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In the Heideggerian Tradition: Acontecimiento by Concha García

Abstract

Critics Sharon Keefe Ugalde and Tina Escaja have called the poetry of Concha García “enigmatic,” “unique,” and “avant-garde.” Studies of her work to date tend to attribute the fragmentation and discontinuity of her poetic discourse to her rejection of phallogocentric language. While one of her work’s chief concerns is indeed her speaker’s sense of a radical difference and alienation based on gender, her poetry at the same time directs her reader’s attention to more general ontological considerations. Rather than clearly recounting the events of the life of her poetic protagonist, she rejects the distillations and simplifications that linear narration presupposes in order to explore the textures of being in the world—the moments of daily existence and the way in which what matters to the individual subject is actually experienced. Among the quotations García uses to introduce segments of her 2008 book *Acontecimiento* are several that can be linked to notions of authenticity in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. This essay proposes to use *Acontecimiento* as a point of departure to examine the connections between García’s distinctive and at times enigmatic poetry and a particular view of time and place akin to Heidegger and his concept of Dasein. It anticipates that her incorporation of Heidegger, in its lucidity and eclecticism, will have postmodern characteristics that reflect the freshness of García’s poetic vision.

Keywords

Concha García, Acontecimiento, poetry, poetic discourse, ontology, ontological, gender, experience, existence, Heidegger, Being and Time, postmodern

In the Heideggerian Tradition:
Acontecimiento by Concha García

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Concha García, (La Rambla, Córdoba, 1956), published her first book of poetry in 1986 and since then has gradually gained increasing recognition as a poet. Included in Antonio Rodríguez Jiménez's 1997 anthology of *poetas no-clónicos* 'poets who were not clones,' her independence from predominant tendencies was confirmed by Rosa Belda, who termed her one of the "voces más originales" 'most original voices' writing in Spain today ("Fragmentación" 67).¹ García consolidated her reputation in 2007 by publishing a substantial retrospective collection of poetry that had appeared between 1987 and 2003. In 2008 she published a new volume, *Acontecimiento* 'Event,' which according to García herself, opened a new chapter in her poetic development (Elguero n. pag.). Still, García has not received all the attention she deserves, and for that reason, Jonathan Mayhew, with the express purpose of bringing "to light one of several contemporary Spanish poets deserving of wider notice," devoted a chapter of *The Twilight of the Avant-Garde* (146), to her poetry.

Although, as Mayhew points out, delayed recognition afflicts many contemporary poets, the opacity of much of García's poetry may have contributed, in her particular case, to the lack of prominence Mayhew cites. Certainly, García's originality challenges readers, leading critics to describe her poetry as enigmatic (Belda "Yo y mi cuerpo" 'I and My Body'17), cryptic (Mayhew 146), impenetrable (Escaja) and avant-garde (Ugalde *Conversaciones* 195). In discussing her work, critics have emphasized absurdity, fractured language, and the portrayal of an insipid or banal reality. Belda identifies as well 1) a distinctive voice that persists regardless of García's linguistic and thematic evolution; 2) a subject without a center; and 3) the use of "frases entrecortadas, oraciones simples, exceso de puntuación

y versos breves de encabalgamiento abrupto que se precipitan” ‘truncated phrases, simple sentences, excess of punctuation, and brief, precipitous lines with abrupt enjambment.’²² Belda also notes García’s use of different numbers and persons of the verb to embody the multiple identities and doubled voice of the poetic subject, as well as “un lenguaje quebrado para expresar la desintegración de su mundo” (“Fragmentación” 67-70) ‘a fractured language to express the disintegration of her world.’ The incomprehensibility of the subject’s world is reflected in the texts’ obscurity, posing in turn a problem for the reader, to whom comprehension is denied.

Various critics echo Belda’s insistence on absurdity as fundamental to the experience of García’s protagonist as well to that of her reader. Ángel Prieto de Paula asserts that in García’s poetry, disconnectedness robs the protagonist’s life (and the poems as well), of direction: “Todo se reduce al relato desabrido de unos hechos anodinos y sin embargo absurdos, cuya yuxtaposición indica la ausencia de inferencia lógica entre ellos” (70) ‘Everything is reduced to the insipid tale of some insignificant and yet absurd happenings, whose juxtaposition indicates the absence of logical inference among them.’ Sharon Keefe Ugalde, a leading exponent of the feminist approach to García, likewise notes the poet’s opacity. But instead of attributing García’s impenetrability to the absurdity of her decentered subject’s world, Ugalde ascribes the fragmentation and discontinuity of García’s poetic discourse to her rejection of phallogocentric language (“Poesía subversiva” 237). Mayhew praises García’s avoidance of the “overt sentimentality” and facile epiphanies of the “poetry of experience” movement but claims that in her poetry “banal reality remains what it is, offering little if any possibility for poetic redemption” (149).

Yet while one of the chief concerns of García’s work is her speaker’s sense of radical difference and alienation based partly on gender, her stylistic peculiarities may have roots not only in her awareness of the absurdities and contradictions in life and in her feminism but also in a philosophical orientation that—in its attempt to explore being in a non-reductive way—in many ways recalls Heideggerian thought. Several critics point, albeit not explicitly, towards this conclusion (as do many oblique epigraphical references within García’s poetry, which I will examine later in this essay). Belda, asserts that García

carries out an “indagación meticulosa y naturalista en el contorno cotidiano del sujeto en su deseo de encontrar un sentido y asirse a la vida” (“Fragmentación” 68) ‘meticulous and naturalistic inquiry into the daily surroundings of the subject in her desire to find a meaning and to take hold of life.’ Vásquez Montalbán affirms that García expresses not “la experiencia exteriorizada, extrañada” ‘experience that is externalized, placed outside’ but “la experiencia ensimismada” (7) ‘inward experience.’ Mayhew, in comparing García favorably with Luis García Montero, describes the Granadan poet as one “who places experience in the category of what is ‘already known,’” while García “explicitly rejects this sort of ‘pre-packaging’” to create a “more authentic poetic exploration of reality” (153-54). These critics signal García’s effort to get beyond the received and pre-packaged in order to achieve a more authentic poetic word. Thus, rather than recounting events in the life of her poetic protagonist in a transparent, ordered manner, García rejects the distillations and simplifications that linear narration presupposes in order to explore the textures of being in the world, recreating moments of daily existence that capture the way her subject actually experiences them. Paradoxically, García tends increasingly toward narrativity, as she herself declares (Benegas and Muñárriz 228), thus tantalizing her readers, who, intuiting a story behind the text, seek to understand her poetry on an anecdotal level. It is remarkable that despite a persistent obscurity, García is able to create a poetic voice of extraordinary immediacy, intimacy, and authenticity.

Given the philosophical underpinnings of her work, critics’ emphasis on absurdity and banality in her poetry does not do full justice to García’s poetic project. To be sure, her poetry combines opacity and non-linearity with grounding in the subject’s experience of small daily events, but her search for authentic expression infuses her poems with a quality that transcends the purely mundane. Although such critics as Belda, Mayhew, Ugalde, and Prieto de Paula offer accurate and valuable insights into García’s work, they stop short of providing a full understanding of how her poetry fits within a rich literary and philosophical tradition and in some cases they underestimate the seriousness of her poetic quest. A close examination of *Acontecimiento*, as well as of her previous works, reveals her engagement with a wide European philosophical and

literary tradition. Recognition of this engagement adds a significant dimension to our understanding of her poetry and reveals the extent to which García represents the expansion of Spanish literary horizons and integration into Europe that in previous generations was not always evident. Moreover, what blocks her readers' understanding of the anecdotal is in fact precisely what gives her poetry its great immediacy and, as I hope to show in the following discussion, its philosophical relevance.

The clues to philosophical leanings that transcend the mundane are found in the epigraphs that García has consistently used in her books of poetry. Belda correctly insists that the quotations that introduce sections of her books are not just friendly acknowledgments of influence or affinity but rather “guías que enriquecen la lectura” ‘guides that enrich the reading’ (*Yo y mi cuerpo* 7). Given the often perplexing nature of García’s poetry, these epigraphs, along with various other devices García employs to frame her poems, such as titles, and even, in the case of *Acontecimiento*, the cover illustration, offer welcome hints regarding the poetry itself. *Acontecimiento* is of particular interest in establishing a connection with a Heideggerian orientation because the book contains two epigraphs that directly or indirectly point to Heidegger. The volume opens with one of these quotations, in which Polish émigré writer Witold Gombrowicz refers obliquely and ludically to the concept of *Dasein* often associated with Heidegger and his monumental work *Being and Time*:

Es imposible asumir todas las exigencias del *Dasein* y al mismo tiempo tomar café con bollos durante la merienda. ... Ser una conciencia en pantalones que conversa por teléfono. Ser una responsabilidad que anda de compras por la calle. Cargar con el peso de la existencia significativa, darle sentido al mundo y dar el cambio de un billete de diez pesos (13)

It is impossible to assume all the demands of *Dasein* and at the same time drink coffee with rolls at teatime ... Be a consciousness in pants who talks on the telephone. Be a responsibility who goes about the streets shopping. Bear the weight of meaningful existence, make sense of the world and give change for a ten-peso bill.

George Gömöri has made connections between Heidegger and Gombrowicz regarding the issue of authenticity: “Gombrowicz shares with Heidegger a special concern for authenticity; also like Heidegger, his work is directed against those cultural schemata which falsify contemporary man’s life and make it inauthentic” (123). An epigraph to the second section of the book, moreover, comes from a work said to have influenced Heidegger in his elaboration of the concept of *Dasein*—the Chinese Zhuangzi: “Hay acontecimiento, pero también pérdida, así es / Zahowen tocando el laúd. / No hay acontecimiento ni pérdida, así es Zahowen / no tocando el laúd” (121) ‘There’s an event, but also a loss, that’s how / Zahowen is playing the lute. / There is neither an event nor a loss, / that’s how Zahowen is / not playing the lute.’³ In the light of these Heideggerian coincidences, the titular word of García’s volume *Acontecimiento* recalls the German term *Ereignis* ‘event,’ according to Gerner one of Heidegger’s fundamental concepts (176). The “absurdo cotidiano” ‘everyday absurdity’ that Prieto de Paula identifies in García’s poetry thus should be examined not just in terms of the subject’s disconnected, banal experiences and their expression but also as an exploration of being with philosophical undertones.

Acontecimiento is not the first of García’s books to hint at an affinity for a philosophical tradition focusing on being that includes Heidegger and others who inspired and responded to him. In García’s collected works, *Ya nada es rito y otros poemas: 1987-2003* ‘Now Nothing is a Ritual and Other Poems: 1987-2003,’ may be found, among the eclectic assortment of epigraphs from poets, novelists, and philosophers of various nationalities, a string of connections to the existential philosopher.⁴ Thus the Heideggerian aspects of her poems themselves (the salience of immediate, everyday surroundings; the search for authentic language; the paradox of time as both the now and duration; loss as an inherent part of experience; the absence of a unitary self) are underlined by frames that have links to the twentieth-century European philosophical tradition in which Heidegger played a supremely important role. García herself has emphasized the importance of these frames as points of departure for understanding (Elguero n.pag.).

Of the fifteen writers quoted by García in the epigraphs of *Ya nada es rito*, she cites only four of them twice. Among these is Paul

Celan, whose poetry, according to documentation in a 2006 book by James Lyon, was heavily influenced by his readings of the existential philosopher, to the point that one scholar, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, terms Celan's entire work "a dialogue with Heidegger's thought."⁵ Another author García quotes is Romanian-born philosopher E. M. Cioran. Although Cioran was said to have "despised" Heidegger (Regier 10), the epigraph from Cioran that introduces *Árboles que ya florecerán* 'Trees That Will Now Blossom' within *Ya nada es rito* engages with the German philosopher's ideas about the relationship between being and truth.

Also, García has co-translated two books of poetry by Ingeborg Bachmann, Celan's close friend and the author of a doctoral dissertation on Heidegger. Although Bachmann criticized the philosopher and sought to dethrone him, she recognized his stature and expressed admiration for his work (Lyon 2-3, 221). Thus, though the figures García quotes in her epigraphs may have been ambivalent toward or critical of Heidegger, the philosopher nevertheless loomed large as a point of reference in their thinking. In the light of other aspects of García's poetry that my discussion of *Acontecimiento* will examine, the inclusion of these epigraphs in her books is suggestive. Yet despite multiple references to figures who have influenced her, García has not, to my knowledge, explicitly included Heidegger among them. So in examining how Heidegger's formulation of the problem of being can illuminate her seemingly hermetic poetry, it is more appropriate to talk of a coincidence of affinities than of direct influence. Viewing all texts and readers as an interconnected web, *à la* Roland Barthes, makes it possible to consider García's poetic project as in some ways a dialogue with Heidegger and her poetry as an attempt to express herself authentically in the primordial language that Heidegger valued.

The book *Acontecimiento*, fundamentally ontological in nature, primarily conveys how discrete moments are experienced, even while alluding to temporal horizons in the past and future. Although the title seems to refer to a specific happening that constitutes the volume's central focus, this unitary episode defies easy identification, thus reflecting the enigmatic yet tantalizing narrativity mentioned previously. The volume has two parts. The first "Largo, en el extraño día" 'I Let Go, on the Strange Day' contains fifty-two titled poems.⁶

The second section, “Traslado” ‘The Move,’ consists of ten brief texts constituting, as the author suggests, one long poem (Castrejón). Many of the fifty-two titles of the enigmatic first section place the poetic subject in a particular physical context or allude to an identifiable action (going through customs, pulling back one’s hair, taking a shower, removing one’s shoes). Nevertheless, the lack of linear development noted by the poet herself (Elguero), as well as the fragmentation that has in general been attributed to her poetry, are apt to perplex the reader who expects to understand to what event, exactly, the title “acontecimiento” refers. Only through the clarification provided by “Traslado”—which according to the book’s flyleaf endows the book as a whole with a narrative quality—can the reader with any certainty identify the event as the ending of a love affair and the protagonist’s return to a solitary existence.

The opening two texts, joined under the umbrella title “Dos poemas sobre la pobreza” ‘Two Poems about Poverty,’ present obstacles to their comprehension that can partially be overcome only in the context of the volume as a whole. They seem to establish, as the roots of the subject’s impoverishment, both lack (poem 1) and loss (poem 2). The first text suggests a childhood yearning for wholeness, for an imagined central unity, represented by a fruit that is out of reach but which the child hopes to attain through some merciful accident of fate (“si hubiese / un poco de agua” [15] ‘if there were a little water’). The second text perhaps refers to a later moment in which the speaker, having metaphorically eaten of the fruit and thus satisfied the need experienced earlier, contemplates and desperately attempts to preserve what remains: “Coincidencia. Las mondas del fruto / y todo el ahínco que pone / para que no se dispersen / por el plato” (16) ‘Coincidence. The peelings of the fruit / and all the effort she puts / into their not being scattered / on the plate.’ These poems construct a desiring subject whose attempt at union is thwarted; she later learns that the pieces she attempts to join “no engarzaban” (117) ‘didn’t fit together,’ as she will make clear in the final poem of the first section. On a metapoetic level, the poems also reflect the poet’s struggle with the writing process and the readers’ efforts to overcome the texts’ opaqueness.

Though many of the poems in the first part of *Acontecimiento* are enigmatic, references to an amorous relationship recur.

“Inquietud en la bodega” (43) ‘Uneasiness in the Wine Shop’ opens with the statement “Tengo la impresión de que ya / No me amas” ‘I have the impression that you / don’t love me anymore,’ and “Asiento 13” ‘Seat Number 13’ chronicles the speaker’s ambivalence toward her traveling companion as their airplane is taking off. Toward the end of the first section, however, the entanglement begins to appear as moribund (21). In “Otro soplo de vida” (109) ‘Another Breath of Life,’ whose title suggests a dying affair still clinging to life, the erotic has become routine (“cuando el don se instala, elijo escogerte” ‘when the gift descends, I decide to choose you’). At this point solitude is depicted as positive (“tardes con bancos verdes sin nadie / como un hermoso castigo” ‘afternoons with empty green benches / as a beautiful punishment’). “Guardando en el bolso un libro de filosofía” (111) ‘Putting a Philosophy Book in Your Purse’ resignedly reflects on illusion and reality.

The last two poems of the first section begin to bring the poetic subject to closure regarding her failed affair. In the first, “Como un decálogo” (115) ‘Like a Decalogue,’ the speaker, who expresses both sadness and a resolute refusal to continue in the same stifling relationship, formulates a kind of Ten Commandments for changing her life. The second, “Un poema sobre la extrañeza” (117) ‘A Poem about Strangeness,’ is a retrospective meditation on her experiences to this point. Its title parallels that of the first poem, “Dos poemas sobre la pobreza,” and the final line repeats the section title: “Largo, en el extraño día.” Through these echoes, García creates the sense of a circle closed. In the lines “las mondas de mandarinas / en una mesa eran recuerdo / con color de retrato” ‘the tangerine peels / on a table were a reminder / the color of a person’s photograph,’ she re-creates the images of fruit that appeared in both texts of the double opening poem. She suggests that her early yearnings and the fulfillment that she once had feared losing are now only remains and memories. The enigmatic imagery suggests a life course that comprises desire for joy and plenitude, experience that disappoints, and the transformation of the ideal into a trace or memory. Other aspects of loss appear: ambivalence and regret (“remordimiento por el no” ‘remorse for the no’), failure to connect and a rationalization for that failure, and the visceral image of inexorable flushing or washing away (“Se vertía agua en un acantilado” [117] ‘Water was

pouring off a cliff’).

The ten texts of the brief second part of the book, “Traslado,” less fragmentary and also less enigmatic than Part 1, capture the speaker as she re-establishes herself outside of the failed relationship. As the third text reveals, she experiences moments of joy but continues to long for intimate companionship. Her liberation is decidedly bittersweet. Though she now controls a space that is all hers, what she can actually decide upon is ironically quite banal, and loneliness sometimes engulfs her:

*Ya no hay alacenas, tampoco es que haya
mucho lugar para dejar estos botes de conserva.
Habría sido mejor disponer del armario
para otros menesteres, pero debo poner la comida
en algún lugar. Qué lindo día. Si alguien me amara. (123)*

*They don't make pantries anymore, and there's not
much space for these jars of jam.
It would have been better to use the cupboard
for other necessities, but I've got to put the food
somewhere. What a beautiful day. If only someone loved me.*

A similar combination of disparate focal points and contradictory emotions characterizes the seventh text in this section. The poetic subject considers where to place her armchair, then realizes that she left her glassware at her ex-lover’s house, then muses about the impression she makes on others. After returning to the task at hand, she finally exclaims, “Qué rara alegría” (21) ‘What a strange joyfulness.’

A reading of *Acontecimiento*, like the poems themselves, is not linear but presupposes a back and forth between sections and motifs. After “Largo, en el extraño día,” “Traslado” suggests emergence from darkness to light, portraying a protagonist who feels relief. Nonetheless, García closes the volume on a somber note. Her final poem opens with a quote from Philip Larkin’s “I Have Started to Say,” whose speaker is left breathless by the passing of time and the shock of having arrived at a point when “All that’s left to happen / Is some deaths (my own included)” (185). In García’s poem, the bisemic imagery (dust, the end of the afternoon, nightfall) puts the

death of the love affair in the context of the poetic subject's own mortality. The final sentence, particularly enigmatic, might refer to that unforeseen moment of death after which any light to see by will clearly be superfluous.

*Un cuarto de siglo o treinta años atrás
sobre mi propia vida. Me corta la respiración.*7*

Hay que conversar mucho menos, bufff cuánto polvo.
Señalar las montañas en el mapa y en sus rugosos relieves
dejar el dedo un rato. Lo único que falta por ocurrir
es que concluya de una vez la tarde. Se verá cuando
no sea necesario descorrer la cortina. (130)

*A quarter of a century or thirty years back
about my own life. It makes me breathless.*

One must chat a lot less, whew all this dust.
Point to the mountains on the map and their furrowed contours
leave your finger there a while. All that's left to happen
is for the afternoon to end once and for all. We'll see it
when it's not necessary to open the curtain.

In the light of Larkin's poem, this final text of *Acontecimiento* seems to recommend not dwelling on the past but simply acknowledging the road travelled, living always with the certainty of one's mortality. Alluding to past events in the life of her poetic subject, and to her awareness of her existential vulnerability, García seems to say, with Antonio Machado, that "no hay caminos sino estelas en la mar" (158) 'there are no paths, just wakes in the sea.' The notion of an "acontecimiento" is embedded in the phrase "lo único que falta por ocurrir," which echoes Larkin's reference to the "ultimate" happening in a life, one's own death. Thus as in ending the book's first part, the poet loops back to a title, this time to that of the book as a whole, again creating a circle like the loops in Larkin's poem. Yet the moment of reflection portrayed in the poem is itself a small, more daily, "acontecimiento." García, in an interview about the volume, defined "acontecimientos" as events inseparable from the daily flow of existence that occur constantly and unexpectedly. Each moment has been for her "un pequeño acontecimiento ... en mi propia realidad..." (Elguero) 'a small happening ... in my own

reality.’

References back to childhood and forward to death give *Acontecimiento* a certain narrative thrust. In addition, the book alludes in various ways to travel, activating the conventional metaphor of life as a journey. Yet travel is often portrayed as either aimless wandering or displacement. Further, the “sentido del errabundeo” (Elguero n. pag.) ‘sensation of wandering’ that García herself attributes to the volume, combined with the poet’s conception of individual moments as discrete happenings, counterbalances any sense of progression and destination. Regarding displacement, the poet has indicated that one of the book’s themes is emigration, not only within Spain, like her own family’s move from Andalusia to Barcelona when she was five, but also internationally, as in the case of the migration of Spaniards to Argentina and Uruguay in the nineteenth century. Even in treating this broad historical theme, García constructs individual poems as embodiments of the poetic subject’s daily happenings, whether a mental snapshot collage of childhood moments that reflect the losses and discoveries of her family’s displacement (“Sin dolor” [17] ‘Without Pain’) or a dream of maritime immigration induced by an actual journey the poet made to Argentina and Uruguay (“H.H. se despide” [29] ‘H.H. Says Good-bye’) (Elguero). Thus each poem portrays an individual happening that combines the threads of a life journey with a sense of strangeness and displacement.

As Mayhew has noted, García eschews epiphany (147), and on both macro- and micro-levels captures moments of existence rather than a linear story. In her interview with Elguero, she explicitly rejects the idea that she is telling a story with a conventional narrative structure: “El sujeto poético no sale de la infancia para ir a una madurez de alguna forma metafórica sino que no encuentra un lugar y esa es la gran metáfora del libro *Acontecimiento*” “The poetic subject doesn’t emerge from childhood to enter some kind of metaphoric maturity but rather she doesn’t find a place for herself and that is the overarching metaphor of the book *Acontecimiento*.” *Acontecimiento* on the one hand embodies the constant irruption of unexpected events, often banal in character, but on the other paradoxically chronicles a non-event, thus undermining the positivistic conception of life as progress towards something. The

poet's reference to a metaphor of "not arriving" illuminates her poetry as a whole, which eschews the distillations and simplifications that linear narration presupposes in order to explore the textures of being in the world—the moments of daily life and the way in which the subject experiences what captures her attention. García calls sensation in the moment a "ráfaga de lucidez" (Rodríguez Jiménez 238) 'burst of lucidity' that poetry later permits us to recuperate.

The poetry of *Acontecimiento*—an attempt to apprehend in authentic, un clichéd language the affective experience of being in the present, or in other words the series of instants that embody past and future and encompass the subject's mortality as part of their horizon— suggest manifold connections to Heidegger's thought. Paramount is the connection between being and time. In his essay "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics" (1949), Heidegger explains key elements of *Being and Time* (1927), emphasizing the dual nature of time and its significance in regard to understanding Being: "[I]n being present there moves, unrecognized and concealed, present time and duration—in one word, Time" (216). He states that to comprehend the "truth of Being," it is necessary to "look out into Time as the horizon of any possible understanding of Being," recognizing and uncovering what had been concealed (217). Furthermore, according to Kevin Aho, Heidegger eschews the idea of the self as a fixed thing, as an entity that persists over time, referring "to human being not in terms of a being, a spirit, a subject, or material body but as Dasein, a unique self-interpreting, self-understanding way of being" (12). García's poetry seems to embody Heidegger's dual notion of time and his view of the self, both of which explain the fragmentariness that has been attributed to her work. She considers poetry a way of accessing the fragments of sensations that memory retains, and of thus recuperating the lucidity of the past moment. In poems that treat past events, she attempts to access the authentic past experience and its affective component. She does not depart from a fixed self that looks back and endows past experience with coherence but rather seeks to capture moments of being that embody both time as present and time as duration, in accord with Heidegger's principles of thrownness and projection.⁸ She also speaks regarding her poetry of "la magia de saberse varias en una" (Rodríguez Jiménez 238) 'the magic of

knowing oneself to be many in one.’ A response García gave to an interviewer who commented on her epigraph from Cioran by suggesting that her poetry consists of fragments that are sometimes contradictory recalls Heidegger’s concept of *das Man* ‘the One,’ a social context that, unless the self chooses authenticity, determines the experience of being. She stated:

Sí, pero ¿qué experiencia tiene un principio y un final? Una cosa es cómo una pueda leer el mundo a través de lo heredado, de la cultura, y otra es cómo te suceden las cosas y creo que ninguna experiencia o retazo de realidad tiene un principio y un final... yo suelo ir bastante en contra de lo racional del positivismo que una heredó pero que no guarda semejanza con la realidad, al menos con la mía. (Haro)

Yes, but what experience has a beginning and an end? One thing is how you can read the world through what has been inherited, through culture, and another is how things happen to you and I believe that no experience or snippet of reality has a beginning or an end... I tend to go quite a bit against the rationality of the positivism that one inherited but which does not resemble reality, at least my reality.

Her statement coincides with Heidegger’s valorization of authenticity over experience mediated by the voice of “Das Man.”

The last poem of *Acontecimiento*, discussed earlier, underlines the Heideggerian thrust of García’s poetry. The poem, beginning with the quotation from Philip Larkin, clearly embodies time as duration, encompassing history and future, and time as present moment. Being in the present encompasses what is given to us—our past and our culture—as well as our sense of future. The speaker refers to the “rugosos relieves” of the path she has taken but instead of rationally analyzing her route, she desires to touch the path directly. The exclamation “bufff cuánto polvo” (130) invokes her physical and emotional being in the present, though the bisemic image recalls as well the “dust” of the past. The last lines, especially in the context of Larkin’s poem, embody the Heideggerian notion that authentic Dasein always has human mortality as part of its horizon. Finally, the speaker’s exhortation to herself, “Hay que

conversar mucho menos,” aligns with Heidegger’s belief that “idle talk” is part of the distraction of “the One” that prevents Dasein from being authentic (Gorner 111).

Recent feminist re-readings of Heidegger suggest potential applicability of his thought to women’s writing. According to Patricia Huntington, feminist interest in Heidegger surged in the 1990s. Among the Heideggerian themes she cites that are relevant to García’s work are “the manifold ways that Dasein (human being) falls into unfreedom and inauthentic relations, what it means to be a thinker endowed with language, the poetic nature of human existence, and the urgent need in the era of technological rationality to restore a sense of balance, harmony, and quietude to existence” (1). (In many senses, this quotation encapsulates the narrative line of *Acontecimiento*.) Significant as well are the concepts of mood and attunement, which Huntington discusses as follows: “Mood—one of the basic structures of being embedded in a world—is commonly understood to denote the reality that Dasein (human being) does not first stand in a cognitive relation to the world of its environs but rather finds itself attuned to that environs in a particular, affective way. All understanding occurs on the basis of a mode of affective attunement that colors our perception and the overall way in which the world appears intelligible to us” (10). Also relevant to García’s poetry is Heidegger’s reference to anxiety and boredom as confirming that attunement is “an essential feature of human existence” (10). According to Huntington, “Attunement articulates not simply the fact that, because human beings live within a concrete situation, all knowledge claims prove context dependent. Rather, it denotes for Heidegger our relation to the cosmos as an intelligible whole” (11).

Perhaps the best way to understand how García’s poetry relates to the philosophical affinities outlined above is through her own statements about the frames she gives her works. The poet in fact has affirmed that in *Acontecimiento* the titles provide frames from which the poems “se caen” ‘fall away’ in a process García terms “desenmarcar” ‘to unframe’ (Castrejón). The title of the text “Guardando en el bolso un libro de filosofía” (111) typifies her approach to the inspiration she takes in philosophical ideas. The title portrays the poetic subject as a reader of philosophy, yet as she confronts the moment, she puts aside philosophical systems. The

text of the poem indeed has nothing explicit to do with books but instead captures a seemingly ordinary moment of being and time in which the mystery of human perception examines the paradoxical relationship between change and continuity. As with much of her poetry, here García explores Dasein, which Huntington terms “a finite transcendence” (11). García’s poetry begins with what seems superficial and mundane but, in consonance with “libro[s] de filosofía,” leads us to the heart of what it means to be human.

Notes

1 See up-to-date information on García, including articles about and by the poet, reviews, and current publications, at <http://sobreconchagarcia.blogspot.com>.

2 All translations are my own.

3 For basic information about Zhuangzi, see Harold Roth’s article “Zhuangzi” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/>. Anecdotal evidence provided by a prominent Japanese philosopher, Tomonobu Imamichi, suggests that by 1919, Heidegger had been given a 1908 German translation of Okakura Kakusō’s *The Book of Tea*, which describes a concept attributed to Zhuangzi, that of *chushi*, translated in the German text, according to Imamichi, as “In-der-Welt-Sein.” Imamichi believes Heidegger in his 1927 work *Being and Time* was inspired by this concept. See Imamichi 122-24.

4 Figures, in order, are Paul Celan, Miguel Espinosa, T.S. Eliot, Vlademir Holan, Wallace Stevens, Fernando Pessoa, Heraclitus, Espinosa, Bernardo Soares (heteronym of Fernando Pessoa), Peter Handke, Uffe Harder, Clarice Lispector, Adrienne Rich, Lispector, E.M. Cioran, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Olga Orozco.

5 Lyon analyzed the poet’s library to show how Celan engaged with Heidegger’s thought, though he considers Lacoue-Labarthe’s statement an oversimplification (7). Lyon shows that even Celan’s objections to Heidegger’s association with Hitler’s project did not prevent the two men from forging an important, lasting friendship.

6 The number of poems in “Largo” is ambiguous, however. In a ludic touch, the title of the first poem, “Dos poemas sobre la pobreza” is self-contradictory. The translation of the title is also problematic, as “largo” could possibly refer to the slow tempo it denotes in music.

7 García uses the asterisk to refer her reader to a footnote identifying the quotation. The full text of Larkin's poem is as follows: "I have started to say / 'A quarter of a century' / Or 'thirty years back' / About my own life. // It makes me breathless / It's like falling and recovering / In huge gesturing loops / Through an empty sky. // All that's left to happen / Is some deaths (my own included). / Their order, and their manner, / Remain to be learnt" (185).

8 According to Korab-Karpowicz, "Heidegger's fundamental analysis of Dasein from *Being and Time* points to temporality as the primordial meaning of Dasein's being... Its temporal character is derived from the tripartite ontological structure: *existence*, *thrownness*, and *fallenness* by which Dasein's being is described. Existence means that Dasein is potentiality-for-being (*Seinkönnen*); it projects its being upon various possibilities. Existence represents thus the phenomenon of the future. Then, as thrownness, Dasein always finds itself already in a certain spiritual and material, historically conditioned environment; in short, in the world, in which the space of possibilities is always somehow limited. This represents the phenomenon of the past as having-been. Finally, as fallenness, Dasein exists in the midst of beings which are both Dasein and not Dasein. The encounter with those beings, "being-alongside" or "being-with" them, is made possible for Dasein by the presence of those beings within-the-world. This represents the primordial phenomenon of the present. Accordingly, Dasein is not temporal for the mere reason that it exists 'in time,' but because its very being is rooted in temporality: the original unity of the future, the past and the present."

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