

The Impact of Vicente Huidobro and Ramón Gómez de la Serna in the Spanish Avant-Garde: Visualization and Rhetorical Artifice

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Abstract: This paper discusses the visual rhetoric in the literary work of Vicente Huidobro and Ramón Gómez de la Serna. For Huidobro, images release imagination from restrictions that impede full creative potential. His *creacionista* poems merge the sensuous and intellectual aspects of artistic productions to bring into being a new world, distancing them from our everyday reality and disarming our ability to understand. By contrast, Gómez de la Serna's poetry places emphasis on intelligence and artifice, similar in style to Baltasar Gracián's stylistic precepts of the Spanish Baroque literary movement, *conceptismo*.

Keywords: Huidobro – Gómez de la Serna – Visualization – Witticism – Avant-Garde

This essay examines the philosophical and aesthetic sense of mental and visual images in the compositions of Vicente Huidobro and Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Huidobro and Gómez de la Serna reacted to the dominant *modernista* tradition of Rubén Darío, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Antonio Machado by contributing to a renovation of the Spanish literary panorama. They attached importance to contrastive rhetorical devices as a means of exploiting the imaginative possibilities of the mind. The analysis of their use of eye-oriented rhetorical devices is significant since it provides insight into the philosophical implications of merging imagination and intelligence in the artistic activity of creation. For Huidobro, visual inspiration is the basis of his *creacionista* poetry, and thus he draws on image as an implement to convey freedom of mind at its maximum creative power. Nonetheless, Gómez de la Serna shows deference for metaphor to arrive at a poetic work characterized by wit and artifice, defining traits of his aesthetic theory and practice that harken back to the Spanish Baroque *conceptistas* such as Baltasar Gracián and Francisco de Quevedo.¹ Both authors use image and metaphor in their respective poetry, but it is

¹ To be certain, we might consider Gracián to be the architect of *conceptismo*, defining this technique of producing writing with wit and metaphor through examples that he procures from the poets of antiquity and of his own time. Meanwhile, figures such as Francisco de Quevedo and Luis de Góngora provide poetic use of concepts, loosely defined in Emilio Blanco's edition of *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la*

the differing processes they employ during the creation of their compositions that is at stake in this discussion.

The comparative study of these authors' differing theories and innovations is relevant to the emergence of Ultraism and the Generation of 1927 in Spain. As Cansinos-Asséns brings to mind in *La novela de un literato 1914-1923*, both poets were involved in a series of confrontations apropos the leadership of the Spanish avant-garde. This interaction later sparked off reciprocally heated responses between the two. Regardless of these disputes concerning aesthetic authority, their influence was acknowledged by literary criticism in future generations as both poets partake of similar creative processes. In the initial stages of artistic creation, Huidobro and de la Serna give free rein to imagination and sensibility akin to Schiller's aesthetic paradigms, but their perceptual experience is ultimately ordered by dint of intelligence. To put it simply, their works originate in the locus of intuition, but in order to arrive at a successful composition both authors are driven by intellectual faculties.

Both Huidobro and Gómez de la Serna's use of image and metaphor as rhetorical devices appeals to the sense of sight as the main constituent of avant-garde creative expression. Upon distinguishing the image from the metaphor, Luis Cernuda claims, "en la imagen hay mayor creación poética que en la metáfora. En la primera interviene más la imaginación que el ingenio; en la segunda más el ingenio que la imaginación" (174-75).² Huidobro and Gómez de la Serna take part in a self-conscious creative process based on intuition and ingenious wit.³ As visual representations of the mind, their literary pieces are expressive of the tendency toward graphic visualization in the avant-garde. Huidobro's *creacionista* poems are illustrative of a new reality independent of the external world. The images in his poetic work are sublime. Not only do they create objects devoid of contours and measures, but like Cubist paintings, they also model the formless thereby creating new worlds out of the materials provided by the real or palpable. By comparison, Gómez de la Serna establishes unusual analogies originating in intellectual and ingenious abilities. His *greguerías* are maximum exponents

agudeza as "todo tipo de hallazgos en la escritura o en las artes, de forma que los escritores, y especialmente los poetas, componían sus piezas con vistas a un concepto final en donde confluyen todos los hilos que han ido tejiendo previamente en el poema" (41). In a word, some twist of intellect or use of ingenuity, which produced a sense of wittiness to describe a concept, necessarily had to appear in the writing.

² For a detailed analysis on the differences between the image and the metaphor, See: Richard L. Jackson, "The *Greguería* of Ramón Gómez de la Serna: Antecedents and Originality."

³ It is important to note that wit, *ingenio*, in the works of Gómez de la Serna are, at least in part, contrived from a Baroque world vision laid out by Gracián in his *Arte de ingenio*. Gracián, for his part, understands *ingenio* as an inventive activity entailing intellectual vigor in order to resolve difficult problems. In writing, or poetry, the effects of *ingenio* take on metaphorical relationships that the writer might not exactly employ to resolve difficult questions, but rather to call readership's attention to a concept in a unique and new way. See: Emilio Blanco, "Introducción," to *Arte de ingenio, tratado de la agudeza* (9-88).

of witticism. In his theoretical writings, he expresses philosophical and humorous thoughts that harken back to Baltasar Gracián's attempt at defining Classical and Baroque aphorisms that resulted in the creation of the term *conceptismo* to define this Early Modern literary movement. Indeed, Gómez de la Serna's admiration of Gracián and the *conceptistas*, such as Francisco de Quevedo, is an area noteworthy of pause and one that we will later touch upon as an influential component of the avant-garde.

Inspired by the avant-garde tendency toward visuality, both Vicente Huidobro's *creacionista* poems and Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías* challenge the conventional patterns of reading, vindicating the freedom of the eye's movement and the destruction of the sequential word order. This poetics of visualization results in displacing writing, which is reduced to a supplement or a *parergon*, to put it in Derridean terms.⁴ The rivalry between visual and textual codes stages power relations that account for the prominence of the image over writing. As inarticulate as it may be, the visual element becomes more efficient and forceful in capturing the immediacy of the moment, albeit if it also incapacitates the imaginative capabilities of the viewer/reader by implanting a preconceived image. Hence, practices such as ekphrasis, iconicity and pictorialism are at work in the compositions of these authors.⁵ As a verbal representation of a visual depiction, the ekphrastic principle raises the question of a meta-aesthetics that creates a space for reading words through images and vice versa. Iconicity and pictorialism are also significant insofar as they deal with the typographical arrangement of writing and its relation to content and meaning. In mediating the sign through poetry—and conversely, mediating poetry through plastic strategies—Huidobro's *Poemas árticos* (1918) and Gómez de la Serna's *Total de greguerías* (1955) question the commonplace idea of truth as correctness. In turn, truth is intrinsically correlated to *poiésis* or creation. It is thus the artistic activity that allows for the disclosure of the enigmas concealed in reality. Hence, the complexity between the literary and the graphic element highlights the crisis of conceptual language being the only medium capable of conveying standard meaning.

I. Vicente Huidobro's *creacionista* Poem: From Visuality to Vision

Vicente Huidobro was influenced by the contemporary trend surrounding typographical innovations in poetry and by the emphasis on visuality at the outset of the twentieth century. In 1916 he began a two-year stay in Paris, where he familiarized

⁴ In "The Parergon" Jaques Derrida critiques Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" from *The Critique of Judgement* by questioning the universality of beauty. Specifically, Derrida refers to the frame of an artwork as the element that distinguishes between what is included in and excluded from the artistic domain, thereby belonging to a space other than representation. See: Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*.

⁵ Traditionally speaking, ekphrasis is a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art. Pictorialism corresponds to the use of pictures or visual images, whereas iconicity takes advantage of onomatopoeia or interacts with the poem's content. For a further view on the subject, see: Peter Wagner, ed. *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*.

himself with Cubist aesthetics. During this time, Cubism had superseded the analytic tendency to represent an object viewed from differing angles that its founders, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque (1909-1912), had originally attributed to it. Most scholars consider the year 1913 to be the outset of synthetic Cubism, which coincides with the encounter of these two painters in Ceret, France. Their pictorial style made use of neutral colours, dissected objects in varying shapes and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials on canvas (Busto Ogden 96-97).

In the two years that Huidobro spent in Paris, he witnessed the apogee of synthetic Cubism and initiated a series of collaborations for the French magazine *Nord-Sud*, edited by Pierre Reverdy. This connected him with the Parisian avant-garde of the moment, which included Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, Jacques Lipchitz, Francis Picabia, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, Paul Eluard and Blaise Cendrars, among others. During this time, he familiarized himself with the visual poetics of Tristan Tzara, Jean Cocteau, André Breton, Louis Aragon, Max Jacobs, and, especially, Guillaume Apollinaire, the theorist of Cubist precepts. According to Huidobro, Cubism is an intellectual art that carried, as an inherent aspect of itself, two different approaches: the traditional notions of metaphysical thought and the fourth dimension. The fourth dimension emerged as a result of the popularization of the *General Theory of Relativity*, and affected American and European artistic circles.⁶ In Apollinaire's view, the fourth dimension

represents the immensity of space eternalized in all directions at a given moment. It is space itself, or the dimension of infinity; it is what gives objects plasticity. It gives them their just proportion in a given work, whereas in Greek art, for example, a kind of mechanical rhythm is constantly destroying proportion. (Caws 120)

With this in mind, Apollinaire sought to designate a space that is inaccessible to ordinary senses. For this French poet, modern art is concerned with the intellectual creation of illusions rather than with the sensual representation of reality. Based on techniques utilized in mathematics, Cubism subverted the long-lasting three-dimensionality of Euclidean geometry. This movement privileged penetration into an object so as to exploit the potentialities of the image and to create a new universe that bears no resemblance with our ordinary world. With a tendency resembling figuration, Cubist painters deformed reality and questioned the notions of beauty and truth.

Apollinaire designed his calligrams, or poems in which the typographical arrangement of handwriting generates a visual image, relying on the abovementioned visual strategies. The resulting figures express the content of composition by way of the

⁶ This theory's popularity is generally attributed to Albert Einstein and entails in-depth conjectures concerning dimensionality. Whether the avant-garde movement fully comprehended this theory or not is not at question here, rather, our intent is to demonstrate the 20th-century artistic world's grasp and utilization of these ideas in general.

layout of the page. In this poetry, the linguistic and poetic mechanisms operate on the level of the text and are frequently defamiliarized by visual and iconic devices, namely, breaks in words, white spaces, different fonts, type sizes and visual syntax. Some of Apollinaire's most famous calligrams—"Heart, Crown, Mirror," "Eiffel Tower" and "Vase"—are illustrations of Marinetti's ideal of *parole in libertà*, where signs are an extension of the chaos of war transplanted onto text. As Juan Manuel Bonet underscores in his article "El caligrama," underneath the visual surface of the calligram lies a profound reading in line with Symbolist aesthetics (11). Furthermore, the visual image likewise conditions content in a mutually influential relationship between text and image.

As a result of these pictorial influences and theories, Huidobro conceived his *creacionista* poetry in terms of the rhetoric of visualization, commonly understood as "Formarse [una persona] en el pensamiento la imagen de algo que no se tiene a la vista o de un concepto abstracto" (*Diccionario*, RAE **Visualizar**). This connection with Cubism made it possible for Huidobro to experiment with the multiple image, a single image that engenders a subsequent or contained image allowing for different ways of seeing and reading the poem. Visual mechanisms such as the suppression of punctuation and the displacement of margins appeal to both the sensuous and intellectual constituents of experience. Our senses capture manifold disarrayed sensations that our intelligence is to subsequently order and decipher. Like Schiller in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1794), Huidobro integrates two forces into his poems: the *Sinnestrieb* and the *Formtrieb*. The former is a sensual drive that expresses an urge to produce tangible reality, whereas the latter, the formal drive, allows for moral and conceptual order in the world. The conflict between the passive state of feeling and the active process of thinking is resolved in the *Spieltrieb*, or play-drive. This aesthetic impulse, synonymous with artistic beauty or living form, enables the individual to exploit both sensual and cognitive faculties to the fullest. Huidobro's *creacionista* poetry responds to this play-drive of imagination, since it primarily relies on perception. Nonetheless, intelligence later intervenes to organize sensuous experience. In his manifesto, "Creación pura," he expresses the significance of these two artistic forces:

Toda escuela sería que marca una época empieza forzosamente por un período de búsqueda en el que la Inteligencia dirige los esfuerzos del artista. Este primer período puede tener como origen la sensibilidad y la intuición; es decir, una serie de adquisiciones inconscientes. Partiendo siempre de la base que todo pasa primero por los sentidos. Pero esto sólo ocurre en el instante de la gestación, que es un trabajo anterior al de la producción misma y como su primer impulso. Es el trabajo de las tinieblas pero al salir a la luz, al exteriorizarse, la Inteligencia, empieza a trabajar. (*Obras* 719)

In line with the Cubist fragmentation of space and the Schillerian play-drive of imagination, Huidobro brought to light *Horizon Carré* (1917). An illustration of this is “Paysage,” a calligram that offers diverse visual perspectives and reading possibilities (Fig 1). As Bohn has rightfully observed, “Paysage” acts as a “picture-of-a-picture poem. Instead of a poem that functions as a painting, it proves to be a poem that functions as a painting of a painting” (23). This composition lends itself to ekphrastic, iconic and pictorial practices that enter into dialogue with each other. As a verbal representation of a visual expression, ekphrasis reveals the complexities of the reading process. The title “Paysage” illustrates this phenomenon by pointing to the thematic of landscape painting. The river is described as containing no fish whatsoever, which once more points to a picture rather than to a material river. The exhortation, “do not paint on the painted grass,” in the poem is also reminiscent of the green shade used to color the vegetation in a landscape painting. All these references to visual art within the poetic domain direct readership/viewership to the concurrent acts of reading and seeing. The temporal genre of poetry and the spatial art of painting are brought together to reach an all-embracing perceptual experience that combines the senses of hearing and sight.

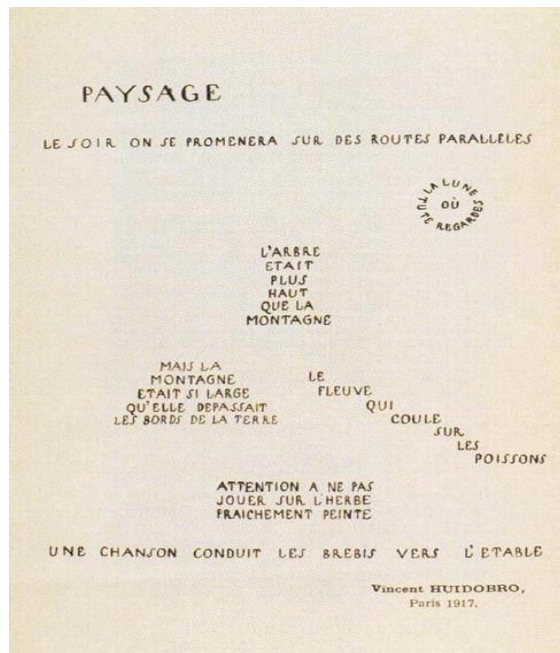


Fig. 1. Vicente Huidobro, “Paysage,” from *Horizon Carré*, Paris, 1917.

The typographical arrangement also ties in with the idea of the poem as an icon, linking the distribution of letters and sounds on the page to the subject matter. This is noticeable in the geometric reproduction of three objects that mimic and capture the

essence of natural elements. Whereas the moon and the mountain display themselves respectively as circle and triangle, the shape of a tree combines curved and straight lines. The use of simple structures might be read as an enactment of the Platonic emphasis on form as a technique to arrive at eternal ideas.⁷ “Paysage” is representative of the quest for knowledge that Platonic philosophy and Cubism aim to exhibit. The poem presents the visual images or shadows encountered in the physical realm as a means of mirroring true and abstract reality. In a word, this calligram evinces an abstract reality to such an extent that readership/viewership perceives or intuits its essence, rather than attempting to interpret vague details that may veil our understanding of things. In the writing process of poetry, the calligram aids not only with the reading of pictures, moreover it provides additional information that the visual representation has overlooked. Graphically, the tree is illustrated on top of a mountain, once more proving the existence of a deeply seated intersection between form and content. In “Paysage,” effects akin to painting are also reproduced on paper. Resting on the paradigm of the fourth dimension, the poem attempts to capture the infinity of space and the plasticity of writing. The text acts as a field of multiple directions that allow for the interchangeable reading of words as image and image as words. The deterministic sequentiality of discourse is substituted for the mobility of the eye when confronted with pictures. This brand of calligram abolishes the verticality of writing, and so too the traditional model of perusing words. Emancipating itself from articulacy, the reading process tends to continually represent itself as more accidental and sensitive than logical.

As seen in this poem, the revolutionary aesthetics of Cubism, and particularly those of Pierre Reverdy, impacted Huidobro’s *Horizon Carré*. Notwithstanding, Huidobro refuted that others influenced his artistic inventions to declare himself the creator par excellence of Creationism, which entailed an ensuing series of backlashes between the French and the Chilean poets. In his study *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* (1925), Guillermo de Torre documents the heated *creacionista* controversy between Reverdy and Huidobro. Huidobro dated the achievements of his technique as far back as 1916, when he wrote his “Arte poética,” included in *El espejo del agua* (1916) and shortly after in *Horizon Carré (Obras)*. The Chilean author claimed his poetic discoveries preceded his avant-garde stage in Paris, and that it was he who influenced the Cubist poet and not in the inverse order. Over the years, his words fell on deaf ears due to the

⁷ In his *Theory of Forms* Plato claims that reality is not constituted by the material world perceived by our senses, but rather by its transcendence. The Greek philosopher discusses this idea in several dialogues such as those appearing in the allegory of the cave in *The Republic* and the *Phaedo*, where he poses the difference between the physical and spiritual realms, between *eidos* (form) and *idea* (characteristic). The former is characterized by its mutability and imperfections, and is thus considered to be a shadow of the realm of forms or ideas. The latter world is the true reality for Plato and hinges upon abstract and immutable concepts that are at the heart of epistemology, metaphysics and morality. See: Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*.

unfriendly feelings that Huidobro roused in most contemporary writers. Thanks to Richard L. Admussen and René de Costa's research on "Huidobro, Reverdy and la edición príncipe de *El espejo del agua*," today we do indeed know that Huidobro's original edition of these texts did exist. The following lines of "Arte poética" were the subject of the dispute:

Por qué cantáis a la rosa, ¡oh, Poetas!
 Hacedla florecer en el poema;
 Sólo para nosotros
 Viven todas las cosas bajo el Sol.
 El Poeta es un pequeño Dios.
 (*Obras* lines 14-18)

As this poem demonstrates, the task of Creationism is to imitate Nature's constructive laws in form and content. The creative mind takes advantage of the potentialities of the natural world in order to bring forth a genuine poetry that embodies the freedom of imagination. Huidobro then continues in his manifest "La creación pura:"

Tendremos, pues, que considerar las relaciones que hay entre el mundo objetivo y el Yo, el mundo subjetivo del artista.

El artista toma sus motivos y sus elementos del mundo objetivo, los transforma y los combina, y los devuelve al mundo objetivo bajo la forma de nuevos hechos. (*Obras* 720)

The *I* or *Yo* avails itself of those elements belonging to the tangible world, and transforms them into a second reality through this system, which bridges the gap between the objective and the subjective. Subsequently, the self takes advantage of this technique, becoming the communicating vessel that returns those newly created facts to the objective realm. In this sense, the self finds its place in the world, and thus the poet's necessity of subjectivity and objectivity is harmonized in the poem. To this end, Huidobro acts out the play-drive of imagination; he apprehends sensuous experience (*Sinnestrieb*), which is mediated by the intellect to give it shape (*Formtrieb*), thereby bringing to light the new reality of the artwork at hand.

As insightful as the claims of "Arte poética" may be, de Torre doubts Huidobro's claim of originality to Creationism for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, several poets had previously been engaged with constructing poetry from Nature's resources; and secondly, the achievements Huidobro credits himself with were not yet prevalent at such an early stage of his creative process. In de Torre's view, the Chilean poet only had the opportunity to acquire that mastery and precision during the years 1917-1918 ("Sentido" and "Imagen," *Doctrina*). It was during this timeframe that he became familiar with French lyric, and especially with that of Pierre Reverdy, whose

admiration he eventually came to admit in a public lecture. He similarly confessed Reverdy's influence on his own writings to several of his closest friends within the literary circles of Madrid. Seeing the originality of his self-proclaimed Creationism in danger, Huidobro recanted his previous statements and declared himself to be the leader and the organizer of the Cubists. Although de Torre gave credit to Reverdy as the driving force of Creationism, he acknowledged Huidobro to possess the demiurgic ability to exploit the multiple possibilities of image.

In 1918, one year after his experience in Paris, Huidobro spent several months in Madrid. In Pombo Café, he is introduced to Guillermo de Torre, Isaac del Vando-Villar, Mauricio Bacarisse and Ramón Gómez de la Serna. His meetings with these poets as well as the literary events held at the Café Colonial by Cansinos-Asséns eventually gave rise to the *ultraísta* movement in Spain. At the Plaza de Oriente, Huidobro met the Orphists Sonia and Robert Delaunay, as well as the Polish painters Władysław Jahl and Marjan Paszkiewicz, who aided with the production of the covers and articles while launching *Ultra* magazine. As a result of his personal relationships with these artists, Huidobro published *Hallali* (1918) and *Tour Eiffel* (1918) in French, and *Poemas Árticos* (1918) and *Ecuatorial* (1918) in Spanish. These poems emulate the simultaneous aesthetics of Robert Delaunay, who shows concern in his paintings for spatiotemporal disjunction. Thanks to the refraction of light and colour, Delaunay creates the impression of ceaseless dynamism in the modern world. According to Catherine E. Wall, his recurrent leitmotif of the Eiffel Tower responds to an eagerness for “communication through space and time: telegraph, wires, radio towers, and transcontinental or intercontinental movement, among other topics” (58). In her view, this is noticeable in “Exprés” and “Tour Eiffel,” where Huidobro applies strategies rooted in Futurist tradition—destruction of syntax, liberation of syntagmatic restrictions, suppression of connectors and punctuation, usage of mathematical symbols and unexpected analogies. In “Exprés” (included in *Poemas Árticos*) the pictorial idea of Simultaneism is suggested thanks to the enumeration of differing locations and geographical features that follow an orderly arrangement on the page, bringing to mind the simultaneity of modern experience:

Londres Madrid París
Roma Nápoles Zurich
(lines 3-4)

The description of the Apennines and the reference to the stars also suggest the progress of space within the time period of the voyage. In order to reinforce this spatiotemporal confluence, a farewell between two or more people disrupts the sequentiality of events:

Allá me esperarán / Hasta mañana / Buen viaje (lines 32-34)

Wall's assertions appear to be tenable when relating Huidobro's poetry to *simultaneísmo*, as demonstrated by biographical and bibliographical data. Notwithstanding, her argument that form speaks about themes of modernity aligns Huidobro with the faction of the avant-garde that celebrates progress and high development, hinging on the analysis of the aforementioned pieces. Yet Huidobro's oeuvre targets multiple directions apart from technology, the city and science. For instance, in *Poemas árticos* and *Espejo del agua*, most of the poems revolve around eternal human questions, namely, the passage of time, inner and outer voyages, cyclical natural processes, the cosmos, life and death experiences, etc. The figure of the poet possesses a higher consciousness halfway between a mythical poetic past and modern technological processes that allows him to engage in the quest for meaning.

In line with this thematic, Aullón de Haro reads Huidobro's *creacionista* works in terms of the aesthetics of sublimity ("Teoría"). Nonetheless, he overlooks the type of sublime Huidobro attempts to achieve, and this may lead to erroneous interpretations. Let us remember that in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant distinguishes two subjective moments that correlate the faculty of imagination to understanding. The mathematical sublime fails to comprehend natural objects that by size or form present themselves as shapeless and infinite. This inadequacy between imagination and understanding is harmonized in the second moment of the dynamical sublime, when reason comes into play and imposes itself on the unknowable and un-representable. This intellectual capacity demonstrates its primacy over the fallibility of the senses. In seeking to apprehend the vastness of the world, the sensible self is put to death thereby manifesting its powerlessness. Creationism falls into this category of the dynamical sublime. Rather than confronting readership with the anxiety brought about by the inadequacy between imagination and understanding, Huidobro makes use of the faculty of reason to expose us to the concept of infinity without the necessity of mentally reproducing perceptual experience. In his words:

Los poemas creados adquieren proporciones cosmogónicas; os dan a cada instante el verdadero sublime, este sublime del que los textos nos presentan ejemplos tan poco convincentes. Y no se trata del sublime excitante y grandioso, sino de un sublime sin pretensión, sin terror, que no desea agobiar ni aplastar al lector: un sublime de bolsillo. (*Obras* 733)

Rather than feeling tormented, the reader takes pleasure in these poems, wherein the images reveal the nonrepresentational and obscure condition of language by shedding light on a universe of textual suggestiveness and emotional potentialities. The un-representability of the sublime lies in the impossibility of finding an equivalent to the *creacionista* image in the existing world.

In *Poemas Árticos*, Huidobro shows concern for the sublime in a multiplicity of poems that emphasize the vast might of Nature. "Cenit" is symptomatic of this attitude

since, as the vertical point or zenith of the hemisphere, it identifies with a natural object devoid of contours and form. Likewise, several images presented in this poem respond to Huidobro's *creationista* dictum of "crear un poema sacando de la vida sus motivos y transformándolos para darles una vida nueva e independiente" (*Obras* 739). The first two lines of the poem disclose a new autonomous world made out of natural elements we are familiar with:

Lejos de los llanos oblicuos
Las campanas cantando sobre el cenit
(lines 1-2)

Based on the actual element of the 'plains' (*llanos*), the poet has invested them with a new 'oblique' (*oblicuos*) form that cannot be encountered in reality. This figurative adjective, which harkens to Picassian analytical Cubism, geometrically delimits the plains, and in so doing becomes increasingly more sublime, increasingly more impossible for the ordinary mind to apprehend. The personification of "las campanas cantando sobre el cenit" only finds its *raison d'être* in this poetic activity. Only after that unusual landscape is brought forth, does the lyrical subject appear to be "crucificado en la niebla" with his arms open wide (line 3). This imagery is reminiscent of a dying Christ that has undergone an excruciating pain over the course of several days. The paradox of being nailed in such an ethereal phenomenon as fog demonstrates the sublimity of Huidobro's poetic creativeness. This act testifies to the power of imagination beyond the limitations of facts. Regarding the departure of ships, the lyrical voice terminates in a state of hopelessness to find his footprints among them. Let us remember that at the outset of the 20th-century, sea transport is the epitome of life's dynamism, cultures in contact and transatlantic exchanges. The poet may yearn for both an inner and outer voyage, which fails to come true. The capitalization of the next lines responds to the experimentation with the visual typography of the text:

ALGO ME ENCIERRA POR LOS
CUATRO COSTADOS (lines 8-9)

The 'something' that 'is enclosing me from / all sides' enacts pictorial *simultaneísmo*, in that the object appears to be perceived from different standpoints.⁸ This may be pointing to the indeterminacy and yet relativism of a self-confinement. With the voyage concluded, the nothingness of obscurity comes to the forefront. The figure of the sexton embodies this obscurity, "que apagó las estrellas" and "rezaba entre las vírgenes de cera" (lines 12-13). Devoid of any radiance whatsoever, the night shows itself particularly enigmatic and solemn. In the darkness, there is no possibility of keeping

⁸ All translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

track of oneself, but it is only from that unformed chaos that the clairvoyance of thinking comes to light. Only nonexistent images that shock the common eye can convey the inexpressibility of life.

Huidobro's poetics responds to the multiplicity of images inherited from analytical and Orphic Cubism. Upon looking at the question of form, this intellectual art brings into play the sensuousness of the world only to partake of the realm of ideas, also read as the fourth dimension in the modern age. Like the Cubist painters, Huidobro explores the *Ding-an-sich* as a way to penetrate the haecceity of things, instead of external phenomena.⁹ In his *creacionista* compositions, the objective world is permeated by the subjective consciousness of the poet. His eye translates the direct observation of sensory data into simple and precise diction. In so doing, the rigidity of rhyme and meter are relinquished only to privilege the play-drive of imagination, which not only allows for successful synthesis of intuition and intelligence, but also for apprehension of those images that reason is unable to grasp.

II. Ramón Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías*: Witty Ways of Seeing in the Baroque Spirit of the Spanish Avant-Garde

The creative impulse of Vicente Huidobro is dominated by visualization in order to generate a visual representation in the mind, devoid, in great part, of correspondence with the real world. His poetry appeals to the play-drive—understood as harmony—of imagination. Likewise, Ramón Gómez de la Serna exploits visual effects in his literary creations, but what differentiates his imaginative process from Huidobro's is an exhibition of the rhetorical use of wit that permits him to exploit creativity.

Due in part to his political ideology, Ramón Gómez de la Serna initiated a literary career with the journal *Prometeo*. From 1908 to 1912, *Prometeo* introduced writers such as Oscar Wilde, Remy de Gourmont and Filippo Tomaso Marinetti into the Spanish artistic panorama. In Madrid, Gómez de la Serna founded the *tertulia* of Café Pombo, where congregations of varying artists took place, including the poet Manuel Abril, the sculptors Bartolozzi, Ricardo Baeza and Goy de Silva, in addition to the painters and brothers Zubiaurre and the critic Tomás Borrás.

In short, Gómez de la Serna found himself among the major avant-gardists associated with the experimental spirit of his time. During a trip to Paris in August of 1910 he familiarized himself with a series of plastic and literary Cubisms¹⁰ that were at their peak. Gómez de la Serna met Apollinaire at a banquet in 1918, shortly after the end of the war. Max Jacob was also influential in the subversive nature and witticism of

⁹ According to Kant, the *Ding-an-sich* is not mediated through perceptual experience or conceptualizations; it is therefore impossible to be known. For a contrastive view on the *Ding-an-sich*, see: Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*.

¹⁰ For a reference on de la Serna's relationship to literary and plastic Cubism, see Ana Martínez-Collado, *La complejidad de lo moderno: Ramón y el arte Nuevo*.

de la Serna's *greguerías*, although Ramón never considered himself one of Jacob's apprentices. On the plastic level of Cubism, de la Serna was indebted to Picasso, whom he met during several soirées at the French capital.

After his stay in Paris, Gómez de la Serna returned to Spain and frequented modernist circles that welcomed anticlerical and pansexual Nietzschean ideas. In the year 1909, Gómez de la Serna participated in a reading of "Fundación y manifiesto del Futurismo," in the Ateneo of Madrid, a translation from "Le Futurisme" previously published in *Le Figaro*. On 20 April, 1910, he also included Marinetti's "Proclama a los futuristas españoles" in issue XX of his journal *Prometeo* with the purpose of raising awareness of the social realities of Spain:

¡Españoles! Llegaréis infaliblemente a este resultado (de riqueza agrícola e industrial) por la autonomía municipal y regional, hoy indispensable, y por la instrucción popular, a lo cual debe consagrar el Gobierno los cuarenta y dos millones de pesetas anuales destinados al culto y clero.

Es precio para esto extirpar de un modo definitivo y totalmente el clericalismo y destruir su corolario, su colaborador y defensor, el carlismo.

La Monarquía, hábilmente orientada por Canalejas, está en vías de realizar esta hermosa operación quirúrgica.¹¹

Owing to Marinetti's attitude toward mechanization, it is no surprise that Gómez de la Serna took a stand against *Carlismo* and encouraged the government of Canalejas to excise those ideological relics conflicting with the process of modernization, namely the clergy, women and sexual ardor. He also yearned for the technological advancement of Spain, which would occur once the old symbol of the cathedral was demolished.

During a 1917 trip to Madrid, Picasso attended the ballet of Sergei Diaghilev, and subsequently seized the opportunity to meet Gómez de la Serna at Café y Botillería de Pombo. From that moment forward, de la Serna would make contact with several noteworthy figures that inspired his literary production. As a couple, the Delaunays were significant for Gómez de la Serna, who he met for the first time in Paris. During the years of World War I, they moved to Madrid, where de la Serna paid them frequent visits, having the opportunity to meet Jean Cocteau and Tristan Tzara. From the latter he grasped the essence of Dadaism, especially regarding the power of humor and witticism contained in his *greguerías*. The Surrealism of André Breton and Paul Eluard also left an indelible mark on his work in his short story titled "El hijo surrealista." Ramón was attracted to the revolutionary and transformative potential of Surrealism, but shortly after, he questioned the basic premises of the movement on the grounds of its violent leanings (Martínez-Collado 70-75).

¹¹ See the "Proclama" in *Manifiestos and Textos Futuristas* (236).

As a result of these influences, Gómez de la Serna brought his own interpretation of the avant-garde aesthetics to light, which some critics have referred to as *ramonismo*.¹² We observe these ideas registered in his *Greguerías* (1914), *Primera proclama de Pombo* (1915) and *El Rastro* (1915) (*Total*). As García de la Concha argues, *ramonismo* vindicates that:

Un mundo incoherente no puede tener otra expresión que la de la fragmentación y la incoherencia; el hombre debe, además, convencerse de que es un ser marginal y, más que referir las cosas a sí, debe buscarse a sí mismo en las cosas. Cuando, por enfatizar la fuerza creadora de la escritura ramoniana, se insiste en la carencia ideológica, convendría tener en cuenta que tampoco la propone el cubismo con el que Ramón se considera y está directamente emparentado. (VII, 208)

This fragmentation and incoherency that de la Concha references leads us to understand Gómez de la Serna's ideas as chaotic, which demonstrates the paradox of *ramonismo*. On the one hand, creative activity appeals to the irrationality of the world by transferring an incoherent and fragmentary form to the poetic text. On the other hand, it seeks to obliterate the boundaries between aesthetics and reality, and furthermore, to bring to life the perfect condition of art. For Gómez de la Serna, our erroneous belief that man is the centre of the universe prevents us from communicating with ordinary things in our environment. Thus, art is to act as a medium to rethink our place in the world far from a position of anthropocentric power. This is a necessary condition to access the meaning of life through aesthetic expression.

Twentieth-century avant-garde movements provided Gómez de la Serna the background to fashion his *greguerías*. Picasso's collages and Apollinaire's *calligrammes* most likely impacted the visual component of Gómez de la Serna's illustrated *greguerías*, especially regarding the discovery of intrinsic relations underlying words and pictures. This ties in with the potential of the advertising industry to create a shock effect by way of images that attract the viewer to a particular product, which in Gómez de la Serna's case is the poem understood as an object. The connection with Marinetti's Futurism is also at stake given the numerous references to modern culture and city life. Moreover, the subversive and destructive character of some *greguerías* coincides with Dada and Surrealist leanings, although Gómez de la Serna never participated in these movements.

In this quest for meaning and truth, Gómez de la Serna is not only influenced by the 20th-century avant-garde spirit but also, and perhaps more importantly, he returns to Baroque artifice in order to emphasize the significance of intelligence in creative

¹² In his *Historia y crítica de la literatura española*, Víctor García de la Concha, among others, have discussed Gómez de la Serna's unique interpretation of avant-garde aesthetics utilizing the term *ramonismo*, and although this word does not take flight to form a full-fledged artistic movement, it does testify to the importance of this poet's work.

processes. As he argues in his “Ensayo sobre lo cursi” (1934):

Lo barroco es, sencillamente, la rebeldía en rama sin la tensión disciplinada ni el objetivo que cumplen las leyes de la preceptiva. El barroco es la franqueza, la originalidad como signo que igual da que sea hallado e inhallado, pues el propósito es ya grande y es marcar el vericuetto de la forma y la señal para reconocer la casa. (12)

For Gómez de la Serna, the Baroque does not answer to any method that might discipline the artistic creation, but rather to an intense intellectual activity resulting in originality. As he continues in the aforementioned essay, the convoluted rhetoric of the Baroque reconciles the opposition between Realism and Idealism, and entails the liberation from those Classical constraints that regulated style into rigid and straight forms. Conversely, the curved and twisted prevails in any Baroque composition, which brings about the defeat of representational boundaries and thus the turmoil of intellect in its utmost potentiality.¹³ These intellectual abilities are especially acknowledged when the poet ties in fully awoken consciousness with genius’s force of artistic creation. Notwithstanding, the exploitation of mental faculties may also prompt madness in creativity, which is also attributable to the Spanish Golden Age due to its intricate and contradictory nature. As Guillermo de Torre remarks in “Sentido y vigencia del barroco español,” “No sólo el barroquismo es radicalmente español; todo el arte y la literatura españoles, en sus momentos culminantes, en sus expresiones más intensas, han sido sustancialmente barrocos” (396). As he further argues, the Baroque is a *will to style* that has prefigured the *sign* and *destiny* of Spanish character from El Greco to Gómez de la Serna. This is in fact a symptom of the crises of modernity, namely, the tension between tradition and innovation. Baroque artifice channels these contradictions in the work of art to reach successful synthesis.¹⁴

According to de Torre there is a prevalence of the Baroque style in Spanish literature over the centuries. Gómez de la Serna draws attention to figures such as Baltasar Morales Gracián, indicating that the poetics of the ingeniousness of artifice, or wit, is a dominant trait shared by both the Classics and the Early Moderns. In *Arte de*

¹³ While most commonly understood as the exaggerated superabundance of the crowded canvas, moldings or walls, David Castillo notes that the Baroque was the pursuit of the extreme in all of its senses, not just extreme overcrowding. Thus, the lack or vacancy of expression would be another manifestation of the Baroque ideal. For Gómez de la Serna, the question at hand is to determine where boundaries lie and to push them, whether they exist in what is already crowded or what might be empty. See: David R. Castillo, “Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition.”

¹⁴ Artifice, understood in Spanish Baroque terminology, serves to describe “el sentido abstracto, el aspecto intelectual o estético” of the word ingenious (Blanco 24). In a word, Baroque artifice could be comprehended as a way to classify and quantify ingenuity in the artistic world, and there is no better attempt at doing this than Baltasar Gracián’s *Arte de ingenio: Tratado de la agudeza*, a treatise aimed at defining the nuances of ingenuity and wit.

ingenio, *Tratado de la agudeza* (1642), Gracián is ambiguous in his approach to poetry. Indeed, his focus is positioned more on examples of wit than on a particular genre, but the specimens he employs to define ingenious wit are typically poetic. At times, he defends the tropes and rhetorical devices utilized in *poesía culterana*, in that they oppose Nature's roughness, and thus stand for a style that calls for eloquence and sophistication. In other instances, Gracián argues for *conceptismo*, the tendency that he eventually supports as the best means for exploring wit and ingeniousness.¹⁵ For him, witticism is the artful and elaborate articulation of thinking that encounters correspondences between two objects. When realized in discourse, this connection is known as the concept, namely, an idea that is capable of wit. Criticizing *culteranismo*, Gracián states:

[...] nótese, con toda advertencia, que hay un estilo culto, bastardo y aparente, que pone la mira en sola la colocación de las palabras, en la pulideza material de ellas, sin alma de agudeza, usando de encontrados y partidos conceptos... Esta es una enfadosa, vana, inútil afectación, indigna de ser escuchada. (*Agudeza* 243)

For that reason, it seems Gracián privileges Classical over contemporary compositions, in that the former takes advantage of the possibilities of thinking as an extension of human existence. The Classics were concerned with the utilization of intellect, enabling them to adopt an ethical comportment in the world based on the true, the good and the beautiful, as we might bear witness to in the works of Plato or Aristotle. This idea that Gracián marvels at, regarding the ancients, draws a parallel with the avant-garde desire for rendering art as praxis of life. Nevertheless, experimental artists aim for a critique of the relationship between producer and consumer, whereas the Classics confer a higher value upon everyday experience. Despite a few exceptions, Gracián views early modern style as highly obscure and elaborate. In his words:

Esta diferencia hay entre las composiciones antiguas y las modernas, que aquellas todo lo echaban en concepto, y así están llenas de alma y viveza ingeniosa; éstas toda su eminencia ponen en las hojas de las palabras, en la oscuridad de la frase, en lo oculto del estilo, y así no tienen tanto fruto de agudeza. (*Agudeza* 253-254)

¹⁵ *Culteranismo* is a stylistic movement of the Spanish Baroque epitomized by Luis de Góngora in the late sixteenth century. *Culterana* poetry is characterized by a highly ornamental rhetoric that makes use of flamboyant mythical metaphors and complex syntax rooted in Latin tradition. By contrast, *conceptismo* is another movement of the Baroque whose greatest representative is Francisco de Quevedo. This style encouraged witticism and linguistic simplicity so as to delve into the profundity of signifiers. Curiously, Gracián cites Góngora with great frequency and Quevedo very little in *Arte de ingenio*, even though he prefers the wittiness of the *Conceptismo* movement to *Culteranismo*.

Gracián indicates partiality for poets that integrate *conceptismo* in their creations, particularly those of the Classic period inasmuch as they are illustrative of inventiveness and artifice, attitudes he exalts in writing. Among the Latins, he not only pays tribute to Horace, Lucano, Ovid and Virgil, but also to his fellow countryman, Marcial. From sixteenth and seventeenth century lyric, the texts he mentions are relative to Baltasar de Alcázar, Carrillo Sotomayor, Camoens, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Francisco de Quevedo, Lope de Vega and Luis de Góngora. In the field of prose, he admires Cervantes, the Infante don Juan Manuel, Juan Rufo and Mateo Alemán, to name a few. All these authors are expressive of the rhetoric of wit that allows for the creation of eminent works.

In his theoretical writings on modern art, Ramón Gómez de la Serna returns to Gracián's concept of wit as the greatest expression of genius—*ingenio*. *Humorismo* displays the intellectual condition of wit, demonstrating concern for life in the process of conceiving art. In his essay "Gravedad e importancia del humorismo" (1930), Gómez de la Serna defines this term as follows: "el humorismo es una situación *sui generis* y superior para juzgar la vida que pasa, para desarmar lo alevoso. Es el intermedio entre el enloquecer de locura o el mediocrizarse de cordura" (353). Despite its apparent triviality, humour reveals the gravity of life and suggests taking action before those dilemmas man is faced with manifest themselves. For Gómez de la Serna, the comedian is antisocial and anti-political. He or she harshly opposes any brand of authority. Although this statement seems, at least partially, correct, there also exist highly political claims in *humorismo* that react against the establishment. The play, for instance, appeals to the graveness revealed by the emptiness of the world and the dissatisfaction with social yardsticks, used to measure status. In order to contest authoritative dogmas, art is to be evenly invested with the bitter and the humorous. Precisely, modernisms partake of this attitude, in that their leitmotifs are both embraced and derided. In Gómez de la Serna's words:

El arte tiene, agotada la representación, una amargura ante la fijeza escénica, y como idiotizada de las formas, le hace rebelarse. Su deseo de originalidad y de inventiva no es un deseo de imitación, y por eso recurre a la paradoja y al humorismo.

El arte contemporáneo se ha dado cuenta de que, para variar las formas, llega un momento en que no hay otro remedio que desvariar, que cambiarlas radicalmente, que evocarlas desde parecidos lejanísimos. (Total 389-390)

As impassioned as his purpose may be, modern art becomes humorous in that the paradoxes it puts forward seek to supersede photographic mimetism. The new forms appear to be alternatives that satirize inasmuch as they deform reality. This aesthetic conception may captivate the attention of a public whose consciousness had been

desensitized by the climate of modern alienation.

Ramón Gómez de la Serna captures his understanding of humorous attitudes resulting in various uses of wit in his definition of *greguerías*: “metaphor + humour = greguería” (*Total* xxxiv). As he writes in the preface of his *Total de greguerías*, he came across this word, *greguería*, by chance, and he held on to it owing to its euphonic resonances: *gritería*, *algarabía*. The *greguería* is “lo que gritan los seres confusamente desde su inconsciencia, lo que gritan las cosas” (*Total* xxii-xxiii). According to Gómez de la Serna, insofar as decay is a human condition, *greguerías* are to register fleeting details that enable art to better itself by resting on the corrosion of the living. Rooted in the *haiku*, these witty seventeen syllable long compositions privilege irony and the paradigmatic relation between words and images, thus generating multiple creative possibilities. Gómez de la Serna is particularly interested in a humoristic and facetious poetry, and Oriental compositions provide the fundamental mechanisms to attain these effects. Although the *greguería* is seemingly entertaining, its truth resides in its composition rather than in logical substance. What holds these compositions together is the relationality of words and their particular resonances. In a fashion resembling that of the Dada movement, Gómez de la Serna adopts a childlike attitude that causes him to rebel against the predominance of conceptual meaning. For him, informational language has reduced literature to reason and logicity, while literary works should serve as a vehicle that represents the encounter between men and things. The intent of literary discourse is to establish new interactions between the mind of the artist and outer reality.

The *greguería* takes on metaphor as its constitutive principle and experiments with rather distant analogies between objects to draw upon new meanings that are coextensive with a tendency toward witticism in the Baroque style. If Gracián found wit to be a form of sharp ingenuity, for Gómez de la Serna, the metaphor acts as an ekphrastic device that unfolds word-image relations. As de Torre argues in his essay “*Imagen y metáfora en la poesía de vanguardia*.”

La mayor parte de las metáforas son de aproximación o de “deformación por exceso” y poseen un relieve visual fotogénico. De ahí que también asuman, en ocasiones, una deformación antifotográfica, y en otras, un rasgo envolvente caricatural, muy en armonía con el humorismo elíptico y la risa fragmentada que atraviesa gran parte de la nueva poesía. (646)

Similar to the effects of Expressionist painting, the novelty of the modern metaphor lies in transferring the properties of one object to another inasmuch as it can be significantly transformed into a caricature. Stylization, deformation, and moreover, *disrealization* of reality are at stake in modern poetry, where words are rendered corporeal rather than abstract entities. As Francisco Ynduráin underscores in “Sobre el arte de Ramón,” the poetics of Gómez de la Serna centres on the vision of profundity, one that allows the

word to free itself from its logical-conceptual dependency. In turn, he argues for the concreteness of sensorial experience and the rejection of intellectual language (7: 219-221). To some extent, Ynduráin's argument is accurate, however, we cannot disregard the impact of Baroque artifice on Gómez de la Serna's style, in that it is not merely the result of sensuality, but also of self-consciousness and intelligence. Indeed:

El ingenio, en fin, es un método de conocimiento que permite penetrar la realidad, porque descubre relaciones entre elementos diversos de aquella, pero también faculta a sobrepasar lo real, dado que posibilita al entendimiento superar el nivel lógico-racional para explorar nuevas facetas que van más allá de la lógica. (Blanco 28)

The illustrations by which several *greguerías* are reinforced manifest the complexity between the bodily and intellectual aspects of language. At times, icons are attached to these brief pieces, which helps dispel the hidden meanings of the text. For instance, “El triángulo escaleno lo vemos con escalerilla propia para subir al vértice” is complemented by the graphic of a triangle depicted with diminutive stairs on one of its sides (Gómez, *Total* 99). Drawing on Cubist geometrism, the figure identifies with the architectural structure of stairways, which, when seen from their profile, adopt the shape of a triangle in space. This is especially evident if we look into the visual aid of the text. Rather than represented by a straight line, the horizontal segment of the composition appears to be lying on the grass. The visual element enacts the liminal space between subjective and objective experience, questioning the meaning of reality either as a product of the mind or the outer world, just as the Cubists did in their paintings.

Although most *greguerías* are not illustrated, Gómez de la Serna appears to challenge the reader to think visually and discover the enigmas posed by written and plastic languages. An illustration of this is:

El marinero a la mujer del Puerto:
—¿Quién eres, que te has prendido tanto de mí?
—Yo soy el Ancla. (*Total* 83)

Gómez de la Serna depicts a love scenario between a mariner and a woman of the Port, who turns out to be an anchor. This tool helps secure the boat so that it stays in a fixed position, and thus avoids sailing away; hence the pun on the past participle of *prendido* (grasped) and *prendado* (fallen in love). The phonetic and graphic resemblance of both verbs creates a scenario that romanticizes the relationship between the mariner and the anchor. This play with language connects Dada and Surrealist inventiveness with Gracián's witticism, bridging the gap between the avant-garde and Baroque tradition. The capitalization of the initial letter of the word for anchor, *Ancla*, humanizes the

instrument, rendering it valuable and marvellous. Going beyond the marketplace notions of use-value, the anchor adopts an ontological constituency that rethinks our attitude toward those commonplace objects assisting us in our everyday experience. To put it simply, no sooner do these instruments cease to serve the purpose for which they are designed—or rather, vanish from our ordinary life—than we start caring about them once they are humanized and personified.

“Carterista: caballero de la mano en el pecho... de otro” is a *greguería* that may act as an ekphrastic artifact of deformation by possibly referring to El Greco’s 16th-century painting, *El caballero de la mano en el pecho* (1580). As a visual representation, the artwork is transformed within the verbal domain of the *greguería* into the figure of a pickpocket of the early 20th-century. The aristocrats of the Early Modern Period, as well as the lower-middle classes in the Modern age, are drawn together in order to illuminate the contrasts between both epochs. By placing these characters in contact with one another, certain social values associated with El Greco’s painting and with the pickpocket are transposed in this diametrically opposed parallelism: whereas the former is devalued, the latter in turn is elevated to a higher social category. If in the Renaissance the ideal was to self-fashion oneself to the honour code, the outset of the twentieth century is dominated by the lack of values that govern human conduct.¹⁶ In this manner, thefts proliferate in order to palliate hunger or to satisfy vices.

As a connoisseur of 20th-century marketplace culture, Gómez de la Serna very often makes critical commentary on capitalist power structures in order to reflect on the negativity of commerciality. If Futurism celebrated the achievements of the urban metropolis and visual culture, Ramón Gómez de la Serna tends to criticize the superficiality and materiality of the modern world. His *greguería* “hay unos anuncios luminosos que son sanguijuelas de nuestra atención” accounts for the detrimental effects of promotional techniques as the driving force of economic exchanges, which results in a widely commodified culture (*Total* 88). Based on the criterion of efficiency, early 20th-century exacerbated commercialization encourages the viewer to consume advertised goods. Rather than out of necessity, capitalist exchanges that arouse the desirability for expenditure, trap the masses into a reciprocal buy-sell paradigm. The following *greguería* expresses this concern: “El signo del dólar no deja de ser atractivo, pero siempre sospechamos que es un signo al que se enrolla, o un diablo o una sierpe tentadora” (*Total* 907). Alluring as the dollar may be for the stock market, this currency is also expressive of multifarious inequalities, namely poverty, marginalization and injustice. It is precisely its \$-shape twisted design Gómez de la Serna compares to an evil

¹⁶ Of course, we are not attempting to portray the Early Modern period as an ideal Arcadian-like atmosphere where social codes were strictly adhered to and rules unflinchingly followed. To be sure, it was this world that produced the onset of picaresque literature, a form of prose depicting thievery as a way of life. Our aim here is to understand Gómez de la Serna’s perception of the 16th and 17th centuries, a time period that he seems to idealize. For more on the honor code and picaresque literature, see: José Antonio Maravall, *La Literatura Picaresca Desde La Historia Social*.

snake able to swindle us into unending purchases. As the paradigm of capital, the dollar extends to and affects all levels of society, unveiling contradictions within power structures. In the modern experience, mass culture amounts to a resource for experiencing pleasure and making a profit. Individuals are thereby deprived of agency over their acts, and in turn, their existence becomes particularly superficial and empty.

With his *greguerías*, Ramón Gómez de la Serna appeals to sight as the most effective sense to directly capture the passage of time and congeal it in a poetic image. Whether they be illustrated or non-illustrated, his *greguerías* are thought of as either visual representations of the mind or pictorially oriented pieces that reflect on early twentieth-century tendencies toward visuality. Yet, this detachment from our subjective interests can only be arrived at by relying on *humorismo* as a grave and playful attitude that aids us in accepting the world as it is, while adopting a critical position that challenges pre-established values.

Conclusion

Vicente Huidobro and Ramón Gómez de la Serna are among the first antecedents of the Spanish avant-garde that innovated poetic tradition. Huidobro's Creationism and Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías* are their most significant contributions toward renewing Spanish Peninsular literature. Both authors rely upon the creative potential of the sense of sight and visualization to exploit intellectual and imaginative possibilities. This process is illustrative of *Poemas árticos* and *Total de greguerías*, two works in which the visual culture of the avant-garde is adapted and reinterpreted. Huidobro's *creacionista* poetry and Gómez de la Serna's *greguerías* utilize the potentiality of image to appeal to our immediate experience with reality and reconsider our habits of reading and writing. This implies looking at the typographical arrangement of the page, reading the text aloud and even becoming engaged with it physically. The literary creations of these authors ultimately invite the reader to become an active participant by returning to sense perception in the quest for meaning.

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