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Schopenhauer in Dante's Garden of Eden: Melancholy and Rubén Darío's "Autumnal"

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NOT LONG AFTER his arrival in Chile from Nicaragua in 1886, Rubén Darío published an article in the newspaper *El mercurio*, in which he lamented the present state of the arts. Speaking of Chilean poets in particular, he complains: "Casi todos permanecen silenciosos; casi todos han olvidado el amable comercio de las Gracias. Quién con la cartera del diplomático no cura si la Fama le ha encumbrado a la categoría del primer poeta filosófico de América; quién en prosaicas oficinas cuenta números en lugar de hemistiquios" (qtd. in Martínez, introduction 15; Almost all remain silent; almost all have forgotten the kind commerce with the Graces. One, with a diplomat's briefcase, cares not if Fame has raised him to the rank of premier philosophical poet of America; another, in a prosaic office, counts numbers instead of hemistichs).[1] Darío's scorn for those accountants who waste their time in mundane offices balancing accounts and calculating profits reflects a typical *modernista* critique of contemporary bourgeois society. While people could be composing verses that bring the world closer to invisible spiritual realities, they are mired, instead, in vain and earthly pursuits that leave society feeling unfulfilled, discontent, and isolated. Yet this dualistic vision defined by counting money, on one hand, and counting hemistichs, on the other, also presents the perceived crisis in terms similar to those that traditionally characterized the concept of melancholy. Since antiquity, those who suffered from melancholy were often pictured as gloomy, materialistic people who excelled at such activities as counting and measuring. However, it was also possible to conceive of melancholy in positive terms, and it was thought that the negative effects of melancholy could occasionally be controlled and even sublimated to allow for incredible achievements, as in the arts, for example (Yates 51). Melancholy could claim both morose bookkeepers as well

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[1] All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

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as creative geniuses, and this is why the sixteenth-century Dominican friar, Battista da Crema, opined that a melancholic person was "either an angel or a demon" (qtd. in Brann 134). Darío's comments speak to a dichotomous perception of modernity as dominated by the negative traits of melancholy, but they also suggest that spiritual and artistic fulfillment may be tantalizingly close at hand. His remarks in the newspaper reveal his mindset as he adjusted to life in his new surroundings, and these initial reflections on melancholy in Chile find their fullest expression in his poem "Autumnal." Through comparison to a series of poetic texts, visual representations, and Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, this article examines the ways in which the discourse of melancholy informed Darío's conception of "Autumnal" as a passage from discontent to ecstasy.

"Autumnal" is the third in a series of four poems called *El año lírico*, which appears in Darío's landmark book, *Azul . . .* (1888). As the title of the poem suggests, autumn provides the theme for the poem, and like many other texts from *Azul . . .*, it was originally published in the Valparaíso newspaper, *La época*, in 1887. Before Darío took up residence in Chile, though, he had already shown an interest in using the seasons to reflect on melancholy, as evidenced in his poem "Ecce homo." This poem, written when he still lived in Central America as a teenager, presents all of humanity as afflicted by "spleen." The voice of the poem addresses God and describes how spleen insinuates itself into everyone:

> El *spleen* nos invade, nos sofoca,
> esta tu humanidad se vuelve loca,
> a fuerza de sufrir tantos reveses
> y tanto desengaño.
> (25–28)[2]
>
> *Spleen* invades us, suffocates us,
> this humanity of yours goes crazy,
> after suffering so many setbacks
> and so much disillusionment.

In this text, spleen is the result of the endless monotony of daily life symbolized by the unending repetition of the seasons: "No podemos mirar con tanta flema / esas evoluciones / que llaman estaciones" (15–17; We cannot look upon with such phlegm / these evolutions / called seasons). The word "spleen" is a metonymic reminder of the conceptual origins of melancholy in humoral psychology, according to which the condition resulted from an excess of black bile produced in that organ. The term was nearly synonymous with melancholy, ennui, and the so-called *mal du siècle*, all of which encompassed feelings of boredom, sadness, and disillusionment. Faced with the tacit refusal of God to grant a respite from the monotony of everyday life, the poetic subject in "Ecce homo" looks around and sees only moribund tedium. Nature, the heavens, society, religion, science, female beauty, and art are all consulted as antidotes, but none of these offers any deliverance. Melancholy returns, or rather, it continues ("yo me muero de *spleen*" [339]; I'm dying of *spleen*), leaving only one hope:

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, poems are cited with reference to line number, and when relevant, to book (or canto) and line number.

Visión pura de amor, dame consuelo:
corramos de esta noche la cortina;
abre tus ojos, quiero ver el cielo,
visión pura de amor, visión divina.

Aquí en mi corazón tengo guardado
un mi pequeño edén iluminado
por la luz de una aurora indefinida,
donde, en la tempestad, hallamos calmas
recogidos yo y *Ella*,
mi adorada, mi bella.
Se besan dulcemente nuestras almas,
y me refresca el rostro mansa brisa,
y me inunda de gozo
de mi amada la cándida sonrisa.
(353–66)

Pure vision of love, give me comfort:
let us lift the curtain on this night;
open your eyes, I want to see heaven,
pure vision of love, vision divine.

Here in my heart I keep stored
a small Eden of my own, illuminated
by the light of an undefined dawn,
where, amid a storm, we find calm
She and I, huddled,
my adored, my beautiful.
Our souls sweetly kiss,
and a soft breeze refreshes my face,
and I am flooded with the delight
of my beloved's bright smile.

The mystical, Neoplatonic symbolism of vision and light that characterizes these lines culminates in the last stanza, in which the souls of the subject and an idealized woman kiss ("se besan dulcemente nuestras almas" [363]), and the bliss ("gozo" [365]) of beholding the smile of the beloved washes over the lyric voice. Taking refuge in an abstract, intangible woman, rather than in a living, breathing one, reflects the repeatedly disappointing search in Darío's poetry for comfort from melancholy in sexual pleasure (Palacios Vivas 35). "Ecce homo" expresses a misogynistic rejection of the supposedly temporary, physical, impure beauty imputed to real women, described collectively as "un rebaño de lindos luciferes" (242; a flock of pretty Lucifers), in favor of the "hermosura verdadera" (256; true beauty). In its reworking of the *vanitas* trope, the poem reduces the physical attractiveness attributed to women of flesh and blood to just that, "un costal de carne y huesos" (312; a sack of flesh and bones). For Darío, physical indulgence in sex only serves to exacerbate melancholy, since it offers only a fleeting suspension of the condition after which the feelings of dissatisfaction return more acutely. As Lily Litvak writes,

Eros no sólo produce placer sino también soledad, desolación, desesperación, melancolía, *spleen*. Precisamente, son la misantropía y el pesimismo del erotismo fin de siglo lo que nos muestran su fundamento espiritual. Este impulso se concreta en una filosofía idealista, vagamente derivada de los filósofos alemanes, y se manifiesta en la consideración dualista de la vida como un campo de batalla entre fuerzas espirituales y terrenales. (3–4)

Eros produces not only pleasure, but also solitude, desolation, desperation, melancholy, *spleen*. It is precisely the misanthropy and pessimism of the end-of-century eroticism that show us its spiritual foundation. This impulse takes form in a philosophical idealism, vaguely derived from the German philosophers, and becomes evident in the dualistic understanding of life as a battleground between spiritual and terrestrial forces.

This failure of physical eroticism contrasts with the "hermosura verdadera" (256; true beauty) projected in the serene beauty of the smile that brings great joy, peace, and a relief from the pain of melancholy. "Ecce homo" suggests that whereas material pleasures fail, perhaps an imagined spiritual fulfillment conceived in Neoplatonic terms with echoes of nineteenth-century idealist philosophy can still be attained. "Ecce homo" foreshadows much of what appears subsequently in "Autumnal," and it establishes a structural pattern that is followed in the later poem. Melancholy is introduced, a search for deliverance from suffering is pursued, and the mystical vision of an idealized woman concludes the text. "Autumnal" follows this sequence, reinforcing and intensifying it through subtle evocations of influential texts and artwork.

The first indication of the melancholy subtext in "Autumnal" appears in the title itself, as the temperament had long been associated with the season of fall. There may be something seemingly natural to this seasonal connection, and indeed Darío professed as much:

La autumnal es la estación reflexiva. La Naturaleza comunica su filosofía sin palabras, con sus hojas pálidas, sus cielos taciturnos, sus opacidades melancólicas. El ensueño se impregna de reflexión. El recuerdo ilumina con su interior luz apacible los más amables secretos de nuestra memoria. Respiramos, como a través de un aire mágico, el perfume de las antiguas rosas. (qtd. in Ramoneda 28)

Autumn is the season for reflection. Without words, Nature communicates its philosophy with its pale leaves, its taciturn skies, its melancholic opaqueness. Revery is pervaded with reflection. Recollection, with its gentle interior light, illuminates the kindest secrets of our memory. We breathe, as if through a magical air, the perfume of ancient roses.

Darío's assessment of autumn and its associations may very well reflect his own personal convictions and experiences, but it is also consistent with a conventional interpretation of the season that extends back to antiquity. As mentioned above, the concept of melancholy derives ultimately from the ancient humoral psychology in which the four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) were each related in an extensive system to corresponding temperaments, ages, elements, planets, seasons, and times of the day (table 1).[3] Melancholy was related to black bile, adulthood, earth, Saturn, autumn, and the afternoon, the last of which appears referenced in the first line of the poem:

En las pálidas tardes
yerran nubes tranquilas
en el azul; en las ardientes manos
se posan las cabezas pensativas.
(1–4)

On pale afternoons
tranquil clouds wander
in the blue; in ardent hands
pensive heads rest.

Described using the poetic plural for the singular, the lyric subject sits with his head in his hand as the clouds drift through the afternoon sky colored by pale shades of light ("pálidas tardes" [1]). The poetic voice is not said to observe the

[3] This table is adapted from the work of Martin Kemp (20).

Table 1.

Humor	*Temperament*	*Age*	*Element*	*Planet*	*Season*	*Time of Day*
Blood	Sanguine	Youth	Air	Jupiter	Spring	Morning
Yellow Bile	Choleric	Adulthood	Fire	Mars	Summer	Midday
Black Bile	Melancholic	Middle Age	Earth	Saturn	Autumn	Afternoon
Phlegm	Phlegmatic	Old Age	Water	Moon	Winter	Night

clouds directly as they float overhead, but their presence and passage through the air can be taken to symbolize the thoughts that move through his mind. The melancholy content of these meditations is revealed indirectly through a series of exclamations: "¡Ah los suspiros! ¡Ah los dulces sueños! / ¡Ah las tristezas íntimas" (5–6; Ah the sighs! Ah the sweet dreams! / Ah the intimate sorrows!), which reflect feelings of sadness, nostalgia and longing.

Another reflection of the melancholy tradition is the pose assumed by the subject, with his head cradled in his hands. This bodily position is one of the most enduring and recognizable of the iconographic attributes of melancholy, and it was frequently depicted in visual artwork and described in verbal texts. In the Hispanic tradition, descriptions of this gesture, understood as proper to "dejected spirits, morbid brooding and melancholy" (Nordström 18) appear in medieval Spanish texts and continue in such paintings as the portrait of Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1798) (fig. 1) by Francisco Goya (Nordström 133–41). The most influential modern depiction of this pose and all its associations with melancholy, however, appeared nearly three centuries earlier in Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514) (fig. 2).

This engraving was especially popular in nineteenth-century France, where Dürer's "fame was great in literary and artistic circles" (Patty 245). The artwork was influential on several of the same poets that Darío admired and imitated, such as Théophile Gautier, who composed *Melancholia* (1834). In this poem, Gautier imagines Dürer contemplating the misery and frustration of humanity in the same posture assumed by the angel in his engraving:

> Il me semble te voir au coin de ta fenêtre
> Etroite, à vitraux peints, dans ton fauteuil d'ancêtre.
> L'ogive encadre un front bleuissant d'outremer,
> Comme dans tes tableaux, ô vieil Albert Dürer!
> Nuremberg sur le ciel dresse ses mille flèches,
> Et découpe ses toits aux silhouettes sèches;
> Toi, le coude au genou, *le menton dans la main*,
> Tu rêves tristement au pauvre sort humain.
> (121–28; emphasis added)

> Behind the painted panes methinks I see thee there,
> In thy strait window-nook, in thine ancestral chair.
> The ogive frames a front, pale 'gainst a ground of gold,
> As in thy pictures 'tis, o Albrecht Dürer old.
> Nürnberg its thousand spires outlines against the sky
> And lifts its angled roofs and gables builded high;
> Whilst, sadly, *chin in hand* and elbow upon knee,
> Thou ponderest the lot of poor humanity.
> (Payne 121–28; emphasis added)

Figure 1. Francisco de Goya, *Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos*, 1798. Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, New York.

Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514. Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, New York.

The description of Nuremberg establishes the contrast between its elevated spires and the humdrum lives of its inhabitants below. Gautier implies that Dürer enjoys a view from above, where the artist personifies the melancholic angel of his own creation ("dans sa création t'a personnifié" [136]) as he sits with chin in his hand. From there Gautier describes and extolls *Melencolia I* for capturing the melancholy spirit

of Dürer himself and the superior spirituality of his bygone age. It is particularly revealing that, in his ekphrasis of the print, Gautier interprets the luminary in the background not as a comet, as is conventional, but as a black sun setting over the sea ("... d'un grand soleil tout noir" [168]). As discussed below, Darío's poem also pairs the melancholy posture of the poetic subject with a sun setting into the sea.

The final evocation of melancholy in the first stanza of "Autumnal" involves the vision of a woman enveloped by golden dust. The lyric voice exclaims:

> ¡Ah el polvo de oro que en el aire flota,
> tras cuyas ondas trémulas se miran
> los ojos tiernos y húmedos,
> las bocas inundadas de sonrisas,
> las crespas cabelleras
> y los dedos de rosa que acarician!
> (7–12)
>
> Ah the dust of gold that floats in the air
> behind whose flickering waves are seen
> tender and damp eyes,
> mouths flooded with smiles,
> curly hair
> and the fingers of roses that caress!

The emergence of a smiling female face is familiar to readers of "Ecce homo." Here she appears from behind a golden cloud, lending her a mysterious quality, and her other physical traits, including tender eyes, wavy hair, and soft fingers, are similar to those commonly attributed to female characters throughout *El año lírico*. The potential touch of her fingers heightens her sensuality, but it also seems to offer gentle reassurance and comfort to the poetic voice. Ostensibly, the description merely refers to the fantasy of the daydreaming subject, but a clue to its metaphorical meaning can be traced through classical poetry. It is well known that dawn was conventionally personified as a woman, and Homer's description of her rose fingers became a trope of the epic genre. The soft colors attributed to her fingers are a personification of the "pale shades of the dawn sky."[4] In "Autumnal" the woman described in the first stanza also has rose fingers ("dedos de rosa" [12]) and the sky, too, is lit by pale colors ("las pálidas tardes" [1]), but Darío's poem takes place during the afternoon, at which time the sun would be descending. Her apparition could not therefore be interpreted as a metaphorical reference to dawn, but it could be read as a personification of the colors of the evening sky at twilight. As such, her fingers metaphorically caress the poetic subject through her warmth, while the last light of the sun recedes from earth. Her curly tresses ("crespas cabelleras" [11]) likewise recall those final sunbeams, and the floating golden dust ("polvo de oro" [7]) resembles what are known as crepuscular rays, or "shafts of sunlit air separated by cloud shadows, made visible by the scattering of light by airborne particles" (Pretor-Pinney 225). Finally, the portrayal of her facial features in relation to water suggests the specific location where the sun is setting. It is declining into the sea, and her eyes thus become humid and her mouth becomes flooded. The crests and troughs of the waves illuminated by the setting sun perhaps recall innumerable smiles arrayed across the surface of the water ("las bocas inundadas

[4] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (1996), s.v. "Eos."

de sonrisas" [10]).[5] Understanding these metaphorical atmospherics is important because the setting sun is yet another important part of the symbolism of melancholy (Nordström 21). These lines of the poem thus reinforce the explicit reference to the time of day conventionally associated with melancholy ("En las pálidas tardes" [1]) by describing the sunset.

Understanding the "polvo de oro" (7; dust of gold) as a reference to the particles suspended in the air at sunset helps to reveal the influence of other texts behind this description. For Rosemary C. LoDato, the golden dust at the beginning of "Autumnal" reinforces the Neoplatonic subtext of the poem expressed in the opening epigraph, "Eros, Vita, Lumen" (135). She argues that "in Darío's poem, each golden particle contains a secret meaning. Gold is not only a decorative metal; for Darío, it is the esoteric and alchemical symbol of knowledge and perfection" (135). This is certainly correct, but it should be added that the symbolism of secret, hidden knowledge is enhanced by previous treatments of sunlit dust particles that go back at least as far as Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*. In book 2 of his epic on Epicureanism, Lucretius writes:

> contemplator enim, cum solis lumina cumque
> inserti fundunt radii per opaca domorum:
> multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis
> corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso.
> (2.114–17)
>
> For look well when you let the sun peep in a shuttered room
> Pouring forth the brilliance of its beams into the gloom,
> And you'll see myriads of motes all moving many ways
> Throughout the void and intermingling in the golden rays . . .
> (Stallings 39)[6]

Lucretius goes on to provide an interpretation for the sight of specks in shafts of light, commenting:

> quod tales turbae motus quoque materiai
> significant clandestinos caecosque subesse.
> multa videbis enim plagis ibi percita caecis
> commutare viam retroque repulsa reverti,
> nunc huc nunc illuc, in cunctas undique partis.
> scilicet hic a principiis est omnibus error:
> prima moventur enim per se primordia rerum.
> (2.127–33)
>
> Such turmoil means that there are secret motions, out of sight,
> That lie concealed in matter. For you'll see the motes careen
> Off course, and then bounce back again, by means of blows unseen,
> Drifting now in this direction, now that, on every side.
> You may be sure this starts with atoms; they are what provide
> The base of this unrest.
> (Stallings 39–40)

[5] This reading is supported by comparison to another of Darío's poems in which the comparison is more explicit. Poem 3 from his *Rimas*, for example, begins, "En la pálida tarde se hundía," (1; In the pale afternoon sinks) much like the first line of "Autumnal," and it continues: "el sol en su ocaso, / con la faz rubicunda en un nimbo / de polvo dorado" (2–3; the sun in its decline / with its ruddy face in a halo / of golden dust). This poem describes the setting sun as its rays of light shine through golden clouds, and as it declines a small boat carrying "amada y amado" (8; beloved and lover) rows away from the spectator toward the horizon.

[6] Citations of A. E. Stallings's English translation refer to page number.

For Lucretius, the erratic motions of the dust particles provide evidence for the more elemental and invisible material that constitutes the very substance of our reality. Humans may not be able see the atoms, but according to Epicureanism they are surely there behind every sensorial perception of the world. Unlike Darío, Lucretius was a materialist, and thus for him the unobservable reality that lurks under the cover of everyday objects is strictly physical.

Many centuries later, John Milton also takes up this image and works it into his classic poetic treatment of melancholy. His poem "Il penseroso" (1645) was conceived as the serious antithetical counterpart to "L'Allegro" (1645), in which he praises the carefree life spent pursuing earthly pleasure. In contrast to this lighthearted text, "Il penseroso" depicts the deep spiritual revelations made possible by a lifestyle devoted to contemplation and self-discipline. The poem begins with an unequivocal renunciation of the frivolous delights celebrated in "L'Allegro":

> Hence vain deluding joys,
> The brood of Folly without father bred,
> How little you bestead,
> Or fill the fixèd mind with all your toys;
> Dwell in some idle brain,
> And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
> As thick and numberless
> As the *gay motes that people the sunbeams*,
> Or likest hovering dreams.
> (1–9; emphasis added)

Here again, the "gay motes that people the sunbeams" (8) refer to the specks of dust in the air that reflect the sunlight. In both Darío's poem and in Milton's, the references to the illuminated particulates appear in the opening stanza (line 7 of "Autumnal" and line 8 of "Il Penseroso"), and both serve to establish a similar view in the texts. For Milton, the golden dust symbolizes the negative attributes imputed to mirth, as David Miller observes:

> The faults of mundane joy are negative. They are "vain," "deluding," "fickle" dreams, of no more account than motes of dust dancing in the sunlight. . . . They harm man only insofar as they prevent him from desiring a higher state. (35)

In effect, Milton employs an image of dust similar to that found in Lucretius only to denounce many of the same values espoused in the philosophy of—or at least popularly associated with—the Roman poet. Yet neither Lucretius nor Milton is content with the dust in itself, but rather their interest is in what lies beyond the motes. For the Epicurean, there are only smaller physical particles that underlie appearances, but these are crucial for understanding how the world works. For Milton, there is an unseen spiritual reality that ultimately gives meaning to the world. Nor does Darío's poem appear to be concerned with the "polvo de oro" (7; dust of gold) per se, but rather what looms behind the dust. As LoDato argues, the golden dust is, indeed, symbolic of deeper, hidden knowledge; the true interest of the lyric voice is the personification of the setting sun, the enchanting, mysterious face of the woman. It is her countenance and its symbolism in which the deepest understanding consists.

There are further similarities between Milton's and Darío's poems that help to highlight the melancholy subtext of "Autumnal." The subject of both poems is a pensive person, as reflected early in the "cabezas pensativas" (4; pensive heads) of

"Autumnal" and in the title of Milton's "Il penseroso." These subjects also gaze at the lights in the sky at midnight, and they recount the distant sounds they hear from an elevated position. Likewise, the passage from darkness to dawn is described in both poems, and the appearance of the bright light of aurora is initially veiled before it becomes fully visible. Most important is how both poems conclude with descriptions of spiritual rapture. The voice of "Il penseroso" imagines the joy of life among the "studious cloister's pale" (156) and wishes for divine revelation: "There let the pealing organ blow, / To the full-voiced choir below, / In service high, and anthems clear, / As may with sweetness, through my ear, / Dissolve me into ecstasies, / And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes" (161–66). The speaker in "Autumnal" hears similarly unearthly music ("músicas nunca oídas" [52]) before experiencing a vision that produces an ineffable holy bliss ("sacras dichas" [60]) in his soul, and this final ecstatic experience is especially important for understanding the role of melancholy in Darío's text.

The visions experienced by the poetic subjects in both poems exemplify the heightened mental states that melancholy was thought to be capable of provoking. Traditional theories based on diverse theological, philosophical, and physiological arguments held that inspired melancholy could lead to bursts of artistic creativity in some, and in others it could provoke prophecies, visions, and the kind of mystical transport depicted by Milton and Darío. Lauren S. Dixon, for example, writes:

> The idea of religious melancholy, or "enthusiasm," like the concept of melancholia itself, originated in ancient Greek philosophy. Socrates described it as a privileged condition in his discussion of the four "blessed" types of madness: prophecy, mystical revelation, poetic inspiration, and lovesickness. . . . Christianity derived the concept of the melancholic holy man from Aristotle, who linked creative genius with the state of *enthousiastikon*, meaning to be possessed or inspired. (31)

"Il penseroso" exemplifies this thinking, and Frances A. Yates calls it the "supreme poetic expression of the theory of inspired melancholy" (56). In the nineteenth century, versions of these ideas continued to be popular among the same French poets who included the melancholic head-in-hand iconography in their texts, such as Gautier, discussed above, and Charles Baudelaire (Patty; Hauptman). As a predisposing condition for mystical or artistic revelations, melancholy was perceived as tightly bound to a kind of otherworldly sensibility attributed to creative genius and mystical ascetics alike from classical antiquity through the nineteenth century. For Darío, ever attracted to esotericism, melancholy would have afforded him a rich intellectual foundation from which to imagine the paths to hidden knowledge and divine secrets.[7] By invoking attributes associated with melancholy, such as autumn, the afternoon, and a person brooding head-in-hand, and by evoking paradigmatic texts of the melancholy tradition, such as Milton's "Il penseroso," Darío presents "Autumnal" as a reflection on melancholy and the search for mystical knowledge, creative inspiration, and spiritual salvation.

Beginning with the second stanza of the poem, a fairy acts as guide for the poetic voice in his spiritual quest. She leads him on a kind of pilgrimage that commences with a series of preliminary revelations consisting of "lo que cantan los pájaros, / lo

[7] Cathy Jrade's classic study, *Rubén Darío and the Romantic Search for Unity*, details Darío's serious interest in esoteric thought and the mark it leaves on his poetry. She writes, for example, that his comments about occult philosophies of the day "indicate a serious predisposition to a wide range of esoteric beliefs" (11).

que llevan las brisas, / lo que vaga en las nieblas, / lo que sueñan las niñas" (17–20; what the birds sing, / what the breezes bring, / what drifts in the mists, / what girls dream), which serve to whet her companion's appetite. The fairy clears away that which obscures, interprets that which is indecipherable, and makes visible that which is unseen, disclosing esoteric knowledge accessible to few others. Her companion subsequently expresses a "sed infinita" (22; infinite thirst) and beseeches his fairy escort for "inspiración honda, profunda, / inmensa: luz, calor, aroma, vida" (25–26; inspiration, deep, profound, / immense: light, warmth, scent, life). Stanzas 4, 5, and 6 depict a succession of escalating revelations that stimulate the subject's senses and leave him craving more each time. They begin at night, a kind of *modernista* "noche oscura," and as they ascend a mountain, the lyric voice is treated to the twinkling stars (32), the ensuing sunrise (36), the fragrance of flowers (45), and the sound of enchanting music and strange noises (50–52). The description of dawn is particularly interesting, as it represents the counterpart to the twilight of the first stanza, and like this earlier portrayal, dawn is compared to the face of a young woman (36–40). These sensory stimuli are similar to the kinds of remedies traditionally prescribed to alleviate the symptoms of melancholy and here they function in much the same way, but they always leave the melancholic poetic voice gasping for more. "¡Más!" is repeated three times (35, 41, 49), once in each of the stanzas 4, 5, and 6. It is only the final revelation that appears to satisfy completely the infinite thirst of the poetic subject, as it leaves him entranced and speechless.

Just before experiencing rapture, the melancholic subject hears voices, echoes, laughter, mysterious murmurs, flutterings, and "músicas nunca oídas" (52; music never heard before). This music seems to proceed from some other transcendent realm, and this is the destination where the fairy leads her follower. They have arrived at the interstices of the earthly and the divine worlds, where they are separated by only a thin veil from the "ansias infinitas" (54; infinite desires), the "inspiración profunda" (55; profound inspiration), and the "alma de las liras" (56; the soul of lyres). The intervening partition is quite distinct from the veil of Queen Mab described in the story of the same name also from *Azul*. . . . In the prose narrative, the veil symbolizes the queen's deliverance of artists through the magic of dreams to another, idealized world that contrasts with the harsh conditions of their bourgeois surroundings. In "El velo de la reina Mab," to be blanketed by the veil is desirable because it alters the artists' perception, enabling them to see the world through a rose-colored filter. In "Autumnal," the veil symbolizes the archetypal barrier between the mortal and the immortal, between illusion and reality, marking the limit against which humans cannot trespass and that which separates modern individuals from unity with the rest of the universe. It is the conventional disconnect that esoteric Romanticism strove to overcome so that humans might return to their mythical origins and thereby find true fulfillment and completeness.[8] The fairy grants a rare glimpse into this realm when she tears the veil: "Y lo rasgó. Y allí todo

[8] Jrade writes, "Romantic writers adapted various versions of the Neoplatonic paradigm in order to explain what they felt to be personal fragmentation, estrangement, or alienation. They sought to help redeem humanity by fostering a reconciliation with nature, from which it had severed itself" (*Rubén Darío* 7).

era aurora. / En el fondo se vía / un bello rostro de mujer" (57–59; And [she] tore it. And everything there was dawn. / In the background could be seen / the beautiful face of a woman). The sunlight of dawn pours through the opening, and in the background the poetic subject discerns the face of a beautiful woman. The fairy has thus led him from the depths of dejection to the height of ecstasy, from the setting sun to the rising sun, and from darkness to light. It produces a transformative experience, and the question becomes how to convey this inspired level of consciousness to others: "¡Oh, nunca, / Piérides, diréis las sacras dichas / que en el alma sintiera!" (59–61; Oh, never / Pierides, will you say the holy bliss / I felt in my soul!). In this way, his plight remains that of the tortured artist who has witnessed the sublime but remains incapable of representing such a transcendent experience in words. Yet the feeling that dominates is one of detached peace, the kind experienced by the melancholic who has "'taken leave of the senses'" (Yates 56) depicted in Dürer's engraving. Like the winged figure in the print, the poetic subject stares into the distance with his eyes fixed and his head resting on his hands:

> Y yo tenía entonces
> clavadas las pupilas
> en el azul; y en mis ardientes manos
> se posó mi cabeza pensativa.
> (63–66)
>
> And I had then
> my pupils fixed
> on the blue; and in my ardent hands
> rested my pensive head.

At the end, he finds himself back where he started and in the same posture, but he is changed and entranced by it all. The fairy, whose sly grin ("vaga sonrisa" [62]) betrays her irony, asks him one last time if he wants more, which elicits no response. He is too absorbed and satisfied even to hear her question. He remains mute and transfixed on the blue of the sky, the eponymous *azul* of Darío's text.

This revelation experienced by the poetic voice appears to occur on the mountain where the fairy first took her companion, and in this it resembles the texts by Gautier and Milton mentioned above, in which the melancholic subjects look out from garrets and towers. Moreover, the mountaintop revelation is particularly rich in the Western tradition, dating back at least as far as the description of Moses's climbing of Mount Sinai to receive the law of God and the subsequent mandate to deliver it to his people. Darío probably also knew of a modern, uniquely Latin American version of this story in Simón Bolívar's prose poem, "Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo" (1822). In this text, Bolívar recounts his symbolic ascent of the famous Ecuadorian mountain, Chimborazo:

> Y arrebatado por la violencia de un espíritu desconocido para mí, que me parecía divino, dejé atrás las huellas de Humboldt, empañando los cristales eternos que circuyen el Chimborazo. Llego como impulsado por el genio que me animaba, y desfallezco al tocar con mi cabeza la copa del firmamento: tenía a mis pies los umbrales del abismo. (730)
>
> And carried away by the violence of a spirit unknown to me, which appeared divine, I left behind the tracks of Humboldt, misting over the eternal crystals that surround Chimborazo. I arrive as if driven by a spirit that encouraged me, and I faint upon touching the top of the firmament with my head: I had the brink of the abyss at my feet.

He claims to have surpassed the heights reached by Alexander von Humboldt on that very mountain, guided by some divine being. There he is possessed by the spirit

of Colombia and comes face-to-face with the god of Time, who offers a prophecy and commandment to Bolívar: "No escondas los secretos que el cielo te ha revelado: di la verdad a los hombres" (730; do not hide the secrets that heaven has revealed to you: tell the truth to men). The vision is overwhelming to the revolutionary, and he writes that it left him "absorto, yerto, por decirlo así, quedé exánime largo tiempo, tendido sobre aquel inmenso diamante que me servía de lecho" (730; absorbed, stiff, so to speak, I remained beside myself for a long time, lying on that immense diamond that served as a bed). His paralyzed state is reminiscent of the trance of the subject in "Autumnal," who is too fixated on the sky to respond to the fairy's questions.[9] When Bolívar finally regains consciousness, he records what he saw and heard in "Mi delirio." As I will discuss later, this kind of self-portrayal as an individual specially chosen by a divine power to receive a message and convey it to his people as an enlightened emissary will resonate with Darío's own self-depiction, but for now I would like to turn to what appears to be an even more influential model for the conclusion of "Autumnal."

Dante Alighieri's *Purgatorio* culminates in the reunion of the poet with his beloved Beatrice on the summit of a mountain in the Garden of Eden. Canto 30 of *Purgatorio* marks an important transition as Beatrice takes over from Virgil as guide, and the poet passes from sin to blessedness. Much of the imagery from this canto foreshadows that of "Autumnal," but the most significant similarities involve the portrayal of Beatrice. Her first appearance to Dante is compared to a sunrise, as she first approaches Dante amid shouts of jubilation and flowers falling around her veiled face (30.22–30). The canto emphasizes her veil on three occasions (30.31, 65, 67), and her hidden features and her physical distance from Dante on the other side of the river Lethe are symbolic of the poet's moral failures that separate him from her. She points out that he had been bound for greatness, distinguished both by the stars of his birth and by divine grace, but that he was squandering his potential (30.109–20). Beatrice goes on to scold him for "pursuing those false images of good / that bring no promise of fulfillment" (30.131–32) after she died and could no longer guide him toward virtue. In the following canto, she continues chiding him and identifies his desire for her as that which formerly "guided you to love that good / beyond which there is nothing left to long for" (31.23–24), and he finally confesses his guilt to her and promptly falls unconscious from the intensity of the experience. At last, once he has shown contrition and crossed the river Lethe, Dante can approach Beatrice, who yields to the pleas of her attendants, and removes her veil, prompting his reaction at the conclusion of the canto:

> O isplendor di viva luce etterna,
> chi palido si fece sotto l'ombra
> sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna,
>
> che non paresse aver la mente ingombra,
> tentando a render te qual tu paresti
> là dove armonizzando il ciel t'adombra,
> quando ne l'aere aperto ti solvesti?
>
> (31.139–45)

[9] The Venezuelan artist Tito Salas astutely discerns the relation of Bolívar's fantasy to melancholic ecstasy. In a painting titled *Mi delirio sobre el Chimborazo* (1929–30), Salas appeals to the traditional melancholic gesture of the head in hand to depict a transfixed Bolívar reclined against the mountain peak, as the winged God of Time looms over his shoulder (Pineda 211–15).

O splendor of eternal living light—
even he who has grown pale in the shadow of Parnassus
or has drunk deeply from its well,

would not even he appear to have his mind confounded,
attempting to describe you as you looked,
Heaven with its harmonies reflected in you,
when in the wide air you unveiled yourself?

Then, at the beginning of canto 32, Dante, still reeling from what he had just seen, continues:

Tant' eran li occhi miei fissi e attenti
a disbramarsi la decenne sete,
che li altri sensi m'eran tutti spenti.

Ed essi quince e quindi avien parete
Di non caler—così lo santo riso
A sé traéli con l'antica rete!
(32.1–6)

My eyes were fixed and so intent
to satisfy ten years of thirst
that all my other senses were undone,

walled off from anything around them, enclosed
in their indifference, so did the holy smile
ensnare them in its old, familiar net.

After many years separated from Beatrice and after an arduous journey to arrive in the Garden of Eden, Dante finally sees his beloved with her veil raised. These last cantos of the *Purgatorio*, the *cantica* devoted to Dante's spiritual purification, relate the symbolic salvific effects of female beauty and love and the surmounting of barriers that separate the poet from his beloved. They tell the archetypal story of a pilgrimage culminating in a dramatic vision and reunion that rescue the pilgrim from his sin and bring him closer to the divine.

The similarities between these cantos of the *Purgatorio* and Darío's poem are striking, and they help to elucidate the relations between melancholy and what Nancy LaGreca terms the "erotic mysticism" of *modernista* writing. Both Dante's and Darío's texts recount a spiritual journey under the direction of a female guide, the scaling of a mountain on whose summit the countenance of a beautiful woman appears from beneath a veil, and an ensuing ecstatic experience that leaves the beholder stunned and withdrawn from the physical world. Both texts describe the ineffability of the final vision, indescribable even for someone inspired by the muses (Darío's "Piérides" [60] and Dante's "l'ombra / sì di Parnaso" [31.140–41]), and the resulting fixation of the poetic subject's gaze. The ways in which the conclusion of "Ecce homo" even more literally resembles Dante's poem further strengthen the impression that the final vision of *Purgatorio* was known to and influential on Darío.[10] In their poems, both Dante and Darío express the attainment of spiritual enlightenment as through an abstract erotic desire for a woman,

[10] "Ecce homo" concludes: "Se besan dulcemente nuestras almas, / y me refresca el rostro mansa brisa, / y me inunda de gozo / de mi amada la cándida sonrisa" (353–66; Our souls sweetly kiss, / and a soft breeze refreshes my face / and I am flooded with the delight / of my beloved's bright smile). The smile of the beloved in the last line recalls the smile of Beatrice ("santo riso" [*Purgatorio* 32.5]).

or in other words, a Neoplatonic conception of love.[11] This vision of female beauty that produces a mystical revelation shares much in common with many contemporary *modernista* texts, as examined by LaGreca. She writes: "Eroticism and mysticism are intimately intertwined in modernismo. The sublime, pleasurable, and sometimes painful intensity of erotic rapture serves as a catalyst that propels the fictional mystic into an ineffable, noetic state. Modernismo's mysticism is born of the movement's fetishization of sensual beauty in all its permutations" (15). This context suggests that Darío was attracted to the episode in Dante's *Purgatorio* not for its established relation to the melancholy tradition, but for the same reasons others of the *modernista* movement felt drawn to eroticism. That is, it was appealing because it demonstrated the perceived power of sensuality and beauty to bring about the kind of mystical experiences so dear to the *modernistas*. Conveniently, then, the example offered by the *Purgatorio* allowed Darío to depict a kind of rapture that satisfied both the conventions of melancholy and the popular thought about the mystical dimensions of erotic experiences. Furthermore, by imitating this pinnacle moment from the *Purgatorio*, the final ecstatic vision of "Autumnal" evokes the setting of Dante's text in Eden. This, in turn, symbolically casts the journey of the poetic subject as a return to the mythical origins of humanity, an abiding desire of Romantic poets whose texts influenced Darío.[12] Likewise, these particular cantos from the *Purgatorio* are important because they depict nothing less than the moment of the poet's salvation, and in this way, they evoke the nontheistic salvific effect that, according to LaGreca, the *modernista* authors sought from erotic mysticism.[13] Nevertheless, Darío's poem differs from other texts studied by LaGreca in notable ways. Unlike the works studied by LaGreca, Darío's poem does not revel in the physical pleasures of sex. His abstract, Neoplatonic form of eroticism would not ostensibly have been "incongruent with Christian values" (LaGreca 31), as its portrayal draws from one of the most canonical of Christian texts. Darío does, however, dispatch with the overt references to Christianity and eliminates any sense of contrition or guilt on the part of the poetic subject. His salvation is, thus, not from any personal sin, but from the kind of quotidian monotony described in his "Ecce homo" and from the collective transgression of a society led astray by positivism and materialism.[14] Thus, while it may not pose any direct contradiction to

[11] In the *Purgatorio*, Beatrice identifies Dante's desire for her as that which "che ti menavano ad amar lo bene / di là dal qual non è a che s'aspiri" (31.23–24; guided you to love that good / beyond which there is nothing left to long for) and then criticizes Dante for failing to realize fully the opportunity for spiritual enlightenment through the Neoplatonic contemplation of her own beauty in death. See Robin Kirkpatrick's commentary (492).

[12] As Jrade writes, "many Romantic writers perceived a significant coincidence between the Neoplatonic/esoteric design for the circular course of the soul and the Christian figure of the prodigal son. As a result, the post-Adamic individual is often seen as a wayfarer in an alien land and the course of life as a pilgrimage in search of the homeland to which he or she belongs" (*Rubén Darío* 7).

[13] Rachel Jacoff writes that "cantos XXX and XXXI deal, then, primarily with Dante's own salvation history" (341). La Greca argues that "like positivism and Catholicism, non-theistic mystical ecstasy offered salvation. At the same time, it challenged the dictates of manuals of comportment, or ecclesiastic edicts. Modernista mysticism was freeing, imposing no definitions, mores, or prohibitions upon its readers" (35).

[14] This is, after all, the founding impulse of modernism itself, as Jrade observes: "Modernism is the literary response to Spanish America's entrance into modernity. It is a response to the spiritual and

established religion, Darío's vision would appear to be perfectly compatible with the ways in which erotic mysticism was used to critique Latin American society. Finally, it is consistent with a popular philosophy that also evinced an important mystical dimension, that of Arthur Schopenhauer.[15]

The popularity of Schopenhauer's philosophy was peaking at about the time that Darío was writing "Autumnal," and references to him can be found in both Darío and his Latin American contemporaries. One example of Schopenhauer's influence can be seen in a poem by José Asunción Silva, a fellow *modernista* writer. His poem "El mal del siglo" ("Affliction of the Century") portrays a conversation between a doctor and patient, who speaks of "Un cansancio de todo, un absoluto / desprecio por lo humano, . . . un incesante / renegar de lo vil de la existencia / digno de mi maestro Schopenhauer" (5–8; A weariness of everything, an absolute / contempt for everything human, . . . an incessant / renunciation of the vileness of existence worthy of my teacher Schopenhauer). The doctor, representative of rationality and positivism, listens to the complaint but fails to understand the severity of the patient's melancholy, interpreting the afflictions as symptoms of merely physical hunger. The patient's contempt for everything human and his incessant renunciation of the commonplace lead to a suicidal despair in him similar to that of several other Romantic fictional characters with whom he identifies.[16] For Schopenhauer, such discontentment comes about because of the never-satisfied will, that urge experienced subjectively as various desires whose effect is to perpetuate life. According to Schopenhauer, however, everyday experience is only illusory, or mere representation projected by the mind, and not the ultimate reality, or thing in itself, to use Kant's term. These two facets, will and representation, form the basis for his philosophy, as reflected in the title of his most influential formulation of it in *The World as Will and Representation*. As Schopenhauer conceives it, the will implies an existential lacking that leaves humans always wanting more and never fully satisfied. Momentary suspension of the suffering caused by the insatiable will is possible, for example, when one contemplates spectacles of nature or works of art and temporarily loses touch with one's desires, but this relief does not last. The only way to permanently stop the persistent gnawing of will is to break through the illusion of the phenomenal world, which Schopenhauer frequently likens to the "veil of maya," a metaphor borrowed from Indian philosophy. Once this veil is lifted, one loses the false sense of individuality and achieves an indescribable peace much like that achieved by mystics. As visual examples of how such a state would look, Schopenhauer adduces the faces of figures painted by Correggio and Raphael,

aesthetic vacuum created by the positivist abandonment of religion and metaphysics in favor of science as well as by the positivist support of materialistic, bourgeois values" ("Socio-political" 38–39).

[15] In addition to Schopenhauer's *Will and Representation*, my brief summary of Schopenhauer's philosophy is informed by the works by Christopher Janaway, Matthias Koßler, R. Raj Singh, and Robert Wicks.

[16] The patient alludes to Werther, Rolla, Manfred, and Leopardi, of whom Rocío Oviedo y Pérez de Tudela writes, "Bajo estos nombres simbólicos agrupa Silva el sentido del dolor así como la tendencia al suicidio y la relación con el misterio por parte de estos personajes" (Silva 137n3–4; under these symbolic names Silva groups the sense of pain as well as the suicidal tendency and the relation with mystery on the part of these characters).

but he might have alternatively referred to Dürer's *Melencolia I*.[17] The angel's transfixed gaze in the engraving would seem to reflect the melding of the objective and subjective that he finds characteristic of the suspension of the will. In fact, Schopenhauer's philosophy, from its pessimistic origins in an eternal lacking to its aspirations to a mystical state of peace, has much in common with traditional thought about melancholy, and thus it may not be surprising to detect its presence in "Autumnal."

In Schopenhauerian fashion, Darío's poem is structured around longing and yearning, for which no lasting fulfillment can be found. The irrepressible "sed infinita" (22; infinite thirst) and the "¡sed del ideal!" (30; thirst for the ideal) are evocative of Schopenhauer's will, and they are what instigate the fairy's tour of nature. The experiences that she presents to him are deliberately curated to alleviate the incessant craving felt by the poetic voice, with a view to the sort of effect described by Schopenhauer: "Whenever it [i.e., natural beauty] presents itself to our gaze all at once, it almost always succeeds in snatching us, although only for a few moments, from subjectivity, from the thraldom of the will, and transferring us into the state of pure knowledge. This is why the man tormented by passions, want, or care, is so suddenly revived, cheered, and comforted by a single, free glance into nature" (197). The specific thirst in "Autumnal" for the "ideal" (30) also recalls Schopenhauer's discussion of the Platonic Ideas, which he identifies as the most stripped-down of all representations and the closest that the objective world can come to the thing-in-itself (§32). Such Ideas can be apprehended if we "devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein" and contemplate an object, such as a "landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag" (178). As a result of this intense gazing, "we *lose* ourselves entirely in this object, . . . we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as a pure subject" (178). Likewise, in "Autumnal," in seeking to quench his constant thirst, the poetic subject contemplates the starry sky ("estrellas encendidas" [32]), the sunrise ("aurora" [35]), and the fragrant and colorful flowers ("las flores" [43]), but he is never satisfied with what he had just seen. It is as Schopenhauer writes: "As soon as any relation to our will, to our person, even of those objects of pure contemplation, again enters our consciousness, the magic is at an end. . . . We now no longer know the Idea, but the individual thing, the link of a chain to which we also belong, and we are again abandoned to all our woe" (198). The beautiful sights of the nature revealed by the fairy only seem to stimulate his desire rather than to satiate it, and it leaves him wanting more, "¡Más!" (35, 41, 49), which he exclaims after viewing each spectacle. This exclamation draws the attention of readers as a single word, emphatically repeated three times, and it acquires the force of a refrain, further driving home its importance to the poem. The constant desire for more and the inability to bring an end to the craving can be compared to one of the most cited passages from Schopenhauer:

[17] Schopenhauer writes of the "ocean-like calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquility, that unshakable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Correggio, is a complete and certain gospel" (411). Likewise, Yates describes the face of Dürer's Melancholy as "in an intense visionary trance, a state guaranteed against demonic intervention by angelic guidance" (56).

All *willing* springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfillment brings this to an end; yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied. . . . But even the final satisfaction itself is only apparent; the wish fulfilled at once makes way for a new one; the former is a delusion, the latter a delusion not as yet known. No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines. . . . Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus. (196)

Read in this context, the cries for more should not be understood as joyful expressions of delighted contemplation, but rather as desperate pleas of a person eager to end once and for all the suffering of his unending dissatisfaction. The "sed infinita" (22; infinite thirst) of the poetic subject is none other than that of the "eternally thirsting Tantalus" (198), but there is an end within sight.

For Schopenhauer, it is only mystical experience and the tearing of a symbolic veil that can finally bring about peace. Early in his *The World as Will and Representation* he uses the metaphor of the "veil of maya" to describe all objects of the physical world: "The ancient wisdom of the Indians declares that 'it is Mâyâ, the veil of deception, which covers the eyes of mortals and causes them to see a world of which one cannot say either that it is or that it is not; for it is like a dream'" (8). For the German philosopher, removing the symbolic veil is tantamount to understanding that all appearance of differentiation and individuality ("principium individuationis") is illusory, and this, in turn, is a denial of the will and its grip over humans (§68). The penetration of the veil and denial of the will is usually preceded by great suffering, but it ends up giving rise to "inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity" (392). The tearing of the veil in "Autumnal" is likewise preceded by melancholic sufferings, and it produces the "sacras dichas" (60; holy bliss) experienced by the lyric voice of the poem, who does not respond to the fairy's playful question: "¿Más?" (63; More?). As discussed above, the poetic subject does not reply because he is too transfixed on the blue sky. He does not desire more, because he finds himself in a mystic state of bliss consistent with Schopenhauer's description of what it means to deny the will. The lyric voice no longer is in "thraldom to the will" (197), as Schopenhauer would say, and he no longer perceives himself as distinct from the rest of the world or in any sense lacking.

In "Autumnal," the relation of the unveiling of the woman to the preceding unfulfilled desires and the subsequent state of peace and detached tranquility, suggests an earlier, deeper, and more systematic engagement with Schopenhauer than previous readers have realized.[18] In fact, Darío's poem is nothing short of a lyrical representation of Schopenhauer's theory of the will, the suffering it causes, and the possibility of overcoming it to apprehend the ultimate reality and its accompanying bliss. Such serious adoption and poetic adaptation of his philosophy parallels the intense interest in Schopenhauer of the French symbolists writing in the 1880s.[19] Darío may have had access to Schopenhauer's ideas through the same

[18] Alberto Acereda and Rigoberto Guevara argue that "Darío must have had the opportunity to read Schopenhauer" (29), but their work tends to focus on the general influence of Schopenhauer's pessimism on works after *Azul* . . . . Likewise, Rubén Benítez examines Schopenhauer as a source for Darío's poem "Lo fatal."

[19] As Shehira Doss-Davezac unequivocally puts it: "Almost all the painters, writers and critics of the late nineteenth century in France frequently mentioned the influence of Schopenhauer on their

texts that so influenced him; his extended network of friends and acquaintances in Chile was in close contact with the latest intellectual and artistic trends in France.[20] Regardless of how Darío may have learned of Schopenhauer, though, one of the most important implications of the philosopher's thought in "Autumnal" is how it serves to reinforce the symbolism of other subtexts of the poem. As with the comparison to Dante's *Purgatorio*, so the reading of "Autumnal" through the philosophy of Schopenhauer also reveals the extent to which Darío's ecstatic conclusion expresses an apparent longing for redemption and salvation from his current circumstances. To break through the symbolic veil of maya and to see through to the thing in itself was Schopenhauer's promise of salvation that proved so attractive to the French symbolists.[21] As Shehira Doss-Davezac writes:

> Schopenhauer, who had consigned science to the phenomenal world, had further confirmed the Symbolists in their belief . . . that the arts, not science, pointed to the thing-in-itself and to ultimate truth. Broadly anti-scientific, Symbolist writers and painters argued for Schopenhauer's and later for Bergson's intuitive experience as the only true form of knowledge. The evocation of the Platonic Idea was to become for these artists the essence of art, the salvation of man's psyche, and their own redemption from a cruel, relentlessly driven world. (256)

This conviction about the role of artists and the effect of their work was also in keeping with Schopenhauer's understanding of the crucial social function that artists played, and it is to this aspect in Darío and "Autumnal" that this essay turns in conclusion.

Schopenhauer regards geniuses, rare individuals with heightened powers of contemplation, to be the only people who can, in their artwork, provide others with a look into the realm of Platonic Ideas while operating within the strictures of the phenomenal world. Given this unique capacity, Schopenhauer tasks geniuses with an important responsibility, as summarized by Robert Wicks:

> Since the perspective of the genius is rare, and given Schopenhauer's assumption that suffering is important to alleviate, he assigns a special social role to the artistic geniuses within the world's population: they should serve the majority by portraying in the form of fine art visions of eternal truths. By displaying the Platonic Ideas to those who would otherwise only vaguely apprehend them, artistic geniuses guide everyone towards a more distinctively universalistic, suffering-reduced perspective. (100)

As already noted, LaGreca also perceives a similar social implication in her interpretation of the erotic mysticism espoused by *modernista* writers. For her, the mystical experiences depicted in their works permitted salvation from a world faced with the spiritually empty positivism and the repressive Church. Following convention, Darío's poem presents the melancholic as especially receptive to such a salvific mystical experience, and thus as a kind of prophet of the age. If readers allow an identification between the lyric voice and the poet himself, "Autumnal" thus portrays Darío as a Schopenhauerian genius, an individual apart from society who communes with the ultimate reality and shares that experience with the rest of

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ideas. Every literary critic and art historian writing on the period today associates the Symbolists with Schopenhauer" (249).

[20] Doss-Davezac discusses the French commentaries and translations of Schopenhauer's work (249). See also Acereda and Guevara on Spanish and French translations (29). See Martínez, introduction (18–24) for the literary sources of inspiration on Darío in Chile.

[21] See Julian Young's discussion of what salvation meant in Schopenhauer's philosophy (188–220).

the world by creating art. Excepting the mythological and theistic premises, this vision of Schopenhauer is not unlike the roles into which Bolívar, and even more to the point, Dante cast themselves in their works discussed above. The genius is vouchsafed a vision that, in honor of that privilege, must be disseminated. The fulfillment of that public duty simultaneously confirms their uniqueness as individuals in relation to the average populace. It is a self-image commonly embraced by many artists of Darío's time that melancholy helped reinforce. As Dixon observes, "Nineteenth-century artists elevated artistic genius to a position of preeminence, endowing the qualities of intuition, fantasy and inspiration with great importance" (184–85). She goes on to argue that artists were "active initiators of their own victimization" (185) as creative melancholics, and that, in their self-portraits, "the traditional Düreresque head-in-hand pose is the most familiar and pervasive signifier of genius" (187). Dixon offers several examples of this pose in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century portraits, and many more artists and intellectuals admired by Darío, such as Victor Hugo (fig. 3) and Arthur Schopenhauer (fig. 4), appear in similar postures in visual images of them.

Evidence that Darío identified with the poetic persona of "Autumnal" and that he desired to fashion his own image as melancholic genius can be seen in the famous photograph taken of him toward the end of his life (fig. 5). In the picture, Darío exhibits many of the characteristics of other paintings and photographs of melancholic artists examined by Dixon. He sits, slouched in a chair with his head resting on his hand while he looks at the viewer from a slight angle with a subtle frown on his face. The photograph, given as a gift to Archer M. Huntingdon, benefactor of the Hispanic Society of America, seems to be a carefully staged expression of Darío as melancholic genius. If not for his elegant attire and the interior setting of the portrait, the photograph could serve as an illustration of the poetic subject from "Autumnal." Even his middle age reflected in the photograph corresponds to the stage of life traditionally associated with autumn and melancholy, and unfortunately Darío did not live long after the picture was taken. His ensuing reputation as the "melancólico capitán de la gloria" and the great innovator and revitalizer of Spanish-language poetry is foreshadowed in his alter ego from "Autumnal" and finally reinforced visually in the photograph.

"Autumnal" suggests that the predisposition to melancholy allows one to perceive the inadequacy of the modern world, or to put it another way, to perceive such insufficiency is to be melancholic. Yet the poem also portrays melancholy as a means to salvation, as a way to cut through illusion to attain spiritual fulfillment. It constitutes, moreover, a responsibility, a privilege that must be repaid to society by communicating the special knowledge that melancholy has made accessible. This is largely what melancholy has meant for centuries, but its unique articulation by Darío for his time is revealed in those subtexts by Dante, Milton, Gautier, and Schopenhauer, whose presence in "Autumnal" this article has highlighted. Perhaps most interestingly, melancholy and the ecstatic vision that it makes possible are the conceptual key that allows Darío to synthesize Dante's unveiling of Beatrice in the earthly paradise with Schopenhauer's metaphorical piercing of the veil of maya. In effect, despite the vast differences in their overall worldviews, Darío manages symbolically to place Schopenhauer in Dante's Garden of Eden. The fusion of these texts reinforces the conclusions of José María Martínez, who has highlighted

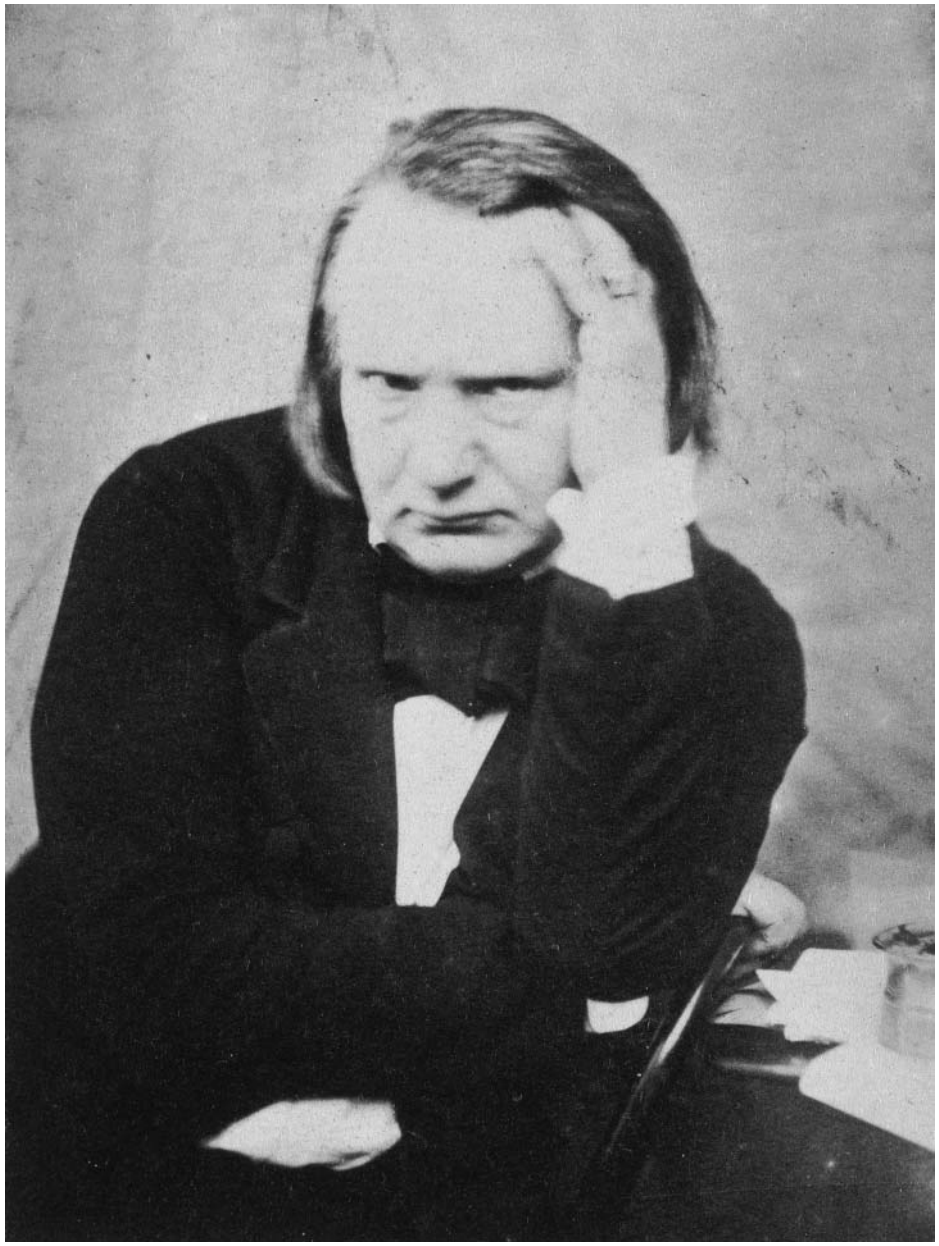

Figure 3. Victor Hugo, 1853–55. RMN–Grand Palais / Art Resource, New York.

Darío's "consciente labor de filtración" ("Nuevas luces" 213; conscious labor of filtration) of his many readings into his works. Martínez has added, for example, Percy Shelley's "Queen Mab" to the texts that inform "Autumnal," and this article continues to expand the range of authors and artists that Darío is able to filter into this remarkable piece of *modernista* philosophical poetry. As Martínez contends,

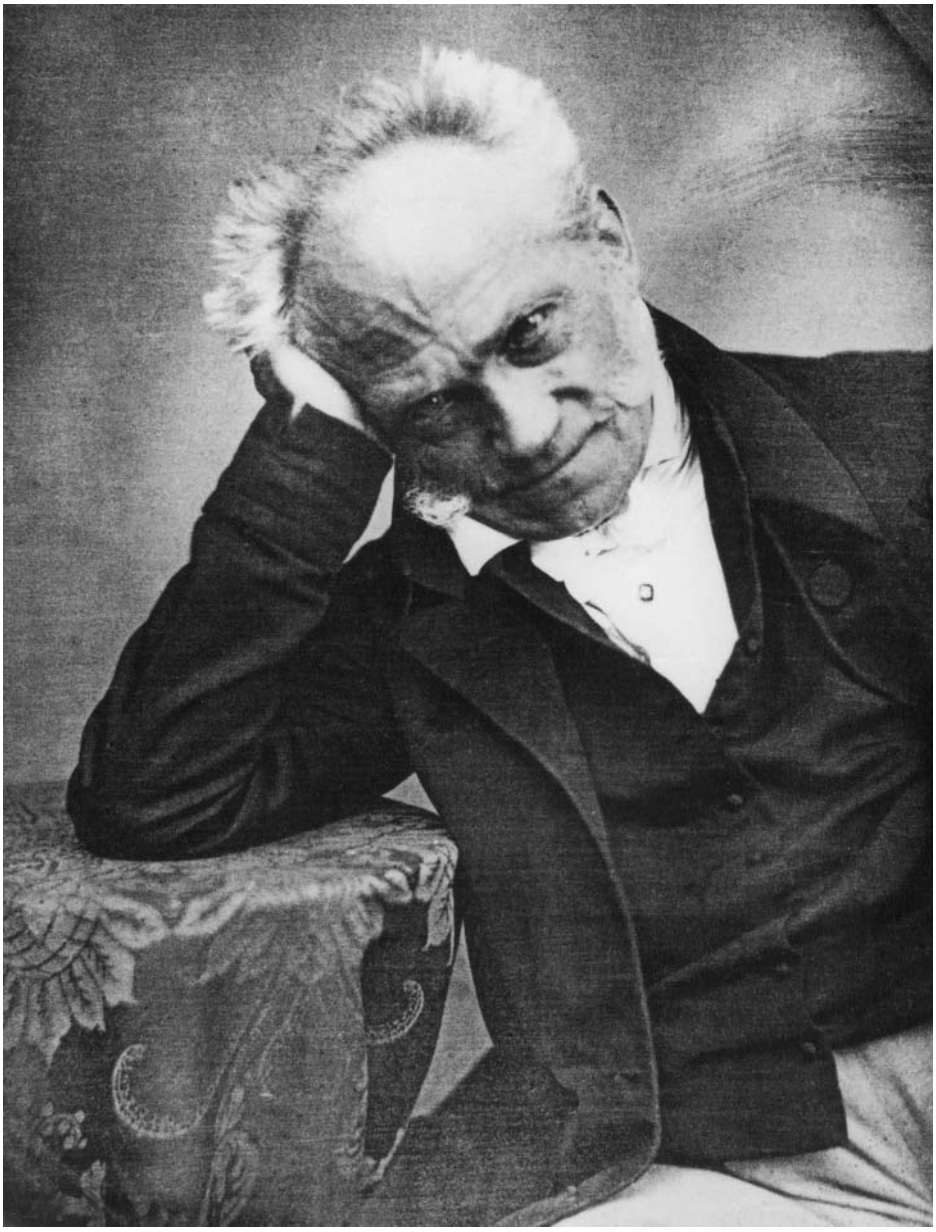

Figure 4. Arthur Schopenhauer, 1852. bpk-Bildagentur / Art Resource, New York.

this literary synthesis is indicative not of "un poeta en trance de formación" ("Nuevas luces" 213; a poet in the process of formation), but of one who is fully conscious and in control of his poetic abilities. Nevertheless, readers should remember that "Autumnal" is also a work of self-promotion as a poem written by someone aspiring to Schopenhauer's conception of a genius. Melancholy provided the perfect framework for Darío to present himself as a tortured and gifted individual, who, like the

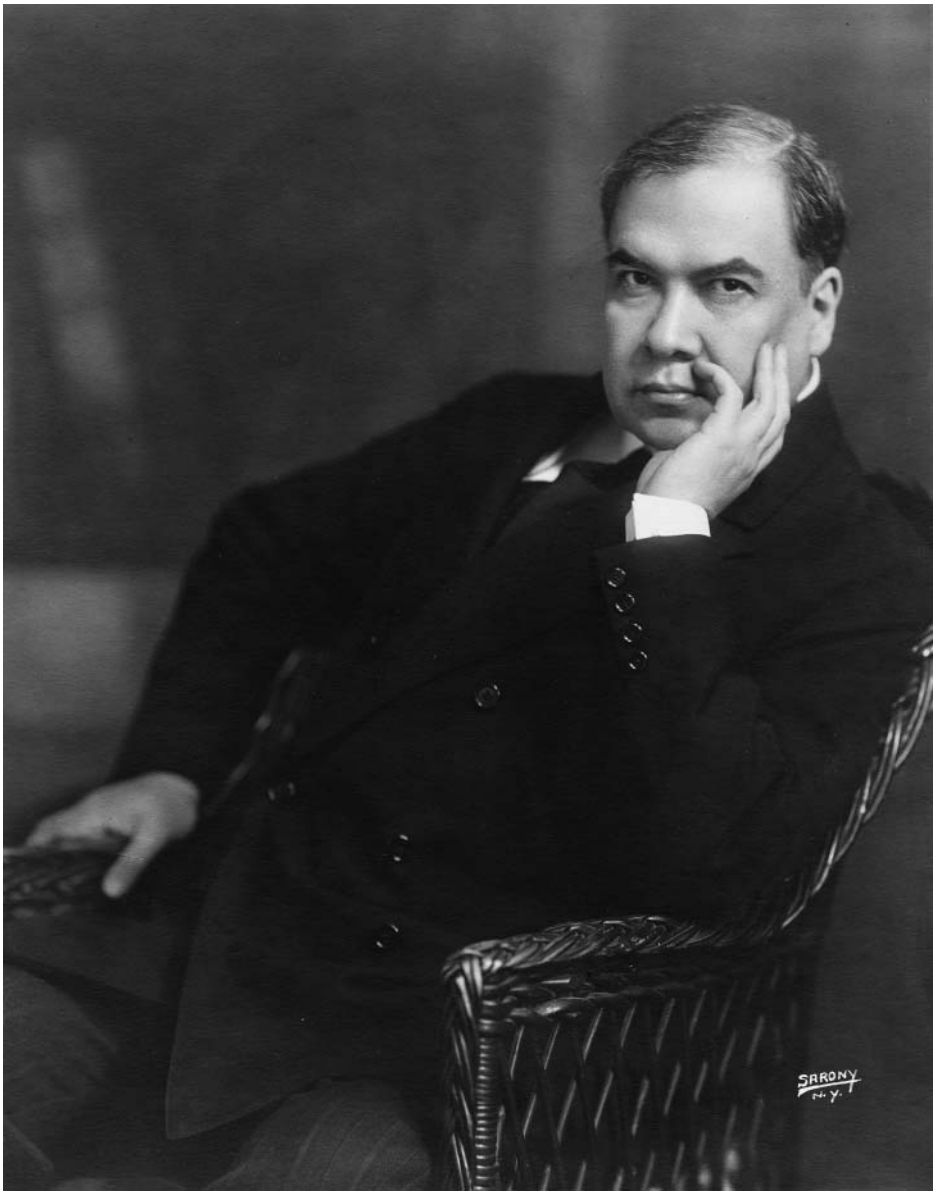

Figure 5. Rubén Darío, 1915. Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

poetic subject of "Autumnal," was vouchsafed a vision of eternity. Readers are invited to accompany Darío on his melancholy pilgrimage and to experience that vision rendered in words so that they might lose themselves and their nagging desires momentarily in poetry.

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