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Modern, Mechanical Sounds Signal Ambivalence and Alarm: A Sound Reading of Three Short Stories and an Essay by Rubén Darío

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Resumen

Entre 1850-1950, los Estados Unidos y Europa entraron en un momento de modernidad que facilitó el comercio internacional, el progreso científico, el desarrollo urbano, y encuentros entre varios idiomas. Para Centroamérica, este momento requiere la consideración de contextos imperiales y neocoloniales durante esta época moderna occidental. Este artículo indaga sobre la cultura sónica y moderna que surge a raíz de las experiencias auditorias y las representaciones literarias interpretadas por el del autor nicaragüense Rubén Darío (1867-1916). Darío recorrió Europa, Latinoamérica, y los Estados Unidos y oyó sonidos modernos que le preocupaban y le inspiraban. En sus cuentos y ensayos, Darío propone nuevas prácticas de escuchar para valuar estos sonidos modernos. Para interpretar los textos de Darío, propongo tres preguntas: ¿Cuáles sonidos elige Darío y cuáles significados asumen? ¿Cómo critica y valúa Darío el sonido y el ruido? Finalmente, ¿cómo contribuyen las prácticas auditivas de Darío en la inserción de Nicaragua a la modernidad del siglo veinte? Este artículo aborda estos temas en tres cuentos de *Azul…* (1888) escritos por Darío: "El rey burgués," "La canción de oro," y "El velo de la reina Mab." También analizo su ensayo, "Marinetti y el futurismo" (*La Nación,* el 5 de abril del 1909). Razono que Darío asocia los sonidos mecánicos (debido a la modernidad) con la conquista imperial. Darío teme que Centro- y Suramérica perderá su agencia cultural y geopolítica debido a la expansión transatlántica industrial. Darío expresa una ambigüedad hacia la modernidad porque fue informada por su experiencia auditoria.

Palabras clave
Sonido, ruido, Centroamérica, Nicaragua, imperialismo, modernidad, escuchar, ciudades

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Abstract

Between 1850-1950, the U.S. and West Europe entered a moment of modernity that facilitated rapid international trade, scientific progress, urban development, and encounters across multiple languages. For Central America, however, this moment necessitates consideration of both imperial and neocolonial contexts at the hands of these Western global powers. This article indexes the modern sonic culture that emerges as a result. Specifically, I index it through Nicaraguan author Rubén Darío's (1867-1916) auditory experiences and his literary representation of them. Darío's travels across Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. exposed him to modern, auditory experiences that worried and inspired him. He suggested new listening practices for these modern sounds in the short stories and essays he wrote. In interpreting Darío's writing, I ask three primary questions: What sounds did Darío capture, and what was their meaning? How does Darío critique or validate modern noise? Lastly, how do Darío's listening practices contribute to bringing Nicaragua into twentieth-century modernity? With these questions in mind, I analyze three short stories from Darío's *Azul…* (1888): "El rey burgués," "La canción de oro," and "El velo de la reina Mab." I then analyze his essay "Marinetti y el futurismo" (*La Nación,* April 5, 1909). I argue that Darío associates modernity and mechanical clamor to a certain degree with imperial conquest. He fears Central and South America will lose their uniqueness due to the unforgiving expansion of transatlantic industries. Darío's ambivalence toward modernity is informed by his auditory experience.

Keywords
Sound, noise, Central America, imperialism, modernity, listening, cities

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Modern, Mechanical Sounds Signal Ambivalence and Alarm: A Sound Reading of Three Short Stories and an Essay by Rubén Darío

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Introduction

Daniel Morat and Mark M. Smith describe the years between 1850 and 1950 as a period of "high modernity" in the United States and Western Europe. As they define it, the term implies rapid urban development and a "maelstrom of change" (Morat 2014: 2-3; Smith 2007: 69-220). New communication technologies and machinery generated previously unheard noise, transforming cultural habits of hearing and listening. The globally diverse histories of this modern sonic culture remain to be told (Morat 2014: 3). My article will focus on one region that changed dramatically in this period: Nicaragua.

In the Central American transisthmian region, any investigation of noisy modernity necessitates consideration of both imperialist and neocolonial contexts. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Great Britain and the U.S. competed for concession rights to Central American territory, resources, and capital. The intrusion of foreign investors impacted traditional soundscapes. The clamor of docks, freight trains, agricultural machinery, and construction sites grew. Europeans and Americans brought a confusing inventory of sound technologies to Central America: mechanical barrel organs, train whistles, telephone and telegraph lines, phonographs, radios, musical instruments, or medical tools such as the stethoscope and the audiometer. As noted by Daniel Morat in speaking about the industrialized nations of Europe, this resulted in an epistemological shift "from the notion of technology as a prosthetic device to the notion of the body as a technological device" (Morat 2014: 49). Against a backdrop of multiple languages, international trade, and scientific progress, a transisthmian[1] and even transatlantic auditory culture emerged in Central America.

Writers in Latin America identified and critiqued this sonic shift in their novels, poems, and short stories. The Nicaraguan author, correspondent, and diplomat, Rubén Darío (1867–1916), was one of the first to express alarm about the arrival of the mechanical sonic age. Darío traveled between Latin American and Western European cities to work as a journalist for the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* (1889-1910). He was a diplomat for Colombia in Buenos Aires (1893) and for Nicaragua, based in Paris (1902–1903) and Spain (1907). As a result, he witnessed the growth of urban clamor in many cities: Guatemala City, Havana, Madrid, Vienna, New York, Berlin, Valparaíso, Managua, Morocco, Buenos Aires, and Paris, to name but a few.

Darío visited and lived in Paris five times between 1893 and 1909. He chronicled his impressions of French society for *La Nación*. In 1900, he reported on the Parisian Exposition Universelle. His short visits to Paris in 1906 and 1909 were his last. Stuck somewhere between a "settled cosmopolitan"[2]

[1] I use "transisthmian" the same way as Ana Patricia Rodríguez employs it. The Central American *transisthmus*--an imaginary and material site--merges all nations in the region. The site links literary and cultural production with social and economic flows. For further discussion, see Rodríguez (2009: 2).

[2] I use Jeff Browitt's and Werner Mackenbach's concept *cosmopolitana arraigado* (settled cosmopolitan) as a starting point in my own analysis. They position Darío as a *cosmopolitana arraigado*, not in the literal sense of the phrase, but rather as someone whose work settles in the Spanish language but incorporates transatlantic cultural trends both in Latin America, Western Europe, and even the United States. For further discussion, see Browitt and Mackenbach (2010: 7-8).

and a "marginal"[3] equivalent, as he admitted, Darío felt sidelined both home and abroad. He was both an insider and an outsider, operating on the fringes of French culture while dedicating himself to his own country, which was a focal point of international profiteering. Through those same literary fashions, Darío documented his sense of urban sounds both near and far with pessimism. The cities he heard were all boisterous; global change was not quiet.

Darío's travels exposed him to new auditory experiences that worried and inspired him. He suggested new listening practices in the short stories he wrote. Whereas he described city sounds as discordant, he idealized the human voice, natural sounds, and mythical echoes of ancient Greek instruments he imagined and idealized. He privileged harmony over discord and had little faith in progress. Specific texts are especially revealing. "El rey burgués" (*Azul*…) critiques the sound of a mechanical barrel organ; "La canción de oro" (*Azul…)* celebrates a street peddler's poetry performance; "El velo de la reina Mab" (*Azul…)* features an impoverished composer.[4] Darío tends to validate preindustrial Central American landscapes and the simplicity of human breath as a more genuine foundation of all music. Finally, in his essay "Marinetti y el futurismo," Darío mocks the locomotive and urban din foregrounded in Italian Futurism (in Schwartz and dos Santos 1991: 398-408). In these texts, he associates mechanical clamor to a certain degree with imperial conquest. He fears Central and South America will lose their uniqueness due to the unforgiving expansion of transatlantic industries. Human and cultural uniqueness will also vanish in their wake. This situation led to his ambivalence about modernity.

In interpreting these stories, I ask three primary questions: What sounds did Darío capture, and what was their meaning? How does Darío critique or validate noise? Lastly, how do Darío's listening practices contribute to bringing Nicaragua into twentieth-century modernity?

In the opening section of this article, I provide background by describing the history of the mechanical barrel organ, which plays a significant role in the first story under investigation, "El rey burgués," from the collection *Azul….* In my close reading of this short story, I carefully analyze the ways Darío grapples with the meaning of the mechanical barrel organ and the urban context in which it operates. I also investigate the images Darío uses to depict musical harmony. I then examine two other short stories from *Azul….*, as a way of solidifying what I see to be Darío's sonic archive. I trace the part of the human voice in "La canción de oro." Moving then to "El velo de la reina Mab," I explain his take on the fate of a lyre, birds, and human breath in dingy cities. Finally, I unpack Darío's later essay "Futurismo y Marinetti" (June 5, 1909), where he theorizes noise more precisely within the context of the Western avant-garde to make points that complement his literary representation of music. His take on Futurist methods help him to develop new tools to critique modern urbanization and, therefore, to better understand the fate of his homeland.

Street Music in Paris, London, Berlin, and Madrid at the Turn of the Century

When Darío read about the mechanical barrel organ in the writings of French symbolists, the instrument was a downsized version of its more "distinguished" antecedents. It had become an instrument primarily played by street peddlers. Once a vehicle for religious worship and

[3] I build on Browitt's and Mackenbach's concept using Mariano Siskind's the *marginal cosmopolitan*. Siskind defines Latin American male intellectuals like Darío as marginal cosmopolitans. Darío sits in a marginal position of enunciation, which prevents him from the global unfolding of modernity. Moreover, he rejects the Latin American cultural field, fixated on nationalistic or peninsular signifiers. For further discussion, see Siskind (2014: 8-9).

[4] These short stories from the collection *Azul…* are included in Arturo Ramoneda's anthology entitled *Rubén Darío Esencial* (1991).

experimentation, the organ Darío heard was already taken for granted and even despised by the general public, professional musicians, and composers.

Dario's impulse to distance himself from this instrument was not unique to South America. Victorian English intellectuals and artists such as Charles Dickens, John Leech, and Lewis Carroll criticized street barrel organs (Picker 1999).[5] Without acknowledging the street organist's social and labor circumstances, Dickens cast him as a ringleader of the capital's noise. Dickens spoke about "brazen performers on brazen instruments, beaters of drums, grinders of organs, bangers of banjos, clashes of cymbals, worriers of fiddles, and bellowers of ballads" (Picker 1998: 388). He joined other London authors in supporting the legislative movement to ban barrel organ street playing. On behalf of his colleagues and himself, he co-wrote a letter to congressional leaders:

> Your correspondents are all professors and practitioners of one or other of the arts or sciences. In their devotion to their pursuits – tending to the peace and comfort of mankind—they are daily interrupted, harassed, worried, wearied, driven nearly mad, by street musicians. They are even made especial objects of persecution by brazen performers on brazen instruments, beaters of drums, grinders of organs […] for, no sooner does it become known to those producers of horrible sounds that any of your correspondents have particular need of quiet in their own houses, than the said houses are beleaguered by discordant hosts seeking to be bought. (in Picker 1998: 388)

At a time when writers frequently lived where they worked, Dickens and his cosignatories believed the open-air playing of street barrel organs would disrupt their quiet domestic offices.[6] Dickens suggested the barrel organ be played only in less desirable areas of the city, emphasizing the class divide between wealthier and poorer neighborhoods (Zucchi 1992: 86). In the end, these complaints resulted in a formalized legal movement to ban the instrument in London (Picker 1999: 438-441). Although the ban was not upheld, negative attitudes toward it remained among the London upper class for decades.

Just like the London upper-class intellectuals, wealthy Berliners pursued a similar effort to ban the barrel organ from the 1880s to the 1920s. In June 1886, for example, a dispute occurred between a street organ grinder and a lawyer, reported in the *Berliner Gerichtszeitung*. The lawyer took the organ grinder to court, and the latter was found guilty of "domestic disturbance." Then, in 1906, Berliners established anti-noise ordinances and quiet zones, particularly around schools and hospitals. Finally, in 1908, the German philosopher and cultural critic, Theodor Lessing, published *Der Lärm: Eine Kampfschrift Gegen die Geräusche unseres Lebens* (1908) and founded the *Deutscher Antilärmverein*, the German Anti-Noise League, which classified barrel organs, and open-air street music in general, a nuisance (Morat 2014: 332-335).

Madrid's intelligentsia also perceived street barrel organ players, or *organilleros,* as noisy. Particularly in the capital, *organilleros* were held to a double standard: they could play for customers on commercial premises, but not on city streets. *Organilleros* were in high demand among customers in taverns, cafés, bars, and restaurants, but once hired, they were required to stay on the property. Nonetheless, players frequently contravened the municipal code to perform outdoors, in search of more generous late-night profit, dragging a parade of noisy customers behind them. Once

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[5] Their works include: Lewis Carroll's "Those Horrid Hurdy-Gurdies!" (1861), Arthur Symons' poem, "The Barrel-Organ" (1897), and T.S. Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" (1915).

[6] As Picker (1998: 441) explains, this also represents a time when English intellectuals were attempting to establish their credibility as professionals and the rightful contributors to Victorian society (a claim commonly reserved for businessmen and lawyers). Dickens' letter was co-signed by a roster of Victorian cultural elite, totaling twenty-eight representative authors, painters, engravers, illustrators, historians, actors, sculptors, musicians, architects, and scientists.

outside, the organists were often caught, fined, and arrested (Llano 2018: 200).[7]

Parisian music critics, composers, and writers also held negative attitudes toward street barrel organs. They attacked organists for their unmusicality, loudness, and ragged appearance. Peddlers were considered to be infesting city streets. Composers, on the other hand, remained ambivalent about barrel organs, but they favored open-air music, which they—paradoxically—found both harmonious and discordant. Claude Debussy, for example, claimed street performances were "the best conductor of mediocrity that one can dream of."[8] At the same time, he also believed open-air music could "prolong the harmonic dream in the soul of the crowd." Debussy and his contemporaries agreed the dream of social harmony was enticing but impossible to achieve (Miner 1995: 406-406).

Like the Victorian intellectuals, the symbolist poets Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé wrote negatively about the barrel organ and open-air band concerts. Rimbaud's poem "À la musique" and Baudelaire's poems "Les Veuves" and "Les Petites Vieilles" meditate on the estranging and alienating effect open-air band concerts inflict upon city dwellers. In contrast, Mallarmé's prose poem "Plaintes d'automne" (Autumn's Lament) ruminates on the organ's disruptive melancholic tone (Ibid., 408-410). The narrator in the latter poem hears the wheezing sound of the automaton from his window. Its melody triggers a crucial memory of the funeral procession for his dead lover, Maria:

> So I was reading one of those beloved poems (their dabs of artificial colour are a greater delight to me than the rosy hue of youth), and I was delving a hand into the pure animal's fur, when a barbarous barrel-organ began to play mournfully and languidly below my window. It was singing in the broad avenue of poplars, whose leaves seem dismal to me even in springtime, now that Maria has passed that way with candles for the last time. (Mallarmé 2006: 85)

The melody here conflates past and present. The subject not only remembers Maria's death upon hearing the tune but also imagines it as the accompaniment to her funeral procession. It is now the soundtrack to his deceased lover's memory.

Although the tune allows the narrator to mourn Maria's death, it nonetheless annoys him. The barrel organ disrupts his contemplative, hushed state while reading a verse in his apartment, resulting in confusion:

> Truly an instrument for mourners: pianos glitter and violins illuminate torn fibres, but that barrel-organ, in the twilight of memory, made me dream in despair. Now, when it was murmuring a cheap and cheerful tune, a tune that would gladden the hearts of the suburbs, a banal old-fashioned thing—why did its refrain penetrate my very soul and make me weep as romantic ballads do? (Mallarmé 2006: 85)

Mallarmé's poem touches on one more aspect of the barrel organ—the anonymous player behind the machine. Even though the narrator hears the organ's melody, he refuses to recognize the actual player: "Slowly I savored it, without throwing even the smallest coin out of the window—for fear I would unsettle myself and see that instrument wasn't singing alone." He dismisses the street player's poverty and instead considers their playing a nuisance. The narrator assumes entitled individuals can close themselves in and shut out the public discord below (Ibid.).

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[7] See also Gil Ricardo's *La caja de música* (1898); Pío Baroja's trilogy *La lucha por la vida* (1904); Ramón Valle-Inclán's *El yermo de las almas* (1908); José Martínez Ruíz's *Castilla* (1912).

[8] My English translation. French original: "le meilleur conducteur de médiocrité qu'on puisse rêver" (Debussy 1971 in Miner 1995: 406-406).

European attitudes toward street barrel organs in the late nineteenth century reflect social prejudice, class divisions, and aesthetic assumptions about musical worth. Darío's story, "El rey burgués," mirrors and heightens these tensions. Unlike Mallarmé, Darío places new emphasis on the individual making the sounds: the organist. In the socially marginalized street player, Darío sees himself. This is certainly one way of reading one of Darío's seminal short stories, "El rey burgués."

Darío's Noisy City and the Street Barrel Organ in "El rey burgués"

In his short story, "El rey burgués" (1888), from the collection *Azul…*, Darío speaks of the street barrel organ as producing noise rather than music. He represents the automaton's static and pathetic rhythm through the onomatopoeic phrase "¡Tiririrín!" ("tra-la-la"). He also speaks about the player himself —a starving, yet talented poet turned into a degraded organist who dies at the end of the story. In this tragic story, Darío thematizes the player's relationship to the machine and the city, while privileging the soundscapes of nature and instruments from Greek antiquity as counterpoints to urban noise. A fable at best, it ultimately cautions against succumbing to modern machines, which threaten the artistic production of music and poetry.

The narrative begins by describing a city and royal residence reigned over by a bourgeois king, who represents, in an allegorical register, an economic ruling sector insensitive to the humanity Darío associates with true art, even as he draws on art for the purpose of affirming his prestige. In keeping with the allegory, the country the king rules is anything but grand. Indeed, it is a wasteland. What may appear as an estate adorned with art objects, paintings, illustrious gardens, ornate salons, and elegant furniture is, in fact, a cluttered warehouse. He hoards kitsch objects displayed in poor taste. He also collects artists and intellectuals—actual humans—as he does objects. The narrator describes the situation:

> Era muy aficionado a las artes el soberano, y favorecía con gran largueza a sus músicos, a sus hacedores de ditirambos, pintores, escultores, boticarios, barberos y maestros de esgrima. (p. 165)[9]
>
> This sovereign was very fond of the arts, and with great largesse, he would favor his musicians, his makers of dithyrambs, his painters, sculptors, and apothecaries, his barbers, and his fencing masters. (p. 221)[10]

The king uses these learned individuals and surrounds himself with material things both to elevate his social status and entertain himself. A street barrel organ is among the king's junk, but at first, there is nobody to play it.

The bourgeois king frequently hosts rowdy parties for his courtiers. The narrator describes these celebrations in an ironic tone as elegant, but they are, in fact, debauched affairs. The courtiers intoxicate themselves while watching hired dancers:

> Los criados llenaban las copas del vino de oro que hierve, y las mujeres batían palmas con movimientos rítmicos y gallardos. (p. 165)

[9] The page numbers of Darío's works cited in Spanish hereafter correspond to Ramoneda's anthology (1991), unless otherwise indicated.

[10] The page numbers of the English translation of Darío's works hereafter correspond to Stavans's anthology (2005), unless otherwise indicated.

> His servants would fill glasses with that golden bubble and women would clap their hands and perform elegant, rhythmic dances. (p. 221)

Their drunken conversations and the intellectuals' "allusive songs" are likened to the Tower of Babel to underscore this scene of growing discord and pandemonium:

> Era un rey sol, en su Babilonia llena de músicas de carcajadas y de ruidos de festín. (p. 165)
>
> He was a Sun King, in his Babylon filled with music, laughter, and the sounds of revelry. (p. 221)

Ultimately, Darío allows the king and his courtiers to exercise the political right to make noise in the city they rule—a critique on his part of the class privilege to which the fable alludes.

The monarch not only hosts rowdy parties but also engages in the extremely noisy pastime of countryside hunting. As the narrator ironically states, he retreats to the countryside to seek refuge from the urban din. Nevertheless, it is the king and his courtiers who incite clamor when pillaging through peaceful, wide-open terrain:

> Cuando se hastiaba de la ciudad bullente, iba de caza atronando el bosque con sus tropeles, y hacía salir de sus nidos a las aves asustadas, y el vocerío repercutía en lo más escondido de las cavernas. Los perros de patas elásticas iban rompiendo la maleza en la carrera, y los cazadores, inclinados sobre el pescuezo de los caballos, hacían ondear los mantos purpúreos y llevaban las caras encendidas y las cabelleras al viento. (p. 165)
>
> When he wearied of the tumult of the city, he would go out hunting, and the woods would ring with the noise of his retinue. Bringing along their shooting rifles and their unruly behavior, they plunder the tranquil countryside: The sounds would frighten the birds from their nests, and the shouts and calls would echo in the hidden depths of the caves. Dogs of elastic gait would race through the undergrowth, parting as they went, and the hunters would strain forward, leaning over the long necks of their horses, their faces flushed, their hair tousled, their purple mantles ripping out behind them as they pursued their prey. (p. 221)

Leaving behind their bullet shells and echoes of predatory hobbies, they remain unaware of the sonic and physical disruption they continually cause.

In sum, the king and his attendants—a clannish mob—create commotion, whether in the city or the countryside. Territorial privilege goes alongside the courtiers' right to make noise; they extend their dominance through sound. Their actions create the noisy milieu into which the barrel organ player enters, playing a pitiful machine meant to entertain drunk and rowdy gangsters.

The Poet's Sonic World: Ecological Sounds, Music, and Close Listening

Following this clamorous opening, a bright-eyed, whimsical poet enters. Darío casts him as a tragic character, whose dream to write verse is suppressed by the king's demand that he grinds the barrel organ. Before the figure's demise, the tale offers a glimpse into his imaginative world, which evokes Greek antiquity (the lyre and the harp), ecological harmonies (birds, ocean breezes, and storms), the rhythms and rhymes of his iambic pentameter, and the human voice itself reciting the lines. Ultimately, Darío introduces this soundscape as a counterpoint to the king's noisy domain, as well as to present a new aesthetic category of music—itself superior to the king's discordant lands.

Here, Darío adopts assumptions about high-art culture shared by nineteenth-century critics and intellectuals alike in Western Europe. He considers the singing voice and instruments in the classical symphony orchestra (strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, piano, and the like) as superior to the sounds of a modern city. The mechanical barrel organ falls outside this privileged realm; the

machine produces nothing but commotion.

The aspiring bard arrives at the royal residence, hoping to secure a gentle patron who will finance his artistic endeavors. He confesses: “Señor, no he comido” (p. 166) [My Lord, I have not eaten (p. 23)]. As expected, the king and his attendants are anything but a compassionate audience. The king objectifies the newcomer as another nameless artist to add to his collection of entertainers; this arrogant attitude will contribute to the poet’s demise. The guest is allowed an audition where he must describe his past before the king offers him a task. The poet professes:

> He tendido mis alas al huracán, he nacido en el tiempo de la aurora: busco la raza escogida que debe esperar, con el himno en la boca y la lira en la mano, la salida del gran sol. He abandonado la inspiración de la ciudad malsana, la alcoba llena de perfumes, la musa de carne que llena el alma de pequeñez y el rostro de polvos de arroz. He roto el arpa adulona de las cuerdas débiles, contra las copas de Bohemia y las jarras donde espumea el vino que embriaga sin dar fortaleza; he arrojado el manto que me hacía perder histrión, o mujer, y he vestido de modo salvaje y espléndido: mi harapo es de púrpura. He ido a la selva donde he quedado vigoroso y ahíto de leche fecundo y licor de nueva vida; y en la ribera del mar áspero, sacudiendo la cabeza bajo la fuerte y negra tempestad, como un ángel soberbio, o como un semidiós olímpico, he ensayado el yambo dando al olvido el madrigal. He acariciado a la gran Naturaleza y he buscado el calor del ideal, el verso que está en el astro en el fondo del cielo, y el que está en la perla en lo profundo del océano. ¡He querido ser pujante! Porque viene el tiempo de las grandes revoluciones, con un Mesías todo luz, toda agitación y potencia, y es preciso recibir su espíritu con el poema que sea arco triunfal, de estrofas de acero, de estrofas de oro, de estrofas de amor. (p. 166-167)

> I was born in the time of the dawn, and I have spread my wings in the hurricane. I seek the chosen race that awaits, with hymns upon its lips and lyres in hands, the rising of the great sun. I have fled the inspiration of the unhealthful city and the boudoir reeking of perfume, I have fled the muse of flesh that fills the soul with rifles and covers the face with rice-powder. I have smashed the fawning, loose-stringed harp against the goblets of Bohemian crystal and the pitchers filled with sparkling wine that inebriates without strength; I have put off the mantle that made me appear to be an actor, or a woman, and I have dressed in a more savage, splendid way: my rags are crimson. I have gone to the jungle, where I have become vigorous, sating myself upon fecund milk and the liquor of new life, and to the banks of the harsh sea, where, shaking my head in the black, strong tempest like a proud angel, or an Olympian demigod, I have rehearsed iambs, the ringing madrigal forgotten. I have caressed great Nature, and I have sought, in the warmth of the ideal, the verse that lies in the star at the end of the heavens, the pearl in the depths of ancient Ocean. I have sought to boom, to crash! For the age of the great revolutions is coming, with a Messiah that is all Light, and Agitation, and Power, and we must receive his spirit with a poem that is a triumphal arch, with lines of iron, and lines of gold, and lines of love. (p. 223-224)

Sorrowful in tone, the artist mourns a city harrowed by prostitution, disease, soot, and the trivialities of popular entertainment, fashion, and drinking. Indeed, these same frivolities define the boisterous, urban soundscape inhabited by the bourgeois king —the real world the poet rejects. The city’s synthetic, mechanical sounds deafen him. The “tyrannical” and chaotic clamor impedes him from hearing and creating beauty.

Whereas the city cannot facilitate artistic creativity, mother nature can. A lyricist determines that the natural world —jungles, oceans, hurricanes, and rainfall— can inspire beauty, and therefore, musical forms. Here is where ecological sounds and the ancient Greek tradition are privileged over the violent urban commotion. When organized as verse and vocally performed, sounds serve as building blocks. Moreover, they lead to heightened emotional, psychological, and cognitive forms of human experience. These favored transcriptive forms are assumed to faithfully reproduce these ecological sounds: “con el himno en la boca y la lira en la mano” (“with hymns upon

its lips and lyres in hands") from which he recites rhymes—"estrofas de acero, de estrofas de oro, de estrofas de amor" (lines of iron, and lines of gold, and lines of love). In sum, he proclaims an aesthetic manifesto, which maps noise and music to urban spaces. Furthermore, the manifesto suggests a linear protocol on who can create music and how to accomplish it. Beautiful music emerges if a writer escapes the city, inhabits the natural, organic world, transcribes the site's sounds into verse, and vocally performs them. More significantly, his body is a privileged instrument, transforming single, separate ecological sounds into unified, structured couplets. This aesthetic transformation restores human unity.

The tale's final scene diagnoses the dissonance that results from pairing a mechanical barrel organ with the artist. After his performance, the king orders him to become the organist:

> Daréis vueltas a un manubrio. Cerraréis la boca. Haréis sonar una caja de música que toca valses, cuadrillas y galopas, como no prefiráis moriros de hambre. Pieza de música por pedazo de pan. Nada de jerigonzas, ni de ideales. Id. (p. 168)
>
> You will turn the hand-crank. You will close your mouth. You will provide us with music from a music-box that plays waltzes, quadrilles, and gallopes, unless you prefer to starve. Piece of music for crust of bread. But no more prattling, and no more talk of ideals. Go. (p. 224)

Where the poet once exercised his senses, pen, and voice to orchestrate stanzas, the king now silences and demeans him—as nothing more than a single, cranking arm. He is converted into a machine. To this end, the urban dissonance of boisterous parties, hunting games, shallow forms of entertainment, and now machinery, lord over his pleasant-sounding and harmonious world. Humanity is once again destroyed.

Darío now introduces the most significant sound: the automaton's din configured into onomatopoeia. As he describes:

> Y desde aquel día pudo verse a la orilla del estanque de los cisnes al poeta hambriento que daba vueltas al manubrio; tiririrín, tiririrín..., ¡avergonzado a las miradas del gran sol¡ ¿Pasaba el rey por las cercanías? ¡Tiririrín, tiririrín...! ¿Había que llenar el estómago? ¡Tiririrín, tiririrín! (p. 168)
>
> And from that day forth, the starving poet might be seen on the bank of the swans' pool, turning the crank on the hand-organ —*tra-la-la, tra-la-lee*… embarrassed by the glances of the great sun! And when the king strolled anywhere nearby? *Tra-la-la, tra-la-lee!* Was the stomach in need of filling? *Tra-la-la, tra-la-lee!* (p. 224-225)

The figure "¡Tiririrín!" reduces a popular Western European dance tradition —the waltz— into a static and repetitive phrase. Its rhythm is cheapened to cliché. Ultimately, the barrel organ as a machine cannot replicate the rich dynamics, virtuosity, and timbral variation of the artist's sonic world.

In the end, the fable's tragic figure dies while cranking the organ. However, it remains ambiguous whether the ending is sad or uplifting. At first one might think the king has abandoned the artist:

> ¡Noche de invierno, noche de fiesta! Y el infeliz, cubierto de nieve, cerca del estanque, daba vueltas al manubrio para calentarse, tembloroso y aterido, insultado por el cierzo, bajo la blancura implacable y helada, en la noche sombría, haciendo resonar entre los árboles sin hojas la música loca de las galopas y cuadrillas. (p. 168)
>
> Night of winter, night of revelry! And the poor wretch out by the swans' pool, shivering with cold, insulted by the north wind, covered with snow, standing stiff in the implacable whiteness of the garden, in the gloomy night, turned the hand-crank to keep him warm, and the wild music of the

> gallopes and quadrilles echoed among the leafless trees. (p. 225)

Playing the barrel organ is depicted here as excessive, and as a symbol of exploiting those of fewer means. This moving image focuses on the artist's arm, cranking the "la música loca" (wild music) to keep himself warm. Moreover, he is no longer useful to the courtiers, as they cease roaming the gardens in winter. As the story proceeds, however, Darío employs the ellipses to restore his ideal musical world and counter the noise of the barrel organ. The text ends with an evocation of Darío's sonic world of nature and mythical harmony:

> y se quedó muerto, pensando en que nacería el sol en el día venidero, y con él el ideal…, y en que el arte no vestiría pantalones, sino manto de llamas o de oro… Hasta que al día siguiente lo hallaron el rey y sus cortesanos, al pobre diablo de poeta, como gorrión que mata el hielo, con una sonrisa amarga en los labios, y todavía con la mano en el manubrio. (p. 168-169)

> And then he died, thinking that the sun would rise the next day, and with it, the ideal … and that art would wear not wool pants, but a mantle of gold, and flames. … And the next day the king and his courtiers found him there, the poor devil of a poet, like a swallow frozen in the ice, with a bitter smile on his lips, and his hand still on the hand-crank. (p. 225)

The story concludes in sonic counterpoint: the combined noise of the mechanical barrel organ and the city clash against the sounds of nature and Hellenic culture. Darío is hopeful and saddened he cannot reconcile music and noise because, in the end, they must coexist. If one cannot silence city noise (a material reality), one certainly can shut it out temporarily with imagined harmony. Darío's desire to block out the noise reflects Mallarmé's impulse in "Plaintes d'automne." These two authors differ, however, in their ability to keep the city clamor at arm's length. In "El rey burgués," commotion is a violent threat.

"La canción de oro"

In this section, I would like to strengthen my analysis of Darío's sonic archive as it relates to his understanding of modernity by examining "el cuento en prosa," "La canción de oro," also published in *Azul…* in 1888. This story features a traveling poet, "un mendigo", who lives as a beggar. This time, we find the starving artist on a residential city street of wealthy homes and gardens. As the story opens: "quizá un poeta llegó, bajo la sombra de los altos álamos, a la gran calle de los palacios." (p. 185) ["Perhaps a poet arrived, under the shadow of the tall poplars, to the grand street of palaces" (my translation)]. A life of riches remains reserved for those who inherit it, but the same existence outcasts the rest, including the poet. In fact, their wealthy lifestyle stays hidden from unwanted outsiders. The narrator describes this class divide thus:

> Había tras los vidrios de las ventanas, en los vastos edificios de la riqueza, rostros de mujeres gallardas o de niños encantadores. Tras las rejas se adivinaban extensos jardines. (p. 185)

> Through the window glass, in the vast buildings of riches, there were faces of dashing women or of enchanting children. Through the rails one could make out extensive gardens. (My translation)

Behind their glass windows, high walls, and iron bars, the wealthy keep out "mendigos" ("beggars") like the poet. Their message is clear: their world is impenetrable and those who attempt to invade it will face violence.

At dusk, the poet is riled by a class injustice threatening the less fortunate. In response, he recites his poem to raise collective consciousness. He declares:

> Fue la visión de todos los mendigos, de todos los suicidas, de todos los borrachos, del harapo y de la llaga, de todos los que viven —¡Dios mío!— en perpetua noche, tanteando la sombra, cayendo al abismo, por no tener un mendrugo para llenar el estómago. (p. 186)
>
> It was a sight of all beggars, of those who committed suicide, of the drunkards, of those who are ragged and torn, of all who are alive —My God!— in perpetual night, sizing up the shadows, falling into the abyss, for not even having a piece of stale bread in their stomach. (My translation)

The poet is enraged by class inequality and expresses anguish about it. The story emphasizes the poet's body and voice as the source of audible outrage. His body serves as the structural and aesthetic anchor for the poem:

> brotó como el germen de una idea que pasó del pecho, y fue opresión y llegó a la boca hecho himno, que le encendía la lengua y hacía entorchar los dientes. (p. 186)
>
> It came forth like the germ of an idea that passed through the chest, and it was oppressive and came out from the mouth as hymn that inflamed the tongue and made the teeth grind. (My translation)

The poem travels from the poet's heart, through the chest, up to the mouth, past the tongue, through the teeth, until it is finally vocalized. This process transforms breath into speech—a voice can exhale and create poetry. Ultimately, the tale celebrates poetry's birth, which begins with breath. This universal, profoundly human process transcends class divides.

As this occurs, another action occurs through the body-ingestion. Before he performs, the poet also eats: "Sacó de su bolsillo un pan moreno, comió y dio al viento su himno. Nada más cruel que aquel canto tras el mordisco." (p. 186) [He took out wheat bread from his pocket, ate it, and then offered his hymn to the wind. There is nothing more distasteful than to sing while eating (my translation)]. Here, he recites his hymn (born of breath) while he eats. The poet's desire to recite poetry is just as critical as his most basic need for sustenance.

The rest of the story features the poet reciting the line "Cantemos el oro" [Let's intone gold (my translation)]. He recounts "cantemos el oro" twenty-two times, each time criticizing the present day. He mourns consumerism, the exploitation of mining laborers, poverty, and war's violence. At the same time, he offers antidotes to these dilemmas. He celebrates Christianity, ancient Greek philosophy, women's peacefulness, and natural water sources. He also praises a collage of sounds. Of note are the voice: "cantemos el oro, porque su voz es música encantada; porque es heroico y luce en los corazones de los héroes homéricos" (p. 187) [Let's sing the gold, because their voice is enchanted music, because it's heroic and lights the hearts of Homeric heroes (my translation)]; the lyre's chords: "de él son las cuerdas de las grandes liras" (p. 187) [He gives life to the grand lyre's strings (my translation)]; wrestling bulls likened to a timpani: "dios becerro…bullicioso cuando brota a pleno sol y a toda vida, sonante como un coro de tímpanos" (p. 188) [a calf god…boisterous when it springs from under the sun, full of life and as sonorous as a timpani choir (my translation)]; and echoes, moaning, and laughter: "Y el eco se llevó aquel himno, mezcla de gemido, ditirambo y carcajada…el eco resonaba en las tinieblas" (p. 189) [And the echo took the hymn with it, mixing in moans, dithyramb, and cackling...the echo resonated in darkness (my translation)]. The poet champions the human voice, percussive instruments, and Greek Antiquity's musical tradition.

The poet closes his poem by shouting, "¡Cantemos el oro!" into the dark streets. His words are echoed, carrying his message forward to penetrate iron bars, glass windows, and stone walls. He hopes someone behind those walls will hear him. His inhaling, exhaling, cries, laughter, and the remaining traces of his voice —the echoes— all take centerstage. The voice not only enunciates class injustices, but attempts to transcend them.

Even though the human voice has a higher purpose, the body is still weak. After his performance to nobody, the poet chews on breadcrumbs and walks away:

> le dio su ultimo mendrugo de pan petrificado, y se marchó por la terrible sombra, rezongando entre dientes. (p. 189)

> he picked up his last crumbs of petrified, stale bread and marched into the terrible shadows, muttering under his breath. (My translation)

His need for physical sustenance is as dire as his need to create poetry. What is more, the privileged individuals behind the barred windows and walls neglect his hunger. It also remains unknown whether they ever paid attention to his performance. Even so, Darío's story celebrates the human body as a vessel that can produce poetry and music.

"El velo de la reina Mab"

The last tale from *Azul…* that I will address echoes Henri Murger's popular novel, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1851) —which inspired Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème*. Darío's story also recalls Charles Gounod's "Ballade de la Reine Mab" from his opera, *Romeo et Juliette* (1867). Mariano Siskind points out that *Azul…* both translates and appropriates French culture to create a modern and universal Latin American sensibility.[11]

Darío translates elements from the French novel and two operas to build his narrative. "El velo" recasts Murger's four starving bohemian artists. They become "cuatro hombres flacos, barbudos e impertinentes, lamentándose como unos desdichados" (p. 182) [four thin, bearded, impertinent men, complaining like wretches (p. 279)]. The story also introduces Shakespeare's flighty and devious Queen Mab. She becomes a generous fairy, bestowing hope and joy beneath her blue veil. Most importantly, the narrative challenges the musical traditions found in Puccini's and Gounod's operas. The story proposes new sounds from a Latin American soundscape. When Darío introduces "melodías de la selva" (melodies of the jungle), his story takes a dissonant turn.

The tale introduces four starving artists (a sculptor, painter, composer, and a poet) living in "una boardilla" [a garret (p. 279)]. They mourn the loss of their artistic inspiration. At the same time, they decry society's inability to value their work. They're too absorbed in fashionable marriage, social vanity, and class mobility to pay attention to art. They read aloud their eulogy, a consequence of their exiled, ultimately impotent state. At the end of the story, la Reina Mab relieves them of petty suffering. She cloaks them in a blue veil stitched in "suspiros" (breath) and angelic gazes ("de miradas de ángeles rubios y persativos"). They grow cheerful and hopeful again, dancing and laughing together in eternity. In the end, the four artists die. Their physical existence becomes something divine: they can finally make art in the afterlife. Like "El rey burgués", this narrative offers a tragic and hopeful ending.

In this story, the composer and poet favor the human voice, bird songs, the jungle, and thunderstorms. They prefer natural soundscapes over Western traditions from Terpander's poetry to Richard Wagner's operas. The composer, in particular, doubts whether such traditions are the only pathway to beauty. He instead believes nature and the body can offer new modes for creating music. The composer's monologue is worth noting here. He professes:

> Perdida mi alma en la gran ilusión de mis sinfonías, temo todas las decepciones. Yo escucho todas las armonías, desde la lira de Trepando, hasta las fantasías orquestales de Wagner. Mis ideales brillan

[11] For further discussion, see Siskind (2014: 214).

> en medio de mis audacias de inspirado. Yo tengo la percepción del filósofo que oyó la música de los astros. Todos los ruidos puede aprisionarse, todos los ecos son susceptibles de combinaciones. Todo cabe en la línea de mis escalas cromáticas. La luz vibrante es himno, y la melodía de la selva halla un eco en mi corazón. Desde el ruido de la tempestad hasta el canto del pájaro, todo se confunde y enlaza en la infinita cadencia. Entretanto, no diviso sino la muchedumbre que befa, y la celda del manicomio. (p. 183-184)

> In my great hope for my symphonies my soul is lost, and I fear all disappointments. I listen to all harmonies, from Terpander's lyre to Wagner's orchestral fantasies. My ideals shine forth in the midst of my inspired audacities. I have the perception of that philosopher who heard the music of the spheres. All sounds can be caught and imprisoned, all echoes are capable of being combined. Everything fits within the line of my chromatic scales. The shimmering light is an anthem, and the melody of the forest finds echo in my heart. From the deafening noise of the storm to the song of the bird, everything mixes and joins and intertwines in infinite cadence. And meanwhile, I see nothing but the multitude that snorts and bellows, and the prison cell of matrimony. (p. 279-280)

The composer lauds two figures for defining and expanding the same tradition: the Greek poet Terpander, and the German composer Richard Wagner. Spanning two thousand years, Terpander's language evokes the genesis of music, whereas Wagner's operatic music reaches the heights of high-art. The composer reveres the entire history of Western music. At the same time, he feels intimidated at the thought of carrying the torch forward.

The category of noise also emerges as a counterpoint to harmony. The composer considers chromatic scales can control and imprison discord. He declaims: “los ruidos que pueden aprisionarse, todos los ecos son susceptibles de combinaciones” (p. 184). [All sounds can be caught and imprisoned, all echoes are capable of being combined (p. 180)]. The story therefore juxtaposes music and noise and art and non-art. The composer also hears beauty:

> La luz vibrante es himno, y la melodía de la selva halla un eco en mi corazón. Desde el ruido de la tempestad hasta el canto del pájaro, todo se confunde y enlaza en la infinita cadencia. (p. 184)

> The shimmering light is an anthem, and the melody of the forest finds echo in my heart. From the deafening noise of the storm to the song of the bird, everything mixes and joins and intertwines in infinite cadence. (p. 281)

The composer desires to aestheticize sounds from the jungle, rainstorms, and birds. He hopes to rewrite and celebrate them. However, the composer introduces the idea of noise (“el ruido”). Whereas French readers may not recognize some of the sounds the author introduces, they are widely known in Latin America. Because of his homeland, the composer cannot imprison “noise” within chromatic scales. In detaining this noise, he would imprison himself, too. The chromatic scales he once had faith in fail him. He cannot encompass the “infinita cadencia” through them. The question emerges as to whether Western systems limit the Latin American artist. For the author, Western musical language falls short of enabling him to express his local experience. It cripples the composer.

Darío moves from this antidote to the composer's dilemma, which is the human voice, its breath, and echo. The poet describes each facet of the voice, which sounds it produces, and how. The voice morphs into echoes: “todos los ecos son susceptibles de combinaciones” (p. 184) [All echoes are capable of being combined (p. 280)]. The mouth sounds out words: “hallar consonantes, los busco en dos bocas que se juntan” (p. 184) [And to find consonants, I search in two mouths whose lips come together (p. 281)]). The human breath takes shape in la Reina Mab's veil: “tomó un velo azul casi impalpable, como formado de suspiros” (p. 184) [And then Queen Mab…took out an azure veil, as impalpable as though it were made of sighs (p. 281)]. The artists laugh: “se oyen

risas que quitan la tristeza" (p. 185) [[they] laugh a laughter that banishes sadness (p. 281)]). Here the human voice serves as a musical instrument. It creates beauty from speech, echo, breathing, and laughter. Likewise, "el canto del pájaro" (the song of the bird) holds the same privileges as the human voice. As the poet says: "tengo alas de águila que parten a golpes mágicos el huracán" (p. 184) [I possess the wings of the eagle, which with magical strokes can part the hurricane (p. 280)]. Bird songs and the human voice transcend the "muchedumbre" (snorts and bellows) of the noisy, outside world. More importantly, they resolve the limitations of the Western music systems. These voices and sounds represent a new aesthetic horizon for Latin American artists.

The narrative concludes by dismissing antiquated tools for creating art. The narrator details certain objects when la Reina Mab cloaks her blue veil on the men. They dance:

> extrañas farándolas alrededor de un blanco Apolo, de un lindo paisaje, de un violín viejo, de un amarillento manuscrito. (p. 185)
>
> they dance strange capers around a white Apollo, a pretty landscape, an old violin, a yellowing manuscript. (p. 281)

In their celebratory dance, they forget about the statue of Apollo, rickety violin, and yellowing parchment paper. These symbols once dictated their means of expression, but they have become useless. The poet sheds conventions and makes space for new devices like the human voice, bird songs, and rainstorms. These new sounds allow him to innovate in music and poetry.

This story questions the techniques of Western classical music and how they can limit the use of sounds outside their privileged realm. The composer's and poet's relationships to their local, familiar soundscapes causes them to question whether Western musical language can faithfully express all experience. Indeed, local experience remains outside the Western canon.

Signaling the Political: Mechanical Sounds and Futurism

Nearly twenty-five years after the publication of *Azul…* in 1888, Darío returned to the subject of mechanical resonance in Italian and Spanish Futurism, of which he was skeptical. The two avant-garde documents he critiqued were Gabriel Alomar's *El futurisme* (1904) and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's "I manifesti del futurismo" (1909). In important ways, these texts complement and consolidate the views that were inchoate in his earlier short stories, and a few observations about the nature of futurism in the Iberian world are necessary to move forward with my argument.

Catalonia's Futurism had a different tradition than Italy's Futurism. On June 18, 1904, Gabriel Alomar (1873–1941), a Mallorcan poet and publisher, delivered "El futurisme" as a lecture to a small audience at Ateneu, a literary society in Barcelona (Merjian 2010: 403). His paper appeared the following year in the Catalan vanguard journal, *l'Avenç*, before being translated into Spanish and published on its own (Ibid.). Alomar opposed the rural and pastoral depictions of Spain and instead affirmed a new and modern era for Catalonia. He aimed to replace old ideals of patriotism and fraternity with the idea of a youthful generation who would develop a new city, unique traditions, and new codes of national pride (Schwartz and dos Santos 1991: 404). In the end, the Catalan avant-garde literary movement, *noucentisme*, superseded Alomar's short-lived Futurist trajectory.

Futurism in Italy resulted in a much longer political and aesthetic legacy than that of Spain. Marinetti most likely read Alomar's essay through Marcel Robin's substantial review in the well-known French journal, *Mercure* (December 1, 1908) (Merjian 2010: 402). Alomar accused Marinetti of plagiarism when the latter's "I manifesti del futurismo" appeared in Paris's *Le Figaro* just a few

months later, on February 20, 1909.[12] From 1909 to 1912, he and his compatriot followers published thirty manifestos on related artistic concepts. This literary, musical, architectural, theatrical, and visual arts movement sought to encapsulate modern city life—its physiological, psychological, social, and political conditions (Berghaus 2006: xix). Marinetti also applied an anarcho-syndicalist view by privileging military action and war as revolutionizing the world. His confrontational ideology would inspire Italians to embrace the oncoming First World War as a necessary purging in the name of a resurrected national identity.

In his poetic experimentation, Marinetti built a vast sonic vocabulary to simulate machinery and public spaces. His texts often disregard standard syntax, displacing adjectives and nouns and advocating for infinitives over conjugated verbal forms. He also employs onomatopoeia, synoptic tables, and unconventional spelling (Marinetti et al. 2002: xi). Other indicators of urban intensity include mathematical symbols, plus graphic and typographic experiments. One prominent example of this technique appears in Marinetti's collection *Zang toumb toumb*.[13] In one of its poems, "Correction of Proofs and Desires," an automobile sounds "trrrrrrrrrrrrrr" and "pon-pon-traaak tatatraaak" at 70 km/h. (Marinetti et al. 2002: 57-61). In another text, "Bridge," a flock of crows sings "caaaaaw," while watering cans of bullets declare "tatatatatata," and a bridge cable is "thrrrrrrobbing." His text embraces the language of machines as a basis for literary experimentation.

Against this backdrop of extreme experimentation, Darío's two essays elaborate his literary and political concerns about Futurism. He first caught wind of Alomar's piece when it was translated into Spanish. One year before Robin's review, he had already acknowledged Alomar's manifesto in the introduction to his collection of poems, *The Wandering Song* (1907).[14] Then, less than two months after Marinetti's publication in *Le Figaro,* Darío translated and reviewed the Italian manifesto in "Marinetti y el futurismo" on April 5, 1909 (*La Nación).*

Darío questions Catalonian and Italian Futurism in three fundamental ways: he rejects mechanical resonance and categorizes it as noise; he salvages the human from the machine; and he claims that any celebration of mechanical din can overlook its negative, geopolitical implications. The first two ideals from "El rey burgués" reemerge here. Darío categorizes mechanical sounds as a repellant. However, in this essay, he explicitly elaborates a third point: he warns his Central and South American audiences to be cautious of the industrial development in their homeland.

Marinetti writes about the sounds of transportation: automobiles, tanks, railway stations and trains, steamships, and airplanes. Describing them as "many-hued and multi-voiced tides of revolution," he champions their high-pitched soundwaves and their ability to travel across time and space at a greater speed than ever before. (Marinetti et al. 2002: 13-14)· In summary, he anthropomorphizes industry and technology, drawing parallels with a sniffing nose, a pulsating heart, a belching stomach, chewing or gnawing teeth, and the fluttering wings of a flying bird or an insect. Unlike Darío's sonic oppositions (e.g., body and industry), Marinetti likens production to the male physique.

Darío, in contrast, considers Marinetti's industrial sounds extremely disconcerting. He also expresses concern that Marinetti has not credited Gabriel Alomar with inventing these ideas:

[12] According to Merjian (2010: 402): "It remains impossible to verify the extent to which Marinetti availed himself of *El Futurisme* or its subsequent translations and reiterations. The tracing of Alomar's potential influence on Marinetti will necessarily remain speculative. Since Lily Litvak resurrected Alomar's text from relative oblivion a few decades ago, however, scholars have squared off as to the extent of Marinetti's indebtedness to the Catalan's precedent".
[13] Marinetti first published these poems in French in 1912–1913 and in Italian in 1914.
[14] Darío, "Dilucidaciones," in *El Canto Errante* (1907).

> Solamente que el Futurismo estaba ya fundado por el gran mallorquí Gabriel Alomar. Ya he hablado de esto en las Dilucidaciones, que encabezan mi Canto errante. ¿Conocía Marinetti el folleto en catalán en que expresa sus pensares de futurista Alomar? Creo que no, y que no se trata sino de una coincidencia. (p. 404)[15]
>
> The problem is, Futurism was founded by the great Mallorcan Gabriel Alomar. And I have spoken about this in *Dilucidations,* which prefaces my *Canto errante.* Did Marinetti know the pamphlet in Catalan in which Alomar put forth his *pénsees?* I believe he did not, and that this is just another one of those coincidences. (p. 424)

Darío predicts Futurist literature will inevitably attract amateurs, whose literary production will be brash and superficial. He continues:

> Si Marinetti con sus obras vehementes ha probado que tiene un admirable talento y que sabe llenar su misión de Belleza, no creo que se manifiesto haga más que animar a un buen número de imitadores a hacer "futurismo" a ultranza, muchos, seguramente, como sucede siempre, sin tener el talento ni el verbo del iniciador. (p. 407-408)
>
> Although Marinetti has, with his vehement works, proven that he has admirable talent and is able to fill his mission with Beauty, I do not believe that his manifesto does anything but inspire a goodly number of imitators to do "Futurism" to an extreme —many of them, surely, as always happens without the talent or the poetry of an innovator (p. 428).

In this vein, he establishes a set of values for literature that includes prudence, sensibility, and vision. He believes Futurism cannot achieve these values, which are reserved for an imagined elite. Hence, his commitments to French Symbolism, Spanish Golden Age poetry, classical mythology, Greek antiquity, and Catholic religious oratory show his artistic taste.

Darío uses mythology to predict the fate of Futurism. He refutes Marinetti's claim that poetry must sound mechanical to communicate the promise of the future by referencing the fall of Hercules:

> Apolo y Anfión inferiores a Heracles? Las fuerzas desconocidas no se doman con la violencia. Y, en todo caso, para el Poeta, no hay fuerzas desconocidas. (p. 405)
>
> Apollo and Antiphon inferior to Hercules? The unknown forces are not tamed with violence. And at any rate, for the poet there *are* no unknown forces. (p. 425).

Regardless of Hercules' mythical strength, he dies; not even a machine's fabled power can outlast the passage of time. Using the example of Apollo and Antiphon, Darío argues that classical poetry and song will guide us to the future. In other words, the future belongs to the idealized ancient past.

Darío's reverence for antiquity and nature leads him to decry dead-end urban growth. Reiterating his reference to Hercules' inevitable death, Darío foresees machinery's physical limitations:

> ¡Oh! ¡Marinetti! El automóvil es un pobre escarabajo soñado, ante la eterna Destrucción que se revela, por ejemplo, en el reciente horror de Trinacria. (p. 406)
>
> Oh, Marinetti! The automobile is a poor carapace thing in a dream before the eternal Destruction that is revealed, for example, in the recent horror of Trinacria. (p. 425)

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[15] The page numbers of Darío's works cited in Spanish hereafter correspond to Schwartz and dos Santos's compilation (1991), unless otherwise indicated.

Not only is the locomotive anything but beautiful (a repelling insect, actually), its power will never measure up to nature. Just a few months before Darío's essay, a devastating earthquake occurred in Trinacria (today is known as Sicily), leaving it in ruins. Like Hercules' inevitable fall, human-made machinery or cities inevitably succumb to time's passage.

Continuing in the same spirit of "El rey burgués," Darío recalls in this essay the sounds of nature and Hellenic culture, referring to the lyre, Apollo, Antiphon, Bellerophontes, Mercury, and the Winged Victory of Samothrace for sonic inspiration. He then asks:

> ¿Qué es más bello, una mujer desnuda o la tempestad? ¿Un lirio o un cañonazo? (p. 405)
>
> Which is more beautiful, a naked woman or a storm? A lily or a canon blast? (p. 425)

To supplement his query, he believes beauty resides in the realm of Antiquity:

> Si no en la forma moderna de comprensión, siempre se podría volver a la antigüedad en busca de Belerofonte o Mercurios. (p. 405)
>
> If not in the modern way of understanding, one could always return to antiquity in search of Bellerophon or Mercury. (p. 425)

These sounds both conjure Hellenic culture and hint at Central and South America's preindustrial landscapes and climates. Darío excludes mechanical sounds from his poetic, geographic, and sonic vision.

Conclusion

If we consider how Darío pits urban sounds against antiquity in *Azul…*, it is not surprising that he had little patience for Futurism. His preoccupation with mechanical, urban noise led him to interpret heavy industry as dangerous to Central and South America. As he concluded in his article on Marinetti:

> Dicen en Italia es preciso que deje de ser el 'grand marché des brocanteurs'. No estamos desde luego en pleno futurismo cuando son profesores italianos los que llaman a ilustrar a sus pueblos respectivos un Teodoro Roosevelt y un Emilio Mitre. (p. 406)
>
> They say that Italy must no longer be the *grand marché des brocanteurs*. We are not, of course, in the full bloom of Futurism when it is Italian professors who call upon Theodore Roosevelt or an Emilio Mitre to educate their respective nations. (p. 426)[16]

Indeed, Theodore Roosevelt had made a global name for himself by 1913. The U.S. Navy's "Great White Fleet" successfully circled the globe between 1907 and 1909; meanwhile, the Panama Canal, under U.S. occupation, was near completion. Moreover, Darío's poem about resisting U.S. imperialism in Central and South America—"A Roosevelt"[17]—had already reached popular readership in Latin America and Europe. Darío was also keen on identifying militarist endeavors led by Latin Americans. Emilio Mitre (1824–1893) fell in this category. Mitre, the brother of the Argentinian president, Bartolomé Mitre, was a military general who served under the presidencies of his brother and of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The battles Mitre both led and joined contributed to the formation of the Argentinian nation-state, albeit at the expense of the indigenous population's extermination.[18] Roosevelt and Mitre's militarism ushered in a plague for Darío: "En

[16] A "grand marché des brocanteurs" refers to a second-hand store.
[17] "A Roosevelt" in *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905).
[18] Mitre participated in the nation's civil wars that were near-genocidal for the pampas' indigenous communities, including the Catriel, Cachul, and those living in the ranqueles. He participated in battles such as the Cañada de los

cuanto a que la Guerra sea la única higiene del mundo, la Peste reclama" (p. 406) [As for War being the world's best and only hygiene, there is always the Plague (p. 425)]. Roosevelt and Mitre's militarism comes at the cost of Central and South American cultural, social, and economic autonomy.

Darío employed sound for political effect. He repeatedly categorized mechanical sounds as repelling and unpleasant, the direct result of neocolonial expansion in Central America. He heard the rumble of a distant storm —that of war and revolutions. Rather than turn a deaf ear to these sounds, he alarmed audiences of their impending arrival. If Latin America embraced these cacophonous soundscapes —he claimed— the result would be a political, economic, and poetic loss on a grand scale.

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Cita recomendada

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