

Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 36
Issue 2 *Defining Differences: 20th and 21st
Century Spanish Poetry*

Article 8

6-1-2012

Reading Sara Pujol Russell's Poetry of Contemplation and Connection

Anita M. Hart
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



Part of the [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Spanish Literature Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Hart, Anita M. (2012) "Reading Sara Pujol Russell's Poetry of Contemplation and Connection," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 36: Iss. 2, Article 8. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1785>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Reading Sara Pujol Russell's Poetry of Contemplation and Connection

Abstract

Sara Pujol Russell's poetry captures a process of expanding consciousness and personal renewal. Through contemplation and attention to nature, the poet-speaker in her works generates a sense of connection that moves her beyond daily concerns. Pujol's poetry is both metaphysical and also different in that it resists easy classification and is not representative of mainstream trends. This essay approaches the distinctiveness of Pujol's work by studying selected poems from her third book of poetry in Spanish, *Para decir sí a la carencia, sí a la naranja, al azafrán en el pan* (2004) 'To Say Yes to Lack, Yes to the Orange, to the Saffron in the Bread.' Incorporating philosopher María Zambrano's thoughts on contemplation, it shows Pujol's poet-speaker establishing a connection with nature and spirit, experiencing a heightened consciousness, and searching for expression. The poetic language is characterized by vision, intimacy, enigma, and contradiction. In its subjective, intuitive way, Pujol's work reveals the poet-speaker's winding path of discovery and challenges the reader to look closely inside and outside in engaging life's mysteries.

Keywords

Sara Pujol Russell, poetry, consciousness, nature, contemplation, spirit, mystery, mysterious, enigma

Reading Sara Pujol Russell's
Poetry of Contemplation and Connection

Anita M. Hart
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Sara Pujol Russell's poetry captures a process of expanding consciousness and personal renewal. Through contemplation and attention to nature, the poet-speaker in her works generates a sense of connection that moves her beyond daily concerns. Candelas Gala shows that Pujol, continuing a tradition of meditative poetry in Spanish that combines the senses and the intellect in the intensity of the creative act, perceives reality as a proliferation of signs that both hide and reveal a higher truth (148, 161). Noël Valis explains that Pujol's work "is highly conceptualized, metaphysical poetry that challenges us to unwrap her imagery word for word and thus to enter intimately into her special poetic universe" (9). The metaphysical dimension of Pujol's poetry blends with several of the characteristics of the poetry of "difference" that Jonathan Mayhew discusses as one of the three main currents in recent Spanish poetry (*Twilight* 37).¹ Acknowledging that the divisions between these groups ("essentialist" or "metaphysical" poetry, poetry of "experience," and an innovative poetry of "difference") are not absolute, Mayhew claims that most women poets today belong to the current of "difference" in that they are generally not represented in the dominant anthologies of poetry (37, 38 Mayhew emphasis). Pujol's work is not typical of mainstream trends. The fact that Pujol is a woman who published first in Catalan and then in Spanish indicates a double minority position in the world of Spanish poetry and requires further study.

Valis, pointing out that Pujol's poetry "does not fall easily into any school of writing," claims that "[T]he closest she comes to is Julia Uceda's poetry, which is also metaphysical and centered on the passion for, and of, being, but neither is Pujol a disciple of Uceda nor is Uceda representative of a particular literary movement" (15).

For Valis, Pujol's work reflects the "dream of poetry to be life" and aims to alter the distinction between language and being (11, 15, 16). Although Pujol's frequently enigmatic poetry is unlike the accessible poetry of "experience," it is indeed relevant to everyday life in that it reveals the experiences of a human being, the poet-speaker who pursues a winding path of discovery in engaging life's mysteries.

After producing four books of poetry in Catalan, Pujol published three collections of poetry in Spanish: *El fuego tiende su aire* (1999) 'Fire Holds Out its Air' or, as Valis translates, 'Fire Floats its Air,' *Intacto asombro en la luz del silencio* (2001) 'Intact Astonishment in the Light of Silence,' and *Para decir sí a la carencia, sí a la naranja, al azafrán en el pan* (2004) 'To Say Yes to Lack, Yes to the Orange, to the Saffron in the Bread.'² In this essay I approach the distinctiveness of Pujol's work by studying selected poems from her third book of poetry in Spanish that show the poet-speaker establishing a connection with nature, experiencing a heightened consciousness, and searching for expression in poetic language that creates vision, intimacy, and enigma (Valis, Peñas-Bermejo, Gala).

In order to read poetry by Pujol, who was born in Barcelona and is a university professor and the editor of the journal *Salina*, it is meaningful to be aware of the diverse philosophical and literary directions that inform her writing. The epigraphs that precede the two parts of the book *Para decir sí a la carencia, sí a la naranja, al azafrán en el pan* and the quotations that follow the poetry at the end of the book provide insights into Pujol's creative process and her poetic voice. The first book of this collection opens with a quotation from Novalis's *Los discípulos en Sais* (1988) *The Novices in Sais*, (2005) that evokes the German poet's Romantic belief in a dynamic relationship between nature and humankind, and also his conviction that multiple ways of thinking and attention to all sensations lead to a play of thoughts.³ This focus on nature and freedom of thought and expression relates well to Pujol's engagement with the natural world through the senses and to the intuitive, flowing quality of her work. The epigraph that precedes the second book of *Para decir sí* comes from the *Upanishads*, a collection of Indian spiritual wisdom that accentuates introspection and enlightenment. These two references join with the quotations that conclude Pujol's book to frame her

introspective poetry and the awakening that unfolds through her poetic language.

The collection *Para decir sí* ends with two perspectives, one from third-century neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus (and another from Spanish philosopher María Zambrano). Plotinus writes of a link between the individual and a transcendent consciousness that can be hidden by daily preoccupations, claiming that “the origin of things is a Contemplation” (*The Enneads* 74, 276). Pujol’s poetry makes a similar connection, coming to a contemplative experience of an essential oneness, but her work at the same time verbalizes a human dimension of uncertainty and disconnection.

In the quotation from Zambrano, known for her dedication to contemplation and intuitive knowing, “la razón poética” ‘poetic reason’ or “el conocimiento poético” ‘poetic knowledge’ (*Obras reunidas* 295 ‘Collected Works’), the philosopher maintains that the human being is contemplative, but is at risk for becoming something other than human by forgetting this quality in favor of action. For Zambrano, the person who trusts only in action “entrega la llama del día y su hermosura. Y así se vuelve espectro” (*De la Aurora* 66-67, qtd. in *Para decir sí* 103) ‘gives up the flame of the day and its beauty. And thus one becomes a specter.’ Without contemplation, the person becomes a ghost or shadowy trace of a human being. Gala studies the poet’s connection with Zambrano in Pujol’s first two collections in Spanish (149-50, 153-54, 157, 161). I examine the presence of Zambrano’s thought in the poet’s third book and link the philosopher’s ideas to the topics of contemplation, nature and poetic expression.

Metaphysical in vision, Pujol’s poetry frees language to flow in a circuitous, intuitive process of awakening to deeper being. In many poems, perhaps more frequently in the first two books than in the third, the lines are long, with frequent enjambment, offering images streaming or spiraling in a play of thoughts. Occasionally a brief poem shifts the pace and focus. Pujol’s language both reveals and confuses. Valis comments on what she calls the “universal character” of Pujol’s poetry: “the permeability of things, the sense that everything seems to slip into everything else” (12). Frequent contradictions and interrogatives ask the reader to participate in the poet-speaker’s inquiries. In this collection the poet-speaker

turns both outward to nature and inward for self-knowledge and awakening; the poetry swings back and forth between the light and the darkness of this experience.

An earlier poem that reflects Pujol’s orientation toward the contemplation and the intuitive knowledge that Zambrano advocates is the initial poem of Pujol’s first book, *El fuego tiende su aire*. Titled “Contemplación primera” (19) ‘First Contemplation,’ it captures her separation from day-to-day concerns and her merging with a larger reality. With echoes of works by Jorge Guillén, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, and San Juan de la Cruz, the poem celebrates a moment of plenitude:

Amanece febrero. Mediodía. El tiempo no se sucede.
Qué belleza el agua y la tregua que así se contemplan y callan.... (19)

February dawns. Midday. Time does not pass.
What beauty the water and the respite that thus contemplate and still each other. ...

Contemplating the sea, the poet-speaker delights in connection: “y contemplo con emoción que el mar me mira. ¡Felicidad!” (*El fuego* 19) ‘and I contemplate with emotion that the sea is looking at me. Joy!’ Her gaze extends to the palm trees, the saffron-colored sand, and the olive tree, leading to these concluding lines:

¡Armonía buscada siempre fuera cuando estabas tan cerca!
[.....]
Mediodía. El tiempo no se sucede. Salgo de mí y voy a él
y a él me debo. Por fin, la unión deseada me ha sido concedida.
(*El fuego* 19)

Harmony always sought outside when you were so near!
[.....]
Midday. Time does not pass. I depart from myself and go to it
and to it I owe myself. Finally, the union desired has been granted to me.⁴

In a similar vein, renewal through contemplation is the process explored in Pujol’s *Para decir sí*, though it is not a path of ease

and light. Interaction with nature is part of the meditative way of opening to spirit and restoring peace. The poet-speaker looks to nature to counter a feeling of loss of direction and distance from her self. In "Deudas" 'Debts' Pujol explains that when she began writing the third book of poetry, her second book had just been published. She recognized that she was exhausted, but the need to write was still strong. Pujol took a long trip to China, which she says freed her from thought to experience something different: a peaceful search without words, based on contemplation and silence. As the poet explains, "Sólo sensaciones. Descansé" (108) 'Just sensations. I rested.' The poet-speaker in Pujol's work undergoes a similar shift to another way of being and perceiving, at times experiencing the self as an entity with permeable edges, a part of all life.

The three-line dedication at the beginning of *Para decir sí*, "A la luz que nace de la carencia, / al amor que me nace cada día, / al bosque que me enseña el camino" (7) 'To the light that is born of lack, / to the love that is born to me each day, / to the forest that shows me the way,' suggests that a sense of lack leads to a desire for change and that the forest serves as a guide and inspiration in a search for whatever the poet-speaker understands as an authentic, meaningful life. The initial poem of this collection, "Génesis primero" 'First Genesis' presents the poet-speaker, the yo 'I,' as existing in contradictory circumstances: "*estoy entre dos hambres y dos fuentes y las dos me alimentan / y sólo una me alumbrá...*" (14). 'I am between two desires and two fountains and the two feed me / and only one illuminates me...' The title "Genesis" and the emphasis on the verb "nace" 'is born' in the dedication bring up the creation and beginning of life, suggesting God's creation of the world from nothing. (13, 7). Being pulled in two directions reflects an existential concern about purpose and commitment. Pujol's poet-speaker voices her frustrations, acknowledges one path as offering enlightenment, and undertakes a search for meaning and expression.

This essay examines the poet-speaker's connection to and engagement with nature in *Para decir sí* by focusing on images of the forest, trees, and flowers. This is a partial list. Certainly there are more manifestations of nature in Pujol's poetry, such as the sea. The poems in which these images appear reflect the poet-speaker's desire

for intuitive understanding, for recovery of something essential and enduring about herself, and for a flow of poetic language. At times the path leads to transcendence, with the poet-speaker's sense of rising above daily concerns to experience a greater consciousness (Ciplijauskaitė 155, Peñas-Bermejo 102-03, Gala 161).

In the poet-speaker's opening to new understanding of her life, she addresses the forest in the poem "Si esta luz" 'If This Light' from "Libro I" 'Book I' of the poetry, calling on the forest clearings for support and guidance when uncertainty and fear of the unknown manifest in a mystical dark night:

—bosques, oh claros de los bosques y cigüeñas, despertaos,
permaneced insomnes para mi miedo, para mí
elevaos sobre mí, elevadme, y dejadme contemplar
la historia de lo sereno en el todo de la noche oscura [...]. (37)

—forests, oh forest clearings and storks, wake up,
remain alert for my fear, for me
rise up over me, elevate me, and let me contemplate
the history of the serene in the whole of the dark night [...].

In these lines, an intertextual echo of Zambrano's work *Claros del bosque* 'Forest Clearings' suggests a desire for knowledge that the human being encounters, much as one finds an opening to light in forest clearings. Zambrano, challenging Western ways of knowing, proposed a different way of understanding with her concept of "el conocimiento poético," an intuitive knowing that reality offers the human being when "la realidad le sale al encuentro y su verdad no será nunca verdad conquistada ... sino revelación graciosa y gratuita: razón poética" (*Obras reunidas* 295) 'reality steps out to meet one and its truth will never be conquered truth ... but rather a lovely and free revelation: poetic reason or knowledge.' Zambrano writes in *Claros del bosque* of this inner knowing (58). For the philosopher, a sense of connection, which includes a relationship with nature, is central: "Por el conocimiento poético el hombre no se separa jamás del universo ..., participa en todo, es miembro del universo, de la naturaleza y de lo humano y aun de lo que hay entre lo humano y más allá de él" (55) 'Through poetic knowledge the human being never separates from the universe ..., participates in everything, is

a member of the universe, of nature, and of humankind and even of what exists between humankind and beyond it.' The poet-speaker in Pujol's poem "Si esta luz" turns to nature and seeks support from the forest clearings, which represent intuitive knowledge and openings to a deeper, broader consciousness resulting not from rational thought and linear reasoning, but from a combination of sensing, silence, contemplation, and feeling. The image of "cigüeñas" 'storks' suggests that these birds, as transitional beings that live on the earth and in the sky, can offer assistance and spiritual guidance to the searcher.

Pujol's poet-speaker may see the forest as a guide toward intuitive understanding, but the path through the forest is one of mystery, uncertainty and challenge. In the second book of Pujol's *Para decir sí* her appeal to those forest clearings in: "*Oh, claros de los bosques, ¿dónde estás para mis manos?*" (59) '*Oh, forest clearings, where are you for my hands?*' seems to be calling for the inspiration, creativity, and poetic knowledge with which Zambrano would have been familiar. The interrogative "*dónde*" 'where' suggests a lack of direction and a desire for help in her process.

Just as Pujol is aware of Zambrano's focus on "la razón poética," she is conscious of Zambrano's search for the word. In *Claros del bosque*, Zambrano anticipates "La palabra diáfana, virginal, sin pecado de intelecto, ni de voluntad, ni de memoria" (67) 'The crystal clear, virginal word, without the sin of the intellect or of will or of memory.' Pujol's poet-speaker, engaged in her own search for being and language, experiences moments of illumination, depths of despair, and frequent contradictions. She laments a distancing from poetic expression in the poem "Cuánto tiempo, verso mío" (25) 'How Much Time, My Verse.' In "Oh, verso mío" 'Oh, My Verse' she appeals to poetry for assistance in finding the essence of life: "encuéntrame la vida, que no la encuentro sola en mi vida, / no me cuentes cómo es el olivo, sino el fuego en la rama / del olivo, encuéntrame la vida sin dejarme en la sombra" (28) 'find life for me, for I don't find it alone in my life, / don't tell me how the olive tree is, but rather the fire in the branch of the olive tree, / find life for me without leaving me in the shadow.' Moving back and forth in her relationship to poetry, the poet-speaker chooses words to show the contradictory nature of her approach. Again expressing regret

for her abandonment of poetry, she confesses, “Oh, verso mío, por esta cárcel te dejé en el viento” (30) ‘Oh, my verse, for this prison I left you in the wind;’ with the word “cárcel” reflecting a limited existence, entrapment, or a distancing from being.

As the book *Para decir sí* progresses, the poetic language twists back and forth from peaceful, harmonious moments to distraction and limitation, as in the piece titled “¿Qué la eternidad? Sólo conozco la carencia” (68) ‘What Eternity? I Know Only Lack,’ beginning with a challenging interrogative and echoing the word “carencia” in the title of the book. With a focus on lack, scarcity, or nothingness, Pujol’s poem suggests the path of the mystic, such as San Juan de la Cruz ‘Saint John of the Cross,’ in a search for union with the divine; but Pujol’s poet-speaker shows the voice of question and protest of someone who is trapped in this process. With a paradoxical twist on the figure of the mystic who suspends the senses in the dark night of the soul, Pujol’s poet-speaker is totally engaged with her senses. Only later does she accept that the feeling of lack can lead to something more meaningful.

Temporarily distancing again from word and poetry, the poet-speaker submerges herself into what Zambrano might call “la nada” ‘nothingness’ with its potential for creativity (*El hombre y lo divino* 174-88 ‘The Human and the Divine’). In this emptiness, the forest provides a refuge from suffering, as suggested in a line from the poem “¿Es ésta la luz que busco entre mis sombras?” ‘Is This the Light that I Seek among My Shadows?’: “Dolor, a veces me escondo en el bosque” (69) ‘Pain, Sometimes I Hide Myself in the Forest.’ The poet-speaker turns again to the support of the forest, an element of nature that offers both a promise of life and an uncertain process of finding one’s way. The desire for solitude is associated with the forest in the following lines: “Pido la quietud del bosque en sus nieves.... / la quietud del viento en lo sagrado, quietud en lo que sana / el alma....” ‘I ask for the stillness of the forest in its snow... / the silence of the wind in the sacred, silence in what heals / the soul...’ from “La mañana me recoge y me sostiene” (74) ‘Morning Takes Me in and Sustains Me.’ The poem itself shifts into silence as the forest permits access to a greater consciousness, supporting her spiritual renewal. An emergence into light, meaning, and authentic expression ultimately occurs.

Readers can see Pujol as poet and speaker involved in a dark night of the soul and in the process of recovering through a focus on the natural world, a connection to spirit, and a commitment to expression through poetry. Pujol's style and her perspective are contemplative, personal, refreshingly revealing, paradoxical at times, and always attracted to light, love, and the earth. These features of her poetry invite the reader to participate in her interaction with nature and with spirit.

Shifting from frustration to a contemplative mode of being, Pujol's poet-speaker seeks silence in the poem "Clamor que no se alcanza" 'Clamor That is Not Reached,' where she refers to the peacefulness of the forest and her perception of being one with nature. The poem is almost hypnotic in its flow toward equanimity:

No pensar. Ando, ando y la ventisca me recuerda que tengo
fuerzas para no pensar, no dormir, o dormir al andar
por el bodegón de grullas que es lo incalculable del alma.
Pido paz y sosiego para el alma ante las aguas. Pido
la quietud del niño o del bosque como armonía del ser,
[.]

Mi clamor de todo. Oigo coros. Y el silencio me descansa.
¿No te basta, alma mía, saber que lo efímero es lo eterno
y que tú participas de las hojas del álamo,
que el sonido del agua te hace alma y te hace piedra en las aguas,
que el agua en la fuente es coro y que este silencio te descansa?
[.]

No, no duermo. Y me siento en paz, con lo incalculable del alma.
(75)

Not to think. I walk, I walk and the snowstorm reminds me that I
have
strengths for not thinking, not sleeping, or sleeping while walking
through the still life of cranes that is the mystery of the soul.
I ask for peace and stillness for the soul before the waters. I ask for
the quietness of the child or of the forest as harmony of being,
[.]

My clamor of everything. I hear choirs. And the silence gives me rest.
 Isn't it enough, my soul, to know that the ephemeral is the eternal
 and that you participate in the leaves of the poplar,
 that the sound of the water makes you soul and makes you stone in
 the waters,
 that the water of the spring is a choir and that this silence rests you?
 [.]
 No, I'm not sleeping. And I feel at peace, with the mystery of the soul.

This section of Pujol's poem recalls Zambrano's focus on contemplation and poetic knowledge. In "Clamor que no se alcanza," the poet-speaker regains peace through a combination of sensing, silence, and connection with nature. The phrase "la quietud del niño o del bosque" suggests that she wants to be like a very young child and like the forest, unburdened by thought or reasoning. The references to walking and to the sound of water help to generate the flowing rhythm of the poem, which invites the reader to experience a similar transition to meditation and tranquility. Because birds can represent spiritual processes, the image of her sleepwalking though a still life of cranes brings up the issue of the mysterious process of spiritual development. Cranes are beings of the natural world whose instinctual behavior and cyclical patterns reflect a flow of life. Similarly, water in this poem suggests a movement of energy that carries the poet-speaker to a meditative silence. In an interesting contradiction, the clamor that appears in the title and in the poem does not ultimately affect the poet-speaker in a negative way. She is called back to the earth, as seen in the words "bosque," "agua," and "álamo," even becoming one with the leaves of the poplar as she feels a sense of peace.

Capturing her contemplative approach and dedication to nature, Pujol's poem "Celebración de la luz" 'Celebration of the Light' features her connection with the earth and a sense of merging with a tree, or the essence of a tree:

He salido a andar. Miro los campos. Hace tiempo que sólo
 hago eso....
 [.]
 soy árbol, no árbol, sino su presencia que miro indecible.... (91)

I've gone out to walk. I look at the fields. I've been doing only that
for some time...

[.....
.....]

I am tree, not tree, but rather its presence I observe unspeakable. ...

The poet-speaker, seeking meaning and spirit, finds an essential presence in the tree. Trees can be seen as links between earth and sky, between the human and the divine. When the poet-speaker identifies with trees, when she becomes a tree, or rather, its presence, she senses that she too has the characteristics of these mediators between human existence and a greater consciousness, and that she is part of a whole. The poem works to show trees and nature as manifestations of spirit that invite the individual to know a connection with something larger than the self. Stephen Summerhill's reading of Zambrano suggests another perspective on the role of nature in the poet's work. For Summerhill, nature in Zambrano serves not just as symbol of the transcendent, "but above all as desire for beginnings" (196-97). Pujol's poet-speaker will find in nature and spirit the promise of beginnings.

The poet-speaker's attention to another component of nature is highlighted in the poem "El recuerdo vuelve al jardín" 'Memory Returns to the Garden,' dedicated to poet Julia Uceda, the recipient of the National Poetry Prize in 2003 and a colleague who collaborates with Pujol on a literary series. Pujol edited a collection of Uceda's poetry, *En el viento, hacia el mar, 1959-2002* (2002) 'In the Wind, Toward the Sea, 1959-2002.' Pujol's poem features images and thematic links—involving light, nature, and memory as creative process—that connect Pujol with Uceda, who is part of a tradition of introspective and contemplative poetry that Pujol knows well. The poet-speaker discovers and in a sense re-creates the world of her childhood, using her senses of sight, smell, and hearing to experience nature and understand her self. In this poem the synesthetic imagery, involving the gaze at a fig tree, the crowing of the cock, and the scent and sight of flowers, blends sensations to generate the impression of her garden. Here flowers abound and a fig tree stands out.

Esta mañana ... entre el respirar y la contemplación pura

de la higuera, de la higuera de sol y la higuera del hambre,
la higuera de infancia de mi madre, la del juego y la lluvia
[.....]
Oigo cantar el gallo y sé que no existe, ¿acaso existe
todavía? Di, madre, ¿hubo azucenas en la luz de mi alma
entonces?, ¿hay azucenas en la noche de mi alma ahora?
Sosiego de lo sido. Desasosiego de lo ya sido.
¿Acaso no soy todavía rama de tulipán, dalia
roja y limón atravesado de violetas, y el tomate
[.....]
... y busco la fuente, madre, y busco la luz de siempre.
El jardín de entonces me sosiega y me turba como el canto
al niño, y la higuera, tu higuera, madre, me rompe hoy en cruces. (77-
78)

This morning ... between the breath and the pure contemplation
of the fig tree, of the fig tree of the sun and the fig tree of hunger,
the fig tree of my mother's infancy, the one of the game and of the
rain
[.....]
I hear the rooster crow and I know he doesn't exist, does he perhaps
still exist? Tell me, Mother, were there lilies in the light of my soul
then? Are there lilies in the night of my soul now?
Peace of past being. Uneasiness of the already past.
Am I not still the stem of a tulip, red
dahlia and lemon traversed by violets, and the tomato
[.....]
... and I search for the fountain, Mother, and I search for the
unchanging light.
The garden of that time calms me and disturbs me as the song
to the child, and the fig tree, your fig tree, Mother, tears me apart.

The poet-speaker engages in dialogue with her mother, who seems both absent and present, in a process of memory, going back to nature in a garden of her childhood. The interrogatives highlight concerns about her identity, that is, whether she still has something essential about herself, expressed as “azucenas” ‘lilies’ in the soul. She questions, with some indication of hope and confidence, whether

she and nature are one, full of vitality and beauty, as indicated by the images of the tulip stem, the red dahlia, the lemon, and the violets. Uceda has pointed out that in Pujol's poetry, landscape and experience combine so that nature is the poet, and that her writing resembles Sufi poetry in the sense that nature is a reality interchangeable with "el yo poético" (10). This poem shows the poet-speaker as identifying self with nature, or at least hoping to recover that unity. Associating her self with the flowers and fruit remembered from her youth, the poet-speaker seeks to confirm that she is still the person she was. Oppositions in the words *sosiego* and *desasosiego* and in *luz* and *noche* emphasize concerns and fears that life experiences have covered over the playful, creative child. Past and present blend as she connects through her senses, feeling two contradictory but complementary reactions—both calm and disturbance—in the experience of memory. In the final lines, the memory of the mother's fig tree produces a dramatic effect on the poet-speaker. Nature here generates a feeling of both closeness and loss. The visit to the garden, which the reader witnesses, evokes an emotional response and puts the poet-speaker in touch with something deep in soul or spirit, linking the unconscious and the conscious. Nature also points to an identity that is part of an existence larger than the individual. The symbolism of the garden is different from that of the forest, according to Cirlot, who defines the garden as "a symbol of consciousness as opposed to the forest, which is the unconscious" (115). The garden is more or less planned and tended with awareness, in contrast to the forest, which grows with less human intervention in most cases. For Pujol's poet-speaker, delving into the unconscious linked to "el bosque" leads to a new level of consciousness in "el jardín."

In an evolving process of renewal, Pujol's poet-speaker ventures to express the essence of her being in the brief poem "A veces, la alegría" 'Sometimes, Joy,' where nature again is associated with the understanding of the self: "A veces digo soy. Otras, quiero ser. Otras, soy un árbol. / Otras, soy nada que se recoge en esfuerzos de alegría. / A veces siento soy... / A veces la alegría" (96) 'Sometimes I say I am. Other times, I want to be. Others, I am a tree. / Others, I am nothing that is picked up in efforts at joy. / Sometimes I feel I am. / Sometimes, joy.' The phrase "digo soy" offers a certainty that is

immediately undermined by the anticipatory, but less sure “quiero ser.” Similarly, the assertion “soy un árbol,” suggesting centeredness and strength, is countered by “soy nada.” The repetition of “A veces” and “otras” keeps the self-evaluation unstable and in progress. Contradiction remains, co-existing with occasional joy and fullness of being.

As the book unfolds, the experience of darkness, the acceptance of lack (“la carencia”), and a return to nature lead to a sense of connection and an opening to language that attempts to capture the uncertain process of being and writing. The final poem, “Desde la oscuridad” ‘From Darkness,’ ends this way:

Me busco en el trigo ...
En la llama me busco, en los panes, en la llama de acacia.
¿Quién puede? Quien puede
comprender la oscuridad, ¿puede comprender también la luz? (101)

I search for myself in the grain ...
In the flame I search for myself, in the loaves of bread, in the flame
of the acacia.
Who can? Whoever can
comprehend the darkness, can that person also understand the
light?

The poetic language shows the poet-speaker still seeking connection with nature and thus with spirit, as in the statement “Me busco en el trigo ...” At the end she embraces both uncertainty and possibility as she recovers a spiritual dimension, creates her own path, and finds poetic language to illuminate her process. Nature offers her guidance, inspiration, spiritual growth, greater consciousness, and hope. Called back to the earth, the poet-speaker in *Para decir sí a la carencia, sí a la naranja, al azafrán en el pan* turns to contemplation and experiences both darkness and light, doubt and confidence.

Pujol’s poetry speaks to the reader who seeks awareness and meaning in today’s rapidly changing world, with its ever-increasing distractions. Her work is an invitation to participate in a process of renewal through contemplation, connection to nature, and creativity. Metaphysical and different in its subjective, intimate, perplexing way, with both frustration and celebration, Pujol’s work

challenges the reader to look closely inside and outside in living life's mysteries.

Notes

* This work was supported by a Faculty Development Fellowship from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

1 Mayhew's earlier version of the essay, "Three Apologies for Poetry," was published in *Contemporary Spanish Poetry: The Word and the World*: 224-45.

2 Francisco Peñas-Bermejo points out that it is important to read the complementary titles on the back covers of the two earlier collections in Spanish in order to comprehend the work fully (102). The title appearing on the back cover of this third book is *Piel de pan que tiende a lo absoluto* 'Crust of Bread that Extends to the Absolute.'

3 "Por último, habría que considerar atentamente todas las sensaciones y observar de cerca el juego de pensamientos que originan ..." (Novalis qtd. in Pujol *Para decir sí* 11) 'Finally, one would have to consider carefully all sensations and observe closely the play of thoughts that arise.'

4 Translations of poetry and prose are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Works Cited

- Ciplijauskaitė, Biruté. "Los gozos de la contemplación." *The Discovery of Poetry: Essays in Honor of Andrew P. Debicki*. Ed. Roberta Johnson. Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 2003. 155-71. Print.
- Cirlot, J.E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. Jack Sage. New York: Philosophical Library, 1983. Print.
- Gala, Candelas. "Escribiendo el silencio: la contemplación poética de Sara Pujol." *Revista de Literatura* 67.133 (2005): 147-64. Print.
- Mayhew, Jonathan. *The Twilight of the Avant-Garde: Spanish Poetry 1980-2000*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2009. Print.
- . "Three Apologies for Poetry: Discourses of Literary Value in Contemporary Spain." West-Settle and Sherno 224-45. Print.
- Peñas-Bermejo, Francisco. "Intimidad y trascendencia en la poesía de Sara Pujol." *Cuadernos de ALDEEU* 20.1 (April 2004): 102-11. Print.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Trans. Stephen Mackenna. Burdett: Paul Brunton

- Philosophic Foundation, 1992. Print.
- Pujol Russell, Sara. *El fuego tiende su aire*. Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle-Inclán, Esquíu, 1999. Print.
- . *Para decir sí a la carencia, sí a la naranja, al azafrán en el pan*. Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle-Inclán, Esquíu, 2004. Print.
- Summerhill, Stephen J. "Toward the Postmodern Sublime: The Late Essays of María Zambrano." *Studies in Honor of Donald W. Bleznick*. Eds. Delia Galván, Anita K. Stoll and Philippa Brown. Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 1995. 185-202. Print.
- Uceda, Julia. "Antiprólogo." *El fuego tiende su aire*. Sara Pujol Russell. Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle-Inclán, Colección Esquíu, 1999. 9-11. Print.
- Valis, Noël, trans. Introduction. *The Poetry of Sara Pujol Russell*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2005. 9-17. Print.
- West-Settle, Cecile and Sylvia Sherno, eds. *Contemporary Spanish Poetry: The Word and the World*. Madison/Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2005. Print.
- Zambrano, María. *Claros del bosque*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977. Print.
- . *De la Aurora*. Ed. Jesús Moreno Sanz. Madrid: Tabla Rasa, 2004. Print.
- . *El hombre y lo divino*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955. Print.
- . *Obras reunidas*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1971. Print.