritime imagery a perfect vessel. Sometimes, especially in his first poems, the ocean is still a mystery, a vague murmur looming on the horizon. At other times, he is more of a seasoned sailor. Still, his experience cannot be characterised as a joyous plunge, but rather as boat on the point of capsizing, a shipwreck. Gradually, the ocean affords him more pleasures. At other times, he is not just a sailor, but a full-rigged ship. The presence of maritime metaphors is analysed in the following paragraphs.

Before this discussion of his maritime metaphors, it is essential to point out a few things about translation. Ramón may not have been translated into "Venezuelan" and other such "languages", yet the fact remains that translation —or rather the lack thereof— has always played against him. Undoubtedly, he is one of the most original postmodernist poets in Latin American literature. It is also true that —for all intents and purposes— he is practically unknown outside the Spanish-speaking world. This is due to the fact that his poetic and linguistic idiosyncrasies pose a daunting challenge to even the most dexterous translators. In the introduction to his own translation of some of Ramón López Velarde's poems, M. W. Jacobs has this to say:



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> The difficult imagery, obscure references, invented words, conservatism, religiosity, and romanticism, the emotional rawness, these might explain why RLV is not better known, but they also beg the question: is he worth the effort? Neruda, Borges, and Paz would resoundingly say "yes".
>
> (Jacobs 2014)

In the following lines, unless otherwise stated, I will use my own English versions of Ramón's poems.

Josefa de los Ríos or Fuensanta, the poetic name that Ramón bestows on her, is a symbol of his first unrequited love. She is an image of the eternal feminine. Not surprisingly, in his first collection, published in 1916, *La Sangre Devota* (*Devout Blood*), Fuensanta is a recurring theme. In "Hermana, hazme llorar" (Sister, Make Me Cry) (106), Ramón asks his mythical lady:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fuensanta:* | *Fuensanta,* |
| *Dame todas las lágrimas del mar.* | *Give me all the tears from the sea.* |
| *Mis ojos están secos y yo sufro* | *My eyes are dry and I am overcome* |
| *Unas inmensas ganas de llorar.* | *With intense desire to cry.* |

Ramón is convinced that the ocean is smaller than the pain he endures. The metaphors are hyperbolically saline, with the alternating rhyming scheme with verses ending in *–ar* (*mar, pesar, amar, llorar*) mimics the unceasing oscillation of the sea. However, up to this point, the sea remains a geographic accident, one that is forbidden to the poet:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fuensanta:* | *Fuensanta,* |
| *¿Tú conoces el mar?* | *Have you ever seen the ocean?* |
| *Dicen que es menos grande* | *They say it is not as vast* |
| *Y menos hondo que el pesar.* | *Nor as deep as sorrow.* |
| *No sé ni por qué quiero llorar.* | *I know not why I want to cry.* |
| *Será tal vez por el pesar que escondo.* | *Perhaps because of all the suffering hidden in me.* |
| *Tal vez por mi infinita sed de amar.* | *Perhaps because of my unquenchable thirst for love.* |
| *Hermana:* | *Sister,* |
| *Dame todas las lágrimas del mar* | *Give me all the tears from the sea.* |

I now turn my attention to "En el piélago veleidoso" (107) (The Capricious Open Ocean). This poem, also part of *Devout Blood*, is a perfect example of one of Ramón's trademark features: his special brand of irony, his uncanny ability to take a healthy laugh at himself. Through irony, he manages to put things into perspective. Confessional in tone, the poem starts with this statement. The following is M. W. Jacobs' translation:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Entré en la vasta veleidad del piélago* | *I entered the vast caprice of the open ocean* |
| *Con humos de pirata…* | *With a pirate's haughtiness…* |
| *Y ya me sentía un poco delfín* | *And I was already feeling a little like a dolphin* |
| *Y veía la plata* | *And I saw the silver* |
| *De los flancos de la última sirena,* | *Of the flanks of the last mermaid,* |
| *Cuando mi devaneo* | *When my anachronistic delirium* |
| *Anacrónico vióse reducido* | *Saw itself reduced* |
| *A un amago humillante de mareo* | *To a humiliating hint of seasickness.* |



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| | |
|---|---|
| *Mas no guardo rencor* | *But I hold no grudge* |
| *A la inestable eternidad de espuma* | *For the unstable eternity of foam* |
| *Y efímeros espejos* | *And ephemeral mirrors.* |
| *Porque sobre ella fui como una suma* | *Because it was on her I was like a sum* |
| *De nostalgias y de arraigos, y sobre ella* | *Of nostalgias and roots, and on her* |
| *Me sentí en alta mar,* | *I felt on the high seas* |
| *Más de viaje que nunca y más fincado* | *More on voyage than ever and, in the palm* |
| *En la palma de aquella mano impar.* | *Of that uneven hand, more attached.* |

This was a plunge into the vastness of a capricious sea. *Veleidad* is a beautiful Spanish noun that refers to all things frivolous and unstable, capricious. This frivolity is coupled with the adjective *vasta* (*vast),* which does nothing but reinforce the fickleness of the poet's frolicking on a beach. Thus starts this story about a lover's dismal performance. In Ramón's poetic universe, the ocean stands for a vast sea of sensuous, carnal, pleasure. This poem is the exact opposite of "Hermana, hazme llorar", discussed earlier. The unstable eternity of foam is a fairly straightforward reference to Venus, in direct opposition to virginal Fuensanta. But this Venus is a falsehood, a mirage, a series of short-lived images reflected on mirrors. The inconstancy suggested by the presence of something as immaterial and fragile as foam is nothing but a fleeting reflection. The mermaid may not be as chaste and virginal as his beloved Fuensanta; however, Ramón's attitude towards this Venus is not derogatory, but self-deprecating: *With a pirate's haughtiness…*

In taking part in this amatory adventure of his, Ramón takes aim at himself. "Pirate", in both English and Spanish, describes a fearsome swashbuckling thief, but it is also synonymous with fakes and falsehoods. Ramón is in no position to brag about his sexual prowess; quite the opposite, he is just a fake. This is by no means the first time that Ramón considers himself a sorry sight. In "El perro de San Roque" (Saint Roch's Dog), another poem from *Zozobra*, he candidly admits: "I have been booed by demons who have witnessed my bankruptcy as a vulgar sinner" (200).

For a brief moment, the poet is completely at ease in the ocean, a virile Neptune of sorts: "I was feeling a little like a dolphin. And I saw the silver of the flanks of the last mermaid". The imperfect tense of the verbs in the original Spanish suggests that this affair of the heart was never a fait accompli. The encounter was never between a man and a woman, but between a man and a mythical monster. In Ramón's short life there is no place for the joys of true love. The women with whom he falls in love are always too unloving, too distant or too dead. This is him trying, but failing miserably, to seduce a seductress. The sheer presence of this man-eater allows us to imagine the denouement: "My anachronistic delirium saw itself reduced to a hint of seasickness". His failure is not even a complete one, but just the hint of a failure.

However, the second stanza reconciles us with the poet we love and are familiar with. Completely incapable of holding a grudge for anyone, least of all for women, Ramón describes this instant as an oxymoron: "unstable eternity". He uses the last five verses of the poem to explain why he cannot bring himself to hate the mermaid. This passage is a clear example of the dualistic, paradoxical world he inhabits. On her, he was *like a sum of nostalgias and roots*, in other words, he oscillates between an irretrievable past and steadfast present.

On the mermaid, Ramón experiences the heady feeling of sea exploration, of discovery and serendipity, but also of attachment. He is simultaneously at sea and firmly rooted in land, basking in the serenity of an "uneven" hand.

A hand that is "uneven" is no small detail. No poet, in either Mexican or in Latin American letters, outdoes López Velarde in his use of pleonasm, not the redundant kind, but the one used for emphasis. In one of his most beautiful poems, "El retorno maléfico" (The



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Maleficent Return, as translated by Jacobs), there is a pyrotechnic display of this this rhetorical device: *El amor amoroso de las parejas pares* (154–155). This must be one of the most pleonastic lines ever written, whose beauty is unfortunately lost in my attempt at translation: "The loving love of coupled couples".[2] In Ramón's outrageously idiosyncratic line, the only adjective that can fully describe *amor* (*love*) is *amoroso* (*loving*). *Parejas* (*couples*) is a cognate of *par*, which is the Spanish noun or adjective that, in arithmetic, refers to even numbers. The mermaid's is an odd "uneven" hand; it is *impar*. Theirs are not the hands that a real *pareja* holds.

In Ramón's poetic universe—or in his real life for that matter—women are a force that attracts and repels him in equal measure. They tie him to the physical world and are the inexhaustible source of many of his metaphors. But, for many reasons, his women are always a bleak prospect. Alberto Paredes has this to say about the presence of women in Ramón:

> Women are the steady end of the umbilical cord, the one that ties him and connects him to the world. He is weaned on their image-generating powers. This cord is one of the real bonds that attach him to everything the external world represents […] Real women, however, are forever committing two offences that desecrate them: they want to marry and they get old. (Paredes 37)

Ramón gives women a wide berth, not because of any symptom of anhedonia, but simply because he does not want to father a child. A devout Catholic, he understands marriage as a byword for parenthood. In *Obra Maestra* (*Masterpiece*), one of his essays, he claims that his masterpiece is the child he has not had, and never will (227). However, this rejection of parenthood is no reason for him to put an end to his devotion to women. He will remain on the lookout for the right bay in which to cast anchor. Before he does, however, he wants to give free rein to his five vehement senses, a pack of hounds hankering after the world.

"El Ancla" is another poem teeming with maritime metaphors (194). It is Ramón's desiderata of all the adventures he wants to embark upon before he finds someone with whom to tie the knot. Travel is what he most wants:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Antes de echar el ancla* | *Before I cast anchor in the treasures* |
| *En el tesoro del amor postrero,* | *Of my final love,* |
| *Yo quisiera recorrer el mundo* | *I wish to travel the world* |
| *En fiebre de carrera,* | *In a frantic race,* |
| *Con juventud, y una pepita de oro* | *In my youth, and with a golden nugget.* |
| *En los rincones de mi faltriquera.* | *Deep in my pocket.* |

He is a frantic racer bent on seeing the world before his life as an unmarried man comes to a halt. As elsewhere in Ramón, his use of language connotes frequent sexual undertones. What he really wants is to experience the world as if he were having sexual intercourse with the novelties and the uncounted treasures promised by the new lands. At the end of the poem he says, in my own translation:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Porque mis cinco sentidos vehementes* | *Because my five vehement senses* |
| *Penetraron los cinco continentes.* | *Have penetrated the five continents.* |

[2] This, otherwise faithful, translation by M. W. Jacobs does not, in my opinion, do justice to the musicality of the line: "The affectionate love of the paired couples" (70-71).



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Interesting indeed is his choice of words. Before landing in his native country, at the end of his long voyage, he has not merely seen or visited foreign lands, but has in fact *penetrated* them. Having done this, without the moral constraints of a religious marriage, he will now be free to cast anchor. By then, he will have done many things: kissed both India and Polynesia, caressed a Nilotic snake and many other beasts, striped and otherwise. Only then does he wish to disembark on the shores of a Mexican woman, one whose facial traits resemble those of that most iconic of Mexican images, our Lady of Guadalupe. He wants to lay his hands on the heart of a woman that wears big earrings in her dainty ears.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Porque mis cinco sentidos vehementes* | *Because my five vehement senses* |
| *Penetraron los cinco continentes,* | *Have penetrated the five continents* |
| *Bien puedo, amor final, poner la mano* | *I can, my final love, lay my hand* |
| *Sobre tu corazón guadalupano.* | *Upon your Guadalupean heart.* |

Having discussed "The Anchor", I now turn my attention to *Zozobra*, his second book (1919). As a maritime term, this Spanish word means capsizing, sinking or shipwreck. But it also refers to angst and foreboding. One of the poems of *Zozobra* is "El Candil" (The Chandelier). In the city of San Luis Potosí, where Ramón obtained his law degree, there is a church consecrated to Saint Francis. Hanging from the ceiling in the nave is a chandelier shaped as a sailing ship (170-171). It is a votive offering from the survivor of a shipwreck. If at first the sea was a distant mirage or the gateway to wondrous lands, Ramón now takes this chandelier as a metaphor of his own self as an individual. This is the first part of the poem:

| | |
|---|---|
| *In la cúspide radiante* | *In the radiant summit* |
| *Que el metal de mi persona* | *That my metallic person* |
| *Dilucida y perfecciona,* | *Elucidates and perfects,* |
| *Y en que una mano celeste* | *Where heavenly* |
| *Y otra de tierra me fincan* | *And earthy hands place a* |
| *Sobre la sien la corona;* | *Crown upon my brow;* |
| *En la orgía matinal* | *In the matinal orgy* |
| *En que me ahogo en azul,* | *In whose blueness I drown,* |
| *Y soy como un esmeril,* | *And I am emery-like,* |
| *Y central y esencial como el rosal;* | *And central and essential like a rosebush;* |
| *En la gloria en que melifluo* | *In the mellifluous glory in which* |
| *Soy activamente casto* | *I am actively chaste* |
| *Porque lo vive y lo inánime* | *Because the living and the inert* |
| *Se me ofrecen gozosos como pasto;* | *Are given to me as pasture;* |
| *En esta mística gula,* | *In this mystic gluttony,* |
| *En que mi nombre de pila* | *In which my Christian name* |
| *Es una candente cábala* | *Is an ardent kabala that* |
| *Que todo lo engrandece y aniquila* | *Enlarges and annihilates everything.* |

The verses forming this part of the first stanza are a long list of all the spaces where the poet's life unfolds. He inhabits a radiant summit, elucidated to perfection by something he calls his "metallic person". He lives in the midst of forces in direct opposition to one another, where he is crowned by heavenly and earthly hands. In the space he inhabits, mornings are described as a "matinal orgy", which drowns him in the sheer intensity of the surrounding blueness. In this space beyond the limits imposed by cold logic, he allows himself to be rough and hard, emery-like, yet retaining the essential delicateness of a rose. Here the poet can orgiastically give free



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rein to his sexual appetite and bask in the mellifluous glory of life, all this while remaining "actively chaste". In this paradoxical world, he feeds on the pastures of both the living and the inert. Here sinful gluttony is mystic, while his given, Christian name—a rather common one at that—is transformed into *an ardent kabala*. In this non-Euclidean space he finds a symbol that summarises every single aspect of his personality:

| | |
|---|---|
| *He descubierto mi símbolo* | *I have found my symbol* |
| *En el candil en forma de bajel* | *In the ship-shaped chandelier* |
| *Que cuelga de las cúpulas criollas,* | *Hanging from Creole cupolas,* |
| *Su cristal sabio y su plegaria fiel* | *In its sage crystal and faithful prayer.* |

Next, he imagines that he and the chandelier, not unlike an eloping bride and groom, are at the altar to dutifully obey one single commandment, thou shall venerate:

| | |
|---|---|
| *¡Oh candil, oh bajel,* | *O chandelier, o vessel,* |
| *Frente al altar, en dúo recóndito,* | *At the altar, as a recondite couple,* |
| *Cumplimos un solo mandamiento: venerar!* | *We obey one single commandment: venerate!* |

Once more, Ramón subverts the religious meaning of the commandment. "Venerate" can be used to mean *revere*, as in worship and solicit the goodwill of a god, but also to allude to joy, the venereal kind.

After their wedding of sorts, the chandelier and the poet become one and the same person. It is fair to say then that whenever the poets uses the second person singular he is in fact referring to himself. From this point on, the poet addresses the chandelier directly. He uses both the literal and the metaphoric names of the object. In the following stanza, he combines blatant literality with powerful imagery:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Embarcación que iluminas* | *You are the vessel that illuminates* |
| *A las piscinas divinas:* | *Divine basins:* |
| *En tu irisada presencia* | *In your iridescent presence* |
| *Mi humildad se esponja y se anaranja,* | *My humility grows and oranges,* |
| *Porque en la muda eminencia* | *Because, in your silent eminence,* |
| *Están anclados contigo* | *Anchored in you,* |
| *El vuelo de mis gaviotas* | *Are the flight of my seagulls* |
| *Y el humo sollozante de mis flotas* | *And the sobbing smoke of my fleet.* |

The vessel does illuminate because it is, first and foremost, a chandelier. The basins contain plain water, but they are church fonts containing baptismal water, hence *divine*. In the luminous presence of the chandelier-vessel, the poet seems to oxymoronically describe himself as proudly humble. He does so by outrageously using the noun *orange* as a verb, as a round and expanding humbleness waxing in the presence of the chandelier. In the unspoken eminence that is the magnificent chandelier, his flying seagulls and the smoke of his sobbing fleet have dropped anchor. In the nave that houses the chandelier-vessel, flight and fleeing smoke move, as it were, by remaining static. Ramón then reflects upon the immobility of the sailing ship and says:

| | |
|---|---|
| *¡Oh candil, oh bajel, Dios ve tu pulso* | *O chandelier, O vessel: God sees your pulse* |
| *Y sabe que te anonadas* | *And knows that you are paralyzed* |
| *En las cúpulas sagradas,* | *In these sacred cupolas,* |
| *No por decrépito ni por insulso!* | *But not for decrepitude or vapidity!* |



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No other feeling can instil as much fear in Ramón as decrepitude. He lives in constant fear of losing his sexual prowess, his army of "ants", as he describes it an eponymous text (160). The chandelier's pulse is also the poet's: his blood, veins and vigour. Just like the chandelier, Ramón is very much alive while his army of ants swarms at the apex of his sexual drive.

It is not because the chandelier is infirm that it no longer criss-crosses the seas. If the ship and Ramón are mooring, it is because they are immersed in prayer. However, this can also mean that they have been immersed in something altogether different. Both are full-time sailors that explore remote shores before casting anchor in their final port of call. In their voyages, they have frequently run aground in the permissiveness of treacherous straits. Now they are silent and immobile, enduring the consequences of the other, sexual, connotation of *venerate*. Sheridan notes the curious meaning that the verses *My Christian name is an ardent kabala* take on after a search of Camilo José Cela's *Diccionario del erotismo*, as defined by the Nobel laureate in the entry *rameras* (*whores*) (306). In other words, just like a chandelier that hangs from the ceiling of a church, the poem is a synthesis of sin and sanctity. Ramón goes on to recount the many shores he and the ship have kissed in their countless "voyages", braving all sorts of weather. Opera buffs will be reminded of Don Giovanni and the long list of women he has known:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tu alta oración animas* | *You animate your high prayer* |
| *Con el genio de los climas.* | *With the temper of climates.* |
| *Tú conoces el espanto* | *You know the horror* |
| *De las islas de leprosos,* | *Of insular leper colonies,* |
| *El domicilio polar* | *The polar domicile of* |
| *De los donjuanescos osos,* | *Donjuanesque bears,* |
| *La magnética bahía* | *The magnetic bay* |
| *De los deliquios venéreos,* | *Of venereal frenzy,* |
| *Las garzas ecuatoriales* | *The equatorial herons,* |
| *Como escrúpulos aéreos.* | *Like airborne scruples.* |
| *Pore so, ante el Señor,* | *That is why, before our Lord,* |
| *Paralizas tu experiencia* | *You paralyze your experience,* |
| *Con el perfume que da tu major flor* | *In the scent of your best flower.* |

The list of voyages is an account of his own eventful life and times. At least poetically, he has travelled far and wide. He has been to islands that are leper colonies, in other words, he has sinned. Leprosy is an unequivocal metaphor of spiritual death that leads to corporal putridness. Sinning Ramón also knows the antipodes of those sultry islands of debauchery: *the polar domicile* of bears; not just any bears, but the lecherous kind: furry Casanovas trapped in gelid abstinence. Ramón has also navigated the treacherous waters of *the magnetic bay of venereal frenzy*. It is the land of irrepressible sexual desire. He is only too aware of the compelling power that the female body exerts upon him. This bay is *magnetic*, meaning: inexorable, irrepressible and relentless. Women, being magnetic, show Ramón his true North. However, *coco de mer* trees are all too lacking on this torrid coast. In opposition to the licentiousness of the bay, fly the herons (*garzas*), fleshless birds if there ever was one. At odds with the surrounding sultriness, incapable of suggesting anything even remotely sexual, herons are nothing but airborne scruples. But these scruples do not stem from the poet's repentance. They are, so to speak, "external scruples" resulting from the proverbial lack of flesh on herons. These are a few of the things Ramón and the ship-chandelier have known.



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*Know* (in Spanish *conocer*) is a polysemous verb, used in everyday conversation, which still retains its archaic biblical meaning of sexual intercourse. This, no other, is the meaning Ramón attaches to this verb when he lists the various places, animals and horrors the chandelier has known. Ramón and the ship do not simply *know*, in the seafaring sense of having travelled to all those places. Just like in "The Anchor", Ramón-ship-chandelier has penetrated the five continents. Then he adds:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Paralelo a tu quimera,* | *Parallel to your chimera,* |
| *Cristalizo sin sofismas* | *Free of sophisms,* |
| *Las brasas de mi ígnea primavera* | *I turn the embers of my igneous spring into crystal,* |
| *Enarbolo mi júbilo y mi mal* | *Hoist my joy and my plight,* |
| *Y suspendo mis llagas como prismas* | *And suspend my sores like prisms.* |

So it is that the poet and chandelier chart a parallel route: they have both called at the very same ports and have experienced the exact same pleasures and plight. They have both chased the same dream (*chimera*). There is no sophistry that can conceal the poet's suffering, which is the same the ship experienced on the sinful islands of lepers. At one point, the pleasures of the flesh meet their match in venereal disease: *And suspend my sores like prisms*. Ramón's dualism is in full swing in this passage: from pure crystal to shameful sin, performing a kind of poetic alchemy that metaphorically transforms his sores (sins) into a clear prism, a many-faceted mineral that synthesizes the various layers that form his being. One the many facets of these sores-prisms is the sophism-free confession of his sins. This may explain his adamant rejection of parenthood noted above. He finally says:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Candil, que vas como yo* | *Chandelier, you sail like me:* |
| *Enfermo de lo absolute* | *Struck down with the absolute.* |
| *Y enfilas la expert proa* | *You aim your seasoned prow* |
| *A un dorado archipelago sin luto* | *Towards a golden, mourning-free archipelago.* |
| *Candil, hermético esquife:* | *Chandelier, hermetic skiff:* |
| *Mis sueños recalcitrantes* | *Before your maritime crystal,* |
| *Enmudencen cual un cero* | *My recalcitrant dreams* |
| *En tu cristal marinero* | *Are rendered silent, zero-like,* |
| *Inmóviles, excelsos y adorantes* | *Motionless, lofty and adoring.* |

In the space formed by the nave of a church in San Luis Potosí, in this waterless ocean, the chandelier-vessel-poet comes within sight of his final destination, God. What has set the poet and the ship on their course is a disease they both suffer from: their quest for the absolute, which can be read as an incurable venereal disease or as unflinching religious devotion. In this church, in the all-pervading presence of God, they alter course towards a region which is a golden, mourning-free archipelago. The absolute means the end of motion. The *seasoned prow*, with its literal and sexual connotations, has negotiated all kinds of dire straits and now rises above the nautical chart, eventually reaching the ultimate zenith: the top of the cupola, at zero degrees, at the confluence of all cardinal points, where the poet´s recalcitrant dreams stay *motionless, lofty and adoring*.



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