

Ninguna patria tengo yo: Cuba's Poetic and Political Redemption in José Martí

Ryan Anthony Spangler

Abstract

This paper deals with the unique relationship between poetry and politics in the writings of 19th Century Cuban poet, José Martí. Patria, the underpinning concept that unites his poetic and political agendas, can only be understood through sacrifice. Although never considered a religious poet, much of José Martí's drive and struggle for independence from Spanish colonialism and the threat of North American imperialism can be understood only through his poetic allegories of death and the cross. In order to unite the two and overcome the impending threat of Spain and the United States, Martí writes himself into the sacred mythologies of the Bible and takes upon himself the bitter cross that transforms him from victimized martyr to selfless saviour for Cuba.

Keywords: patria, Jose Marti, sacrifice, poetry, politics, imperialism.

Yo quiero, cuando me muera,

Sin patria, pero sin amo,

Tener en mi losa un ramo

De flores, —y una bandera!⁷²

"XXV" *Versos sencillos*

Thus concludes poem "XXV" of Martí's *Versos sencillos*, published four years prior to his death and the commencement of Cuba's final struggle for independence from Spain. The

⁷² Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Martí's writings are mine: "I want, when I die, / without patria, but also without a master, / to have on my tombstone a bouquet / of flowers,—and a flag!"

poet, reflecting upon death, counters his lament of exile, 'sin patria' with his affirmation of liberty, 'sin amo.' As a 19th century Cuban, patria and liberty stand at odds, eluding the poet until exile enters the realm of death. Independence, engraved upon his tombstone in the symbol of a bouquet of flowers and a flag, only finds shape as *patria* waivers between life and death, exile and freedom, poetry and redemption. This declaration from poem "XXV", albeit a poetic affirmation of his lack of allegiance to the Spanish crown, extends far beyond the mere question of politics. His use of the political backdrop lays the foreground for a discussion of his poetics, coalescing both his political and poetic identities.

Our reading of poem "XXV" sets the tone for understanding Martí's constant endeavour to resolve both his political and poetic ideals. Martí, though one of the most studied writers from Latin America, continues to remain one of its most enigmatic individuals. Born in 1853, he spent the vast majority of his life dealing with Cuba's attempts to attain independence from Spain and autonomy from the United States. Yet, his political challenges are matched only by his poetic search for linguistic and ideological resolution. For Martí, the question of politics is merely an extension of *patria*, an idea that also encompasses the poet's spiritual and literary philosophies. Thus politics, poetry and spirituality find themselves governed by the abiding principle of *patria*. *Patria* acts as the lynchpin that sustains Martí's concept of sacrifice and redemption. In an insightful article on ethics and poetry in Martí, Ángel Cuadra observes that "Martí optó por la primacía del mundo, por darse a los demás, y en ese rumbo empeñó su vida. Para ello impuso dos normas a su conducta en la misma: el *deber*, aceptada con un sentido casi místico, y el *sacrificio del yo*" (Cuadra 2005, 112).⁷³ Cuadra notes that Martí's selfless sacrifice is directly connected to his duty to country, an observation that will serve as a backdrop for my exposition of Martí's notion of *patria*. Through close readings of his poetry, I will study Martí's concepts of sacrifice and *patria* in connection with the redemption of his political and poetic ideals.

By the time Martí reached the age of 17, he had written and published his first article addressing the Cuban Independence conflict; a piece which ultimately led to his

⁷³ "Martí opted for the very best from the world, to give himself for others, and in this sense, sacrificed his life. For that purpose he lived by two standards: the duty, accepted in an almost mystical sense, and self sacrifice."

imprisonment and later deportation to Spain. While there, his efforts to illuminate Cuba's fight led to one of his most explicit attacks on Spain, "Presidio político en Cuba." In the critique, Martí accentuates the bitter relationship existing between Spain and its American satellites. He notes that of all of Spain's dominions, Cuba was the most faithful: "Cuba sobre todo, se arrastraron a vuestros pies, y posaron sus labios en vuestras llagas,"⁷⁴ scars left there by the rest of Spanish America's independence at the beginning of the 19th century. Notwithstanding, Cuba's faithful vassallage was received with mockery. "Y cuando [Cuba] os pidió en premio a sus fatigas una mísera limosna, alargasteis la mano, y le enseñasteis la masa informe de su triturado corazón, y os reísteis, y se la arrojasteis a la cara" (Martí 1975, 1:52). Martí never intends to hide his disdain for the mother patria, what he calls his "infinite pain" (Martí 1975, 1:45). Unfortunately for Martí, Cuba exists only as a *patria sin patria*, a land of patriotic and devoted, yet restricted subjects. In one of his earliest poems written while exiled in Spain, he calls upon all Cubans to "desnud [ar] al fin la espada vengadora" (Martí 1993, 2:21),⁷⁵ so to avenge the thousands of Cuban casualties suffered during the 10 Years War.

Martí's violent defamation of Spain transforms, however, as he departs her borders and arrives in the United States. Although his criticism is still very present, he offsets his anger with humour to create a less forceful revolutionary rhetoric that Paul Giles classifies as "deliberately kaleidoscopic in their tone and orientation" (Giles 2004, 186). Upon arriving to the States, he writes his "Impressions of America," ironically subtitled "By a Very Fresh Spaniard". He assumes the Spanish identity to soften his detractors who might consider him bitter. He opens by praising the spirit of liberty that, in his opinion, is so easily visible in the United States, and contrasts it with the "lazy life and poetical inutility of our European countries" (Martí 1975, 19:3) However, in his praise of the United States, he recognizes an unwavering activity and pursuit for gain. Similar to his comparison of Spain to Rome, he compares the U.S. to ancient Carthage. "Material power, as that of Carthage, if it rapidly increases, rapidly falls down." He goes on to further question, "If this love of richness is not tempered and dignified by the ardent love of intellectual pleasures, —if kindness toward men, passion for all what is great, devotion to all what means, sacrifice and glory, are not as

⁷⁴ "Cuba above all others, bowed down at your feet and rested her lips upon your wounds."

⁷⁵ "unsheathe the vengeful sword"

developed as fervorous and absorbent passion for money, where shall they go?" (Martí 1975, 19:3). His praise combined with caution recognizes both the potential rise and fall of the U.S. due to her insatiable gain of material substance. He fears that such pursuits, if not tempered by the intellectual advancement of its people, will only weaken the character of liberty the U.S. so readily embraces. A country growing on ideals, but void of moral fiber, will only corrupt everything it encounters; a belief Martí fears will affect Cuba should the U.S. continue in its current path.

For a six month period spanning 1889 and 1890, Martí attended the first Inter-American Conference in Washington D.C. as the Uruguayan delegate. He focused his attention upon the increasing United States intervention in the Cuban independence struggle, and the U.S.'s inquiry into actually purchasing the island for annexation. It was in direct response to this experience that Martí wrote *Versos sencillos* (1891), his poetic response to the political anguish weighing upon him. His preface to the poetic collection gives insight into Martí's critical dilemma:

Fue aquel invierno de angustia, en que por la ignorancia, o por fe fanática, o por miedo, o por cortesía, se reunieron en Washington, bajo el águila temible, los pueblos hispanoamericanos. ¿Cuál de nosotros ha olvidado aquel escudo, el escudo en que el águila de Monterrey y de Chapultepec, el águila de López y de Walker, apretaba en sus garras los pabellones todos de la América? Y la agonía en que viví, hasta que pude confirmar la cautela y el brío de nuestros pueblos; y el horror y vergüenza en que me tuvo el temor legítimo de que pudiéramos los cubanos, con manos parricidas, ayudar el plan insensato de apartar a Cuba, para bien único de un nuevo amo disimulado, de la patria que la reclama y en ella se completa, de la patria hispanoamericana. (Martí 1993, 1:233)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ "It was during that anguished winter, when, out of ignorance, blind faith, fear, or mere politeness, the peoples of Latin America gathered in Washington beneath the fearsome eagle. Who among us has forgotten that seal, on which the eagle of Monterrey and Chapultepec, López and Walker, clutched all the flags of America in its talons? And the agony I lived through, until the caution and vitality of our peoples was proven to me; and the shame and horror into which I was plunged by my legitimate fear that we Cubans might with patricidal hands assist in the senseless project of separating Cuba, for the sole good of a new and covert master, from the patria that clamours for her and in her is complete, the patria of Latin America."

At the conclusion of the Inter-American Conference in Washington D.C., aside from his fear that Cubans were freeing themselves from Spain only to place themselves in the United States' hands, Martí was overcome with frustration at the lack of Latin American intervention in Cuba's cause for independence (Santí 1996, 108-9). As the rest of Latin America celebrated "el mantenedor inquebrantable de los derechos de los oprimidos y de los débiles, por el autor y el abogado triunfante del proyecto contra la conquista!" (Martí 1975, 6:102), Martí, "sin patria, hijo infeliz de una tierra que no ha sabido aun inspirar compasión a las repúblicas de que es centinela natural, y parte indispensable, veía, acaso con lágrimas, aquel arrebatado de nobleza" (Martí 1975, 6:102).⁷⁷ Such political frustration must have been at the core of the "dolores injustos" (Martí 1993, 1:233) through which he suffered. Hence, Martí's ultimate struggle for independence from Spain became a battle against two dominant powers, as he feared that Cubans would merely free themselves from Spain to surrender to the United States.

In order to clarify the problematic relationship between Cuba and the imperialist powers struggling to control it, Martí sets out to refine his comprehension of the idea of patria. Patria began to embody not just geographical space, but more importantly the ideology that governed his thoughts and beliefs. His expression of patria becomes a declaration of absolute liberation from any form of subjugation. Patria acts as the key to his political and poetic liberation.

With Martí's shift in focus from Spanish imperialism to Latin America's, and more specifically Cuba's need for improvement, the varied uses and definitions of patria increase dramatically. Perhaps the one word that most clearly embodies Martí, his politics, and his poetry, is *patria*. The word appears no less than 2800 times throughout his various writings, suggesting an extension to the common geographical limits that *patria* normally implies. Esther Allen notes that the translations to English of the term *patria* are problematic for their variety and incompleteness in their meaning, ranging from "homeland" to "native land" and from "motherland" to "fatherland" (Allen 2002, 417). Martí's enigmatic word,

⁷⁷ "the unbreakable resolution to maintain the rights of the oppressed and the weak, for the author and the triumphant lawyer of the project against the conquest, Martí, without patria, the unhappy child of a land that could not inspire compassion among the other republics for whom it should stand as a natural sentinel and an indispensable member, saw, while shedding tears, that outburst of nobility."

often translated by himself as simply "land" or "country" cannot be fully circumscribed in the narrow terms and phrases we use in the English language. While the conventional understanding of *patria* signifies a direct tie to one's birth nation, merely dictating a sense of historical and geographical pride on the part of an individual, Martí's notion of *patria* goes deeper and bonds itself to his moral code, his system of belief, and in many ways emblemizes his definition of existence, embodying the spiritual conflict existing within him. Allen further states:

The English word 'patria' —a relative newcomer to the language, first used by James Joyce in 1914—is less familiar, but that makes it all the more appropriate, for Martí's form of patriotism—absolutely yet acutely critical, totally committed but never blind, selfless but never fanatical; a patriotism of bridges, not barriers—is not a common phenomenon. And 'patria' has evolved a specialized meaning that made it particularly apt in this context: among Protestant theologians, 'patria' denotes an idea of heaven as a place from which the soul is exiled while on earth and to which it longs to return. (Allen 2002, 417)

In this sense, the term *patria* becomes synonymous in its understanding of both death and a Supreme Being, which fills the poet with both awe and fear. Martí's notion of *patria*, perhaps his version of the English *Sublime*, or *das Erhabene* to the German Romantics, characterizes the ongoing pursuit of Martí to achieve his own idealistic version of a Kantian or Hegelian Absolute. Death, God, and his individual *patria* thus become unified under one banner. However, Martí attempts to extend the utility of *patria* beyond the scope of the political and the spiritual, entering also into the realm of the poetic.

The clearest definition of Martí's concept of *patria* resides in his politically and poetically charged "Dos patrias." It opens by enticing the reader to believe that the focus of his poem will be political, but quickly shifts to reveal an outline of his poetic progress:

Dos patrias tengo yo: Cuba y la noche. (Martí 1993: 1:127)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The translation of the following poem is by Elinor Randall. "I have two fatherlands: Cuba and the night"

With the initiation of "Dos patrias," the poet immediately throws a rhetorical jab at Spain. The term *patria* is a unique noun in that it is not only almost never pluralized, but considered incorrect for it to be written so. Because it almost always refers to a geographical location, the title would suggest that Martí is speaking of two places, leading to the assumption that he would be referring to Spain and Cuba, or perhaps in reference to his status as an exile, Cuba and the United States. Because a person cannot actually possess two *patrias*, one of the two would be considered a sub-section of the first. In other words, Spain would most likely be considered the greater of the two and Cuba would be relegated to the position of the *patria chica*. However, Martí overturns the standard concept of *patria* to counter the normality of colonial subjugation to either Spain or the United States. *Patria* binds Cuba to the poet, embodying his personal moral code, thus allowing her to appropriate a decolonial beingness. For Martí, *patria* defines who we are as people. In an article entitled "La revista literaria dominicense," Martí articulates his concept:

Cada cual se ha de poner, en la obra del mundo, a lo que tiene más cerca, no porque lo suyo sea, por ser suyo, superior a lo ajeno, y más fino o virtuoso, sino porque el influjo del hombre se ejerce mejor, y más naturalmente, en aquello que conoce, y de donde le viene inmediata pena o gusto: y ese repartimiento de la labor humana, y no más, es el verdadero e inexpugnable concepto de la patria. [...] Patria es humanidad que vemos más de cerca, y en que nos tocó nacer;—y ni se ha de permitir que con el engaño del santo nombre se defiendan a monarquías inútiles, religiones ventrudas o políticas descaradas y hambroñas, ni porque a estos pecados se dé a menudo el nombre de patria, ha de negarse el hombre a cumplir su deber de humanidad, en la porción de ella que tiene más cerca. Esto es luz, y del sol no se sale. Patria es eso. (Martí 1975, 5:468)⁷⁹

⁷⁹ "Everyone should dress themselves, in their worldly endeavours, in what is closest to them, not because it is, by being theirs, superior to what is different, and finer or more virtuous, but because man's influence is better and more naturally exercised in the person who knows, and where his immediate pain and pleasure comes from: and that distribution of human labour, and nothing more, is the truest impregnable concept of patria. [...] Patria is humanity that we see up close, the one we were born to;— and should not be permitted to defend useless monarchies, bulging religions or shameless insatiable politics under the guise of a holy name, nor should it deny men the fulfilment of their human responsibilities, that portion that is closest to them, because this sin has been done in the name of patria. It is light, and never leaves the sun. That is patria."

Patria, as he asserts, is geographical in the sense that a person's understanding of life is often dependent upon where s/he is from, but it extends far beyond those boundaries for Martí. Although Cuba is the only geographical *patria* that Martí will ever claim, by calling upon the night as his second *patria*, the speaker adds a temporal element to *patria*, which extends beyond the boundaries of geographical space. This transition from the geographical to the temporal carries the reader to the realm of poetry.

Martí is aware of poetic tradition by calling upon the night as his second *patria*. Historically, the evening represented a space wherein the poet gains inspiration, create verse, and obtain visionary wisdom. The nocturne is perhaps the best example of this type of poetry. By drawing upon the night as his second *patria*, the speaker creates a poetic framework that encounters the poetic genre of the nocturne. Calling upon the night instead of Spain as second *patria* transforms the milieu of the poem from a political discussion onto a poetic and visionary soliloquy. By evoking the night, the poet asserts that he goes beyond the physical senses to observe this vision we are about to witness. In other words, he finds himself in an alternative reality or dimension while viewing this dream:

Dos patrias tengo yo: Cuba y la noche.

¿O son una las dos? No bien retira

Su majestad el sol, con largos velos

Y un clavel en la mano, silenciosa

Cuba cual viuda triste me aparece.

¡Yo sé cuál es ese clavel sangriento

Que en la mano le tiembla! Está vacío

Mi pecho, destrozado está y vacío

En donde estaba el corazón. Ya es hora

De empezar a morir. La noche es buena

Para decir adiós. La luz estorba

Y la palabra humana. El universo

Habla mejor que el hombre. (Martí 1993, 1:127)⁸⁰

After having divided his patriotic allegiance between Cuba and the night, the poet reunites them, so as to rewrite the identity of Cuba as more than a country or an appendage to Spain; Cuba is a living poetic entity that actively participates in poetic vision and evolves with time. She arrives as a widow with the night, an enticing erotic symbol that departs only with the sun's rising. Cuba is a beautiful creature, both deadly and alluring by bearing a sexually charged image in her hands, a carnation. As Octavio Paz notes, "La muerte, el erotismo, la pasión revolucionaria, la poesía: todo está en la noche, la gran madre" (Paz 1999, 510).⁸¹ The flower acts as a bisemic symbol that brings to mind either a woman in love, thoughtful of the cherished individual who has given her a flower, or that of a grieving widow. She draws both poet and reader to her, calling upon them to both reminisce and fall in love like she has, or to pity her and learn the cause of her suffering. As in many of his poems, Martí creates a description that plays on the image's dramatic impact. Like the *clavel* found within the hands of widowed Cuba, we have been trapped. Her eroticism has led us to believe that she is in mourning. Suddenly we discover, like the poet, that what she holds in her hands is not a flower, but Martí's heart. The vision, leading us towards something erotic, ends instead with the sacrifice of the poet's heart. Now dead to the world, the speaker watches as Cuba carries his heart in her hands. What the poet beholds is not some figurative image that represents his sorrow; instead she literally possesses his heart. The carnation in her hands is neither a memory nor a symbol; it is a prize, her conquest of the poet. Like the night, the widow has completely consumed the poet and stripped him of his most prized possession. Because she has taken his heart, the time to die has begun.

⁸⁰ "I have two fatherlands: Cuba and the night. / Or are both one? No sooner does the sun / withdraw its majesty, than Cuba, / with long veils and holding a carnation, / appears as a sad and silent widow. / I know about that bloodstained carnation / that trembles in her hand! My breast / is empty, destroyed and empty / where the heart lay. Now is the time / to commence dying. Night is a good time / to say farewell. Light is a hindrance / as is the human word. The universe / talks better than man."

⁸¹ "Death, eroticism, revolutionary passion, poetry: all of this is found in the night, the great mother."

Up to this point, every adjective used carries a negative connotation; *silenciosa / viuda / triste / sangriento / vacío / destrozado / vacío*. The speaker uses a poetic climax to carry the reader through a vast desert of suffering only to conclude with the final adjective of the stanza: *buena*. The ironic twist of describing the night as "good," after she has done so much damage and harm, can only be understood poetically. First, poetry is more than just a combination of words placed together with specific meters or rhymes; it is a revelation of crisis, pain and suffering. As he states in poem "XXXV" of *Versos sencillos*:

Qué importa que tu puñal

Se me clave en el riñón?

¡Tengo mis versos, que son

Más fuertes que tu puñal!

¿Qué importa que este dolor

Seque el mar, y nuble el cielo?

El verso, dulce consuelo,

Nace alado del dolor (Martí 1993, 1:272)⁸²

Pain and suffering, rather than linguistic trickery, act as the keys that give birth to poetry. And in conjunction with the anguish described in poem "XXXV", the night allows poetry to emerge because it visually annihilates everything, including the poet. Night takes away all distractions and temptations, those things that Martí most despises, and negates their existence. Night allows poetry to be more than just simple words or linguistic combinations and structures. Poetry is that deepest voice that speaks when language fails. For this reason the poet so vehemently declares, "La luz estorba, / y la palabra humana".

⁸² "What do I care that your dagger / is thrust into my side? / I have my verses, which are / stronger than your blade! / What does it matter if this suffering / dries up the sea, and clouds the heavens? / Verse, that sweet comfort, / is born with wings from such agony."

Light and the human word, more than being a hindrance, are a nuisance and distraction. They become totally superfluous, *de trop*, to the poet, making them of no use, confirming his appreciation for the magnitude of the universe. Human language cannot account for poetry as it limits the visionary experience because of a linguistic breakdown. The universe, on the other hand, "habla mejor que el hombre". In other words, poetry is more than human language. Humanity is dwarfed by the disproportionate analogy between the cosmic language of the universe and human language. "La noche es buena / para decir adiós" because it reveals the imbalance between the universe and the human word, between poetry and the poem.

As the poem concludes, the vision he encounters in the night comes to life as light re-enters the scenario:

Cual bandera

Que invita a batallar, la llama roja

De la vela flamea. Las ventanas

Abro, ya estrecho en mí. Muda, rompiendo

Las hojas del clavel, como una nube

Que enturbia el cielo, Cuba viuda pasa... (Martí 1993, 1:127)⁸³

The poet opens the second stanza with a structural recurrence. His "Cual bandera / que invita a batallar, la llama roja / de la vela flamea", sounds very similar to an inverted "con largos velos / y un clavel en la mano, silenciosa / Cuba cual viuda triste me aparece". Like the sad widow that carries a bloody carnation in her hand, the candle possesses a red flame that flutters after being lit. By introducing the light in such a manner, the poet invites Cuba to re-enter the picture, reuniting the two patrias through the inclusion of both the night and the candle's flame. Poetic creation can still flourish because the darkness is still there to overpower everything else. With the union of the carnation in the widow's hands and the

⁸³ "Like a flag / that calls to battle, the candle's / red flame flutters. I feel a closeness / and open windows. Crushing the carnations / petals silently, widowed Cuba passes by / like a cloud that dims the heavens..."

waving banner, Martí echoes the image of the flowers and the flag that he etches upon his tombstone in poem "XXV" of *Versos sencillos*.

The closing to the poem, ironically detailed in the opening of the window, reveals the widow passing by, silently crushing the flower's petals. She has gone beyond solely extricating the poet's heart from his chest, now she is quietly destroying the organ of his soul. This widow who passes by, "como una nube que enturbia el cielo," consumes the poet's inspiration. His heart is gone, the heavens are closed, and a light silences the darkness, leaving the poet dead and incapable of even contemplating the result of her actions. The concluding ellipsis indicates there is more to the story, more to be said, but he no longer has the heart, inspiration, nor language to detail the experience. All that is left are physical hands to write and a brain to think. The speaker has been stripped of his passion, and therefore is no longer a poet, just a thinker. Man may think and write, but "El universo / habla mejor que el hombre". Now he is just a man left only with human words, tools to create a poem, but not poetry. And rather than tarnish what is pure and passionate, the poet opts to leave the poem before he destroys it with "la luz [que] estorba / y la palabra humana".

The political and poetic despair permeating the conclusion of "Dos patrias" leaves the poet and reader neither poetic nor political restitution. The poet and poem are denied salvation due, in part, to the absence of the critical element of selfless sacrifice. Martí must be more than a martyr to the ravages of his *patrias*. For poetic and political expiation to occur, that is, for Cuba to achieve an absolute decolonial beingness and liberate herself from the hegemonic presence of Spain and the United States, the poet, and perhaps more importantly, Cuba herself, must go from victim to volunteer. No poem more succinctly clarifies this notion of selfless sacrifice than "Yo sacaré lo que en el pecho tengo". The speaker opens the poem by expounding upon his resistance to the world:

Yo sacaré lo que en el pecho tengo

De cólera y de horror. De cada vivo

Huyo, azorado, como de un leproso.

Ando en el buque de la vida: sufro
De náuseas y mal de mar: un ansia odiosa
Me angustia las entrañas: quién pudiera
En un solo vaivén dejar la vida!
No esta canción desoladora escribo
En hora de dolor: (Martí 1993, 1:171)⁸⁴

Similar to the image of the widow holding his bleeding heart in "Dos patrias", the poem opens with the poet discovering a hole in his chest. However, more than the victimized bystander of the widowed Cuba, he himself has performed the violent extraction to clear the "rage and horror" that has attempted to fill his bosom. Like many of his poems, the speaker fuses a physical action—"sacaré del pecho"—with emotions—"cólera" and "horror". His use of *cólera*, suggesting both rage and cholera, helps to dramatize the poem. His anger is accompanied by many of the physical symptoms that plague victims of cholera: nausea, intestinal pain, even delirium. Yet this sickness in his bowels is spawned by an "anxious hatred" that makes the speaker uneasy. The poet must exile himself in order to extricate what he contains in his chest. The stanza's concluding statement seems ironic at first. The speaker struggles and suffers from seasickness and nausea, hatred and anguish, and yet he does not write in his moment of pain. Paradoxically, nearly each of the poems in *Versos libres* is littered with pain and sorrow. If the speaker is always experiencing pain, how can he not be writing in his "hour of pain?" Perhaps it would be best to refer to Martí's statement in his *Cuadernos de apuntes* written at the time of *Ismaelillo* and *Versos libres* in 1881:

Sucedió a poco que afligido mi espíritu por dolores más graves que los que corrientemente lo aquejan, —y como extinguida temporalmente aquella luz de esperanza a la que yo había escrito los primeros versos. Las ideas [...]

⁸⁴ "I will take from my chest / the rage and horror that I have. From every living thing / I flee, startled, like a leper. / I walk in the vessel of life: I suffer / from nauseas and seasickness: a hated anxiety / fills my intestines with anguish. Who, / in one coming and going, leaves life behind! / Not this devastating song that I write / in my hour of pain:"

salían de mis labios en *versos graves*, de otro género distinto, acordes a la situación de mi espíritu, más no en acuerdo con la necesidad artística que, por haber tomado diversas ideas semejante forma, pensé dar a la obrilla. (Martí 1975, 21:213)⁸⁵

Like earlier moral teachers who have suffered for the sins of others, Martí experiences anguish by struggling with a slavery of complacency and apathy, Cuban independence, and poetic peonage. He suffers from the disease of generalized hatred and anger. However, poetry should never be written during the moment of suffering; it should be tempered to avoid creating "versos graves":

jamás se escriba

En hora de dolor! El mundo entonces

Como un gigante a hormiga pretenciosa

Unce el poeta destemplado: escribo

Luego de hablar con un amigo viejo,

Limpio goce que el alma fortifica:—

Mas, cual las cubas de madera noble,

La madre del dolor guardo en mis huesos!

Ay! mi dolor, como un cadáver, surge

A la orilla, no bien el mar serena! (Martí 1993, 1:171)⁸⁶

⁸⁵ "It so happened that while my spirit was afflicted with the gravest pain that one could experience—and as that light of hope that accompanied me when I had written my first verses was temporarily extinguished, ideas [...] left my lips in solemn verses, of a completely different genre, according to the condition of my spirit, but not according to my artistic necessity that, by having given similar form to diverse ideas, I thought about creating this work."

⁸⁶ "One never writes / in their hour of pain! / The world / like a giant to a pretentious ant / anoints the feverish poet: I write / after having spoken with an old friend, / Pure joy that the soul fortifies:— / But the casks of noble word, / the mother of pain keeps in my bones! / Ay! my pain, like a cadaver, surges / to the shore, as soon as the serene sea!"

To write in a moment of anguish—or odium, in this case—would be to create "versos graves." According to Martí, poetry is not, nor can it ever be, inspired by hatred. That does not suggest, however, that the poet does not experience pain. Carlos Javier Morales explains that:

Esta sentencia, como fácilmente se comprende, no prohíbe la expresión del dolor personal en la poesía, sino la plasmación del dolor en la misma hora del sentimiento vital que lo acusa. Más tarde, cuando ya ha sido superada la experiencia punzante y confusa del dolor, entonces ese sentimiento, reactivado por la memoria, la imaginación y sometido al orden ulterior de la inteligencia, sólo entonces, en ese momento de emoción creadora, el dolor puede transferirse legítimamente al verso" (Morales 1994, 204).⁸⁷

Suffering must be experienced, but the poet must distance himself from it before writing. Instead, the speaker writes after an encounter with an old friend, a moment that would spark hope and love. Similar to Wordsworth, who felt that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility," (Wordsworth 1905, 34-5) the speaker insists that poetry must be inspired by deep emotions, but composed during a time of reflection. The speaker is careful with his choice of words by selecting the adjective "destemplado." Most commonly referring to something that disturbs the order of things, a meaning he clearly hopes to convey, the speaker also selects the word for its relationship to music. To be "destemplado" is to be out of tune. The poet loses his musicality, his tone, through this sacrilegious anointing from the world. The world's, or modernity's, involvement in poetry results in a disharmony of the true poetic spirit. Such discord suggests the presence of suffering, one the speaker goes so far as to say he carries in his bones, penetrating every part of his body. But the pain of which he speaks stems from something else. He mentions that the "mother of pain" is made from the "noble wooden casks." Casks that normally contain water or wine do not hold the precious spirits he seeks. Throughout Martí's poetry, the poet struggles to find a wine that will inspire him

⁸⁷ "This sentence, easily understood, does not prohibit the expression of personal pain in poetry, but capturing pain in the same hour that the vital feeling charges him. Later, when the bitter experience, confused with pain has been overcome, then that is the feeling, reactivated by one's memory, the imagination, and submitted to the ulterior order of intelligence, only then, in that moment of creative emotion, can pain legitimately transform itself into verse."

and give him access to the Universe. These "cubas," referring also to his "patria," or in this case, "patrias," due to their plurality, are the source of his pain. Once again, as the "cuba" pun suggests, his major cause of suffering in this world stems from Cuba and poetry, both of which consume him entirely. He can find no rest from them because they are what gave birth to his moralistic ideal, "la madre del dolor".

The speaker becomes self-aware of his expiatory role as he adopts Christ-like characteristics in both appearance and deed in order to step closer to redeeming poetry, and in turn, Cuba:

Ni un poro sin herida: entre la uña
Y la yema, estiletes me han clavado
Que me llegan al pie: se me han comido
Fríamente el corazón: y en este juego
Enorme de la vida, cupo en suerte
Nutrirse de mi sangre a una lechuza.-
Así, hueco y roído, al viento floto
Alzando el puño y maldiciendo a voces,
en mis propias entrañas encerrado! (Martí 1993, 1:171)⁸⁸

Each of the images in the sequence emulates an expiatory responsibility not unlike Jesus'. The speaker first mentions that not a single pore of his body is without a wound. Having a wound upon every pore of the poet's body would at first glance suggest that his entire body is covered with wounds. Sweat glands are stationed individually within each of the pores of the body, allowing the body to cool itself in times of excessive heat. To suffer at every pore would suggest a pain so great that the entire body would bleed. This poet's suffering is so

⁸⁸ "Not even one pore without a wound: between the finger nail / and the finger tip, stilettos have pierced me / they have even pierced my feet: coldly, they have eaten / my heart: and in this enormous / game of life, my luck run out / they nourish themselves on my blood like an owl.— / Thus, empty and miserable, I float to the wind / Raising my fist, and cursing out loud, / in my own enclosed bowels!"

intense that he suffers "ni un poro sin herida", a suffering not unlike that of Jesus in Gethsemane who "sweat...as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:14). The speaker's possible reference to the sacrifice of Jesus, something he will expound upon as the poem progresses, reappropriates the sacred mythology from the Bible into his own work. He positions himself within a new sacred history to emphasize his role in poetry and politics.

Noting that he has been pierced in his hands and his feet with a stiletto, a sharp dagger-like object, it becomes increasingly evident that the speaker refers to the crucifixion, an image he specifically mentions later. The parallel to Jesus continues as the speaker suggests "se me han comido / fríamente el corazón " and "[se nutren] de mi sangre a una lechuza". Although grotesque in its implications, Martí's description parallels Jesus' redemptive lesson. In one of his many clashes with the Pharisees, Jesus instructed:

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. (John 6:53-58)

In many ways, the poet begins to mirror Jesus. Roberto Agramonte observes that "Martí se identificó en espíritu y en verdad con la prédica de Jesucristo" (Agramonte 1971, 439). This does not in any way suggest that Martí attempts to Christianize his readers. On the contrary, he uses Jesus' words to accentuate the theme of sacrifice, incorporating Jesus' suffering into his new mythology, thus emphasizes the depth of his own anguish. Without agony comparable to Jesus', there would be no poetry. Similar to Jesus, the speaker must remain quiet, screaming only within his bowels against human tyranny. He becomes a prisoner from within, of his own body. The poet's internal struggle begins to mirror Poetry's conflict with language. Poetry is trapped by its body—language and words—, which are incapable of sharing its message. Instead, language parallels the poet as it waits for someone to find the silent message contained within its body.

His self-restraint stems from his understanding of redemption, particularly in its relationship to poetics:

Conozco al hombre, y lo he encontrado malo.

¡Así, para nutrir el fuego eterno

Perecen en la hoguera los mejores!

Los menos por los más! los crucifixos

Por los crucificantes! En maderos

Clavaron a Jesús: sobre sí mismos

Los hombres de estos tiempos van clavados:

Los sabios de Chichén, la tierra clara

Donde el aroma y el maguey se crían,

Con altos ritos y canciones bellas

Al hondo de cisternas olorosas

A su virgen mejor precipitaban:

Del temido brocal se alzaba luego

A perfumar el Yucatán florido

Como en tallo negruzco rosa suave

Un humo de magníficos colores:-

Tal a la vida echa el Creador los buenos:

A perfumar: a equilibrar: ea! clave

El tigre bien sus garras en mis hombros:

Los viles a nutrirse: los honrados

A que se nutran los demás en ellos.— (Martí 1993, 1:172)⁸⁹

This entire stanza tells more than just a story of injustice. It details Martí's poetic and revolutionary concept of salvation. He purposefully selects these specific images to reveal the poet's historical make-up and its impact on his moral code, his ideas, and his poetry. He is not alone in his sacrifice to the world. His assertion, "perecen en la hoguera los mejores!" is immediately followed by his condemnation of the doers of the deed, "los menos por los más!" The speaker selects those people and ideals from the past that have most deeply influenced him. To be a true and lasting sacrifice, the individual must be pure. First he calls upon Jesus in his role as sacrificial savior, a role similar to Martí in his revolutionary cause. Jesus attempted to teach the people, and they crucified him. Martí proposes similar changes in poetry and politics, and much of what he taught is ignored. Jesus created parables, and Martí creates poetry.

The speaker's focus on Christ only tells a portion of the story. He also extends his allegory to ancient American tradition when he calls upon the tale of the virgins. He extends the breadth of sacred history from which he draws to reconfirm the role of sacrifice in poetic creation. These maidens, representations of poetic purity and vitality, end their lives at the hands of the priests that cast them into the fire. They are only seen in view of their possibility of creating "humo de magníficos colores." They are not considered for what they have to offer, a definite reference to the beauty contained in Poetry. Instead they are objects, fuel for fire, sent to be consumed by those who would feed off of their flesh.

What is unique about both of these examples is that they condemn poetic manipulation and "poesía cerebral" (Martí 1975, 21:214). Christ was crucified at the hands of the Pharisees just as these pure virgin maidens were sacrificed by their priestly leaders. In both cases, poetry—the inspiration behind the words—was sacrificed to form and structure. The prophetic poet, the pure individual who carries the ideal they should all follow, is the

⁸⁹ "I know man, and he is in very poor shape indeed. / Thus, to feed the eternal fire / the best one perish in the furnace! / The few for the many! The crucifixes / for the crucifiers! On wood / they nailed Jesus: upon themselves / men of these times are nailed: / The wise men of Chichón, the clear earth / where aromas and magueys are raised, / with high rituals and beautiful songs / to the depth of fragrant cisterns / they throw their best virgins: / From the fearful entrance they later stretched forth / to perfume the flowery Yucatán / like a soft rose on a blackish stalk / a smoke of magnificent colors:— / Such is the life that the Creator gives to good men: / To perfume: to balance: eh! the tiger / digs his claws into my shoulders: / the vile people will nourish themselves: the honorable men / is what other nourish themselves with.—"

one accused of blasphemy, when in fact the blasphemers are the priests themselves. Thus, the poet becomes the emblem of sacrifice as he gives himself to preserve visionary consciousness. The poet answers to a higher law, one governed by morals and ethics, nurtured by visionary experiences, and enclosed in poetic form.

To maintain this expiatory imagery, the speaker calls upon one of the most iconic images from Christian history to emphasize his sacrificial obligation to poetry:

Para el misterio de la Cruz, no a un viejo

Pergamino teológico se baje:

Bájese al corazón de un virtuoso.

Padece mucho un cirio que ilumina:

Sonríe, como virgen que se muere,

La flor cuando la siegan de su tallo!

Duele mucho en la tierra un alma buena!

De día, luce brava: por la noche

Se echa a llorar sobre sus propios brazos:

Luego que ve en el aire de la aurora

Su horrenda lividez, por no dar miedo

A la gente, con sangre de sus mismas

Heridas, tiñe el miserable rostro,

Y emprende a andar, como una calavera

Cubierta, por piedad, de hojas de rosa! (Martí 1993, 1:172-3)⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "For the mystery of the Cross, not an old / theological parchment he comes down: / The heart of a virtuous man comes down. / A candle suffers much when it illuminates: / The flower, like a virgin that dies, / smiles when they cut it from its stalk! / A good soul suffers much on the earth! / By day, he shines brightly: by night /

The speaker reminds us that the purpose behind Christ's sacrifice was not so that we could study the *Bible*—"un viejo pergamino teológico". He came to save people, his great "misterio de la Cruz". The biblical canon intends to go beyond the role of a simple guidebook on morals; it conducts its readers towards an understanding of sacrifice and redemption. Like the Bible, Martí's poetry and words are empty in and of themselves. Their primary potency resides in their philosophies of redemption.

Every image and symbol we see in the concluding stanza reminds us that it is the message behind the words that really matters. A candle must sacrifice itself completely to produce light. The authentic poet is the same; he can neither inspire nor redeem his readers, he cannot fully illuminate his understanding of patria, without sacrificing himself in the process. That is why it is so painful for an "alma buena". The speaker sees both the visions from above and the hypocrisy around him, and all he can do is hope that the message he has attempted to share will bring poetic and political liberation, and salvation to some wandering soul. He must courageously stand his ground at day, even when he breaks down at night, crying from what he observes. "Pues solamente el existir auténtico," maintains José Olivio Jiménez, "integra, el entregarse sin temores a la vida y sus deberes, que por modo único ante la ley del día se pueden perfilar y cumplir, garantizará la ascensión en la sombra suprema—en esa sombra sin límites que como patria fundante y originaria del ser sentía también el poeta y el hombre José Martí" (Jiménez 1983, 152). The speaker returns to the image from "Dos patrias" of "Cuba cual viuda triste" holding a flower (his heart) within her hands. This time, however, it is the poet himself whom we view walking down the street, his face painted with the blood from his own wounds to cover the paleness of his "miserable rostro". In a note from one of his *Cuadernos de apuntes* (1886-1887), Martí explained the significance of such "miserable rostro":

Desagrada (tener que) reconocer que el hombre de mayor idealidad del Universo, el Cristo, pueda tener el rostro deslustrado, cansado, caído, sin aquella beldad y aquella gloria que aun a los rostros sube de la inocencia y confianza del alma no probada, en la edad de la juventud, ignorante y fiera.

he cries upon his own arms: / after he sees in the air of the dawn / his horrendous anger, for not scaring / the people, he dies his own face / with blood from his own wounds, / and begins to walk, like a skeleton / covered, for pity's sake, with rose petals!"

Pero la verdad es que la vida come, y por donde pasa deja la huella de su diente; y en los que viven con más intensidad, ya por el amor de sí, o el de los demás, más la deja. La verdad es que los rostros de los hombres de más belleza moral decaen y pierden gran luz conforme viven, y los ojos se fatigan y se apagan y la piel se decolora, y el cráneo se despuebla de cabello, y la frente se enjuta, y las mejillas se ahuecan, y sólo en las divinas horas de la acción o el discurso supremo les sale al rostro la gloria del alma. (Martí 1975, 21:344-45)⁹¹

The blood on the speaker's face, presented in the poem as rose petals, is a witness to the poet's sacrifice to his cause, his poetic and political "misterio de la Cruz". Like Jesus before him, the poet must continue on his journey, carrying his own heart painted across his face. Martí has replaced the widow's violence with his own determined selfless offering. What was once stolen is now freely given, and what was barely understood, is now fully revealed to the world.

Although Martí always maintained his struggle for Cuban independence, his perspective evolved from one of vengeance and hatred, to that of self-identity and love. It is through the angst and sorrow of his poetry that Martí articulates the direct relationship that the poetic word plays in countering the ominous presence of hegemonic globalization. To counter the colonial dominance of both Spain and the United States, Cuba's understanding of liberty must take on a spiritual role if it desires to counter the extant conflicts between its ideals and its political and geographical boundaries. The poet's appropriation of Christian symbolism counters Cuba's previous attempts to overthrow the hegemonic dominance of Spain through outward rebellion and violence. In many ways, he indirectly assumes the image and symbolism of Jesus; before he can free his people from their oppressor, they must first be free from themselves. Liberty is an idea and belief that must be born from

⁹¹ "It should be displeasing to realize that man who most clearly idealizes the Universe, the Christ, could have his countenance darkened, tired, fallen, without that beauty and glory that even comes from the innocent and confident faces of the untested souls, in their youthful age, wild and ignorant. But the truth is that life eats, and where it grazes it leaves its tooth's print; and in those that live with greater intensity, for the love of it, or for others, the great the print. The truth is that the faces of the most moral men fall and lose their light with how they live, and their eyes tire, and go out, their skin discolours, their hair falls from their heads, their foreheads become lean, their cheeks become hollow, and only in their divine hours of action or supreme discourse do their faces full of the soul's glory come forth."

within. It is requisite that patria, liberty, death, night and poetry be encompassed in one as they become the means of liberating Cuba from the manacles of dominance, violence and disempowerment. To maintain one's patria is to live freely, love freely, and write freely. In the end, it is not a question of Spanish Cuba, or American Cuba, but rather a Cuba decolonized from itself, redeemed by poetry and the night, *patria* redeemed by *patria*, as every Cuban selflessly offers his or her own heart to widowed Cuba.

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