

Festines y ayunos

Ensayos en homenaje a Octavio Paz (1914-2014)

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India and the surreal—journeying through the illustrations of Paz’s *El mono gramático*

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Painting offers us a vision, literature invites us to seek one and therefore traces an imaginary path toward it. Painting constructs presences, literature emits meanings and then attempts to catch up with them.

The Monkey Grammarian (1981, p. 128)

It is difficult—or rather impossible—to translate a modern painting into verbal language.

Blank Thought, *Convergences* (p. 275)

El poema es una obra siempre inacabada, siempre dispuesta a ser completada y vivida por un lector nuevo.

“La consagración del instante”, *El arco y la lira* (p. 174)

Paz’s *El mono gramático* is a prose poem and a meditation on the nature of poetry and art. While the Mexican Ambassador to India, Paz made a day trip to Galta, a temple complex on the eastern side of the city of Jaipur in the state of Rajasthan. He was accompanied by his wife, Marie-José, and the book is dedicated to her. They were perhaps accompanied by Eusebio Rojas, judging by the credits on some of the photographs. The twenty-nine chapters alternate between Galta and Cambridge, England, where in 1970 Paz, a Visiting Fellow at Churchill College, is writing the book. *El mono gramático* was first published in 1972 in a French translation, *Le Singe Grammarien* (hereafter referred to as *SG*), by Claude Estaban in the

illustrated series, *Sentiers de la Création*, edited by Gaëton Picon for the Swiss art publisher Albert Skira. Skira, who was to die the following year, had begun his publishing career in 1931 with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* illustrated by Picasso, and between 1933 and 1939, published the lavish *Minotaure*, organ of the Surrealists, with André Breton as one of the two editors. The series, *Sentiers de la Création* (1969-1976), was explicitly conceived as an opportunity for creative artists to discuss their own works of art, and to intimately combine text and visual art. The editor, Gaëtan Picon, ensured that the published work faithfully reproduced the combination of word and picture of the author's original.¹

There can be no doubt that Paz, with his deep interest in art and friendship with many painters, wrote his text in tandem with choosing the illustrations. The relation of text and picture is carefully planned throughout. Frequent photographs relating to Galta, the place Paz journeys to, accompany the text. There are several drawings and sculptures of Hanumān, including the cover of the book, whose relevance is, again, self-evident. In addition frequent paintings, mostly modern and Surrealist, but some Tantric, complement the text in a way that is left to the reader to fathom. Two pictures, one Indian, eighteenth century from Rajasthan, one Victorian British, are explicitly mentioned, and discussed at length by Paz. Other than these two, no pictures are referred to by Paz, and in the first edition, in French, the captions to the illustrations are given only at the end of the book. The visual image, for the most part, is left to speak for itself.

In the first Spanish edition, 1974, and reprinted several times, the number of illustrations is much reduced, and any possible connection with the text removed by their being printed in two blocks, between pages 32-33, and between pages 96-97. And again, like *SG*, the captions are only given in the list of illustrations at the end of the book. All of these illustrations are taken from *SG*, but this is not the case with the English language edition, *The Monkey Grammarian* (hereafter *MG*), translated from the Spanish by Helen R. Lane, and first published by Seaver Books, New York, 1981; republished by Peter Owen, London, 1989. Things here are very different, in that whilst almost none of the Western paintings occur, many Indian pictures of Hanumān

¹ “[T]out est fait pour que l’association texte-image soit aussi soignée qu’originale”, Joëlle Geize. «Orion-Simon sur les sentiers de la création». *Cahiers Claude Simon* 6, 2010, p. 71-85, p. 73.

are added. There are no photographic plates; the illustrations are scattered through the book, with little or no regard to their relationship with the text. I shall review in more detail the illustrations of the English and Spanish versions, before giving a reading of Paz's combination of picture and text as evidenced in the original French publication.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF *THE MONKEY GRAMMARIAN*

Indicative of the carelessness in the matter of the illustrations in *MG* (Paz, 1981) is the fact that the Antoni Tàpies painting, *Blanc avec signe rose*, on page 40 of *SG*, accompanying the account in Chapter 5 of Hanumān, full of semen, leaping over the ocean with the sea monsters beneath wishing to copulate with him, in Paz's retelling of the monkey's jump to Lanka, is moved in *MG* to the next chapter, the brief Chapter 6, which meditates on stains and letters on a wall in Galta. Not only is it moved but it is captioned thus: "Hanuman . . . at the edge of the path to Galta. The devotees write out a prayer or trace a sign on a piece of paper and paste it on the stone, which they then cover with red paint." (p. 36) In the original, *SG*, a black and white photograph of this red painted stone faces on p. 36 the poet's arrival on the terrace where is another, different, red-painted stone image of Hanumān. The photograph is helpful, and relevant, since a photograph of the actual statue on the terrace at Galta was evidently not available. Lastly, the Antoni Tàpies painting is set at right angles, as it was in the plate in *El mono gramático* (1974). In *SG* the white expanse of the painting complements the whiteness of Hanumān's semen.

Particularly noteworthy, and the strongest justification for bothering to refer to *MG* at all, is the fact that it introduces new, different, pictures of Hanumān into the book, above all the image of Hanumān pulling open his chest to reveal Rāma and Sītā seated in his heart. This 20th century Kalighat painting is inserted in the middle of Chapter 16 (*MG*), which is a meditation on reconciliation. The painting is also placed on the title page, and in miniature at the opening of every chapter. This picture, not present in *SG* or *El mono gramático* (1974), reminds anyone familiar with Hinduism that Paz nowhere mentions that Sītā, Rāma's wife, was stolen by Rāvaṇa, and discovered in Laṅkā by Hanumān. Paz does of course mention Hanumān's visit to Rāvaṇa's palace garden, and Rāma's attack with the monkeys on Rāvaṇa, but he does

not mention Sītā, incarnation as she is of Śrī Lakṣmī. Moreover, as far as I can discover, Paz does not refer to Sītā anywhere else in his writings. Nor does he explain that Rāvaṇa is a demon. Of course, he is aware that anyone who knows of the *Rāmāyaṇa* will know the basic story. Nevertheless, it is striking that the cardinal facts of the stolen wife, and Hanumān's search for her, are completely ignored by Paz, omissions emphasised by the persistent image *MG* provides of Hanumān as devotee of both deities.

The altogether extraordinary blind eye that Paz turns to the doings of Rāvaṇa, the whole fulcrum of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and, still more to the point, of Hanumān as finder of the stolen Sītā, might conceivably find an explanation in the fact that Paz himself carried off at least three women. His first wife, according to her own account, he carried off from her protesting family. She later claimed he tricked her into marriage, and for a while kept her locked up in his parents' house. His mistress, Bona Tibertelli de Pisis, he took from her husband, the French poet Pieyre de Mandiargues, and his second wife, Marie-José, he took from her husband, a French diplomat. Paz's behaviour resembles that of Rāvaṇa, who had Sītā and many other stolen women in his harem, rather than that of Rāma, whose only wife was Sītā.

This affords an appropriate juncture to reflect on Paz's choice of Hanumān as his theme. Hanumān's leap over the ocean is an interesting counterpoint to the dusty walk to Galta. Ingalls—whose translation of a medieval anthology of Sanskrit poetry Paz refers to elsewhere, and even offers new versions of some of Ingalls' translations—claimed that Rāvaṇa became a popular figure in the South of India, and Paz gives no hint, either good or bad, of Rāvaṇa's character. His account of Rāvaṇa's harem (Chapter 10, *MG*) closely follows Vālmiki's original, but the selection entirely omits any statement that some of the women have been stolen. As a matter of fact, Vālmiki himself is rather neutral towards Rāvaṇa during much of his account of Hanumān's flying visit. Rāvaṇa is a rich and sophisticated monarch, whose women love him and long for him, with the exception of Sītā who is unmentioned by Paz. The harem is provided with elegant mechanical birds, and Rāvaṇa rides in a celestial car, while Rāma, incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, has to walk everywhere in his banishment, accompanied by his one and only wife (whom in the end he banishes). The energy and physical force of the demon Rāvaṇa find their counterpart not in Rāma but in the semidivine monkey Hanumān. By the late twentieth century, Hanumān had become a major Hindu deity in his own right. The growing power of Hanumān in modern times is documented by Lutgendorf

in *Hanumān's Tale*; it is already evident in *Hanumān in Art and Mythology* by K. C. Aryan and Subhashini Aryan, published in 1974. Careful examination of the illustrations of *MG* shows that all the additional illustrations found there have been taken, without acknowledgement, from the Aryans' book.

I have already mentioned the key distortion wrought by repetition of Hanumān as devotee of Rāma and Sītā. Mention may be made also of the addition (*MG*, p. 53) of a modern painting of Hanumān emerging from the toothy mouth of a female demon, Surasa (Aryan, p. 59, plate 113). Such images from Hindu mythology may be seen to have connotations of fear of vagina dentate, and are altogether remote from Paz's confident virility, which is evident throughout his work. Almost as prominent as Hanumān revealing his heart in *MG*'s additions are the several pictures of Hanumān where the monkey's body has words written inside it and around it. As we shall see, *SG* does have three instances of this, including the cover, but these occur amidst a total there of 72 illustrations, whereas with *MG* the proportion is much higher. Such pictures are an important part of Hanumān's growing importance as a source of private and personal power, and show a use for words in relation to Hanumān that Paz entirely neglects to refer to. His concerns are with poetry and art, not at all with religion and ritual. Again, my point here is that the illustrations are a distortion of Paz's intent.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF *EL MONO GRAMÁTICO*

Turning now to *El mono gramático* (1974), we find, as mentioned above, only a selection of the original illustrations (25 out of 72). Conceivably questions of copyright governed which modern Western paintings were included. It is not otherwise obvious why the Antoni Tàpies and the Francis Bacon paintings alone of these were included. The illustrations are given in two blocks, between pages 32-33, and between pages 96-97 with no indication of any relevance to the text. Their orientation varies, and as in the case of the Antoni Tàpies painting mentioned above, the correct orientation is not evident unless one is familiar with the original painting. One, of Hanumān, is upside down. Clearly, whoever produced the book had no notion of any relevancy on the part of the illustrations.

Finally, we get to the first edition, *SG*, where an incredibly rich variety of visuals are put together with the greatest care. In some instances an entire

chapter consists of one picture and a facing paragraph. In every case the position of the illustration is clearly planned and thought through, even if most readers would be pushed to give an explanation of why precisely that picture at that place.²

First I will discuss the photographs. Most are taken by Eusebio Rojas, who perhaps accompanied Paz and his wife on the trip. His wife is not referred to by name, other than as the anonymous feminine Splendor (Esplendor). However, one of the photographs, the only one taken by Paz, of the observatory at Jaipur, includes his wife. The caption to the photograph, however, does not mention her. This lack of direct reference to her in *SG* might conceivably arise from the wish to distance his volume in the *Sentiers de la Creation* series from that of Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Bona: l'amour et la peinture*, a simple book of praise to his painter wife Bona, who was Paz's mistress for several years, until, in fact, shortly before Paz met his second wife in India. However, the silence concerning his current wife might simply arise from Paz's machismo.

The first photograph shows an Indian man from behind walking a long path, the path presumably to Galta. This sets the scene perfectly. The most noteworthy photograph is of the palace at Galta, since it appears no less than four times, with varying exposures. This building is in fact the Gopālji temple, the Krishna and Rādhā temple, opposite the bigger temple complex dedicated principally to Rāma and Sītā. There are also photographs of the main tourist attraction, the monkeys, and of sadhus, holy men, one of whom is shown sitting rather like a monkey. Three photographs are taken by Paz's friend, the young painter Jagdish Swaminath. These are of Hanumān shrines in other parts of India. Paz wrote an introduction for the exhibition of Swaminath and his friends, the 1890 group, and also wrote at least one poem to him. It is worth mentioning that none of the paintings in *SG* are by a modern Indian painter, despite Paz's connection with Swaminath and several others whose style often was not unrelated to Surrealism.

² There are at least two errors in the reproduction of images, where the reverse side of a transparency has been printed, but there is no reason to lay these at Paz's door: The painting of Hanumān belonging to Marie-José on the cover of the book—the writing is reversed, and thus the painting; and no. 38, p. 89, detail of a Nāyikā from a miniature in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston—the painting, known as *The Lady and the buck*, has been published several times, including Archer *Paintings from the Punjab Hills* (vol. 1, p. 40), and Paz's detail is reversed.

It takes a while for Paz's choice of illustrations to as it were get into its stride. After the first chapter preceded by the full page photograph of the path to Galta, in chapter 2, which brings us to Cambridge where Paz is looking out his window, we are shown a small black and white photograph of crayon and watercolour trees forming an arch by Cézanne. At the end of the chapter, reinforcing the fact that Paz has been looking out his window, there is a full colour quarter page print of Jasper Johns entitled *Out of the window no. 2*. A grayish wall with a large smudge of blue paint, a distinct letter Y and some red marks like Xs bring us for the first time to surrealism and abstraction.

In chapter 3, he says he didn't want to think about Galta again, but it comes back. He, the traveller, makes his way among dilapidated buildings. He reads from an unnamed 1891 source (in fact the communal garden guide Murray's Guide to India) that the sandy desert is encroaching on the town. After that sentence the page is finished with a Turner, *A Coloured structure*, with a thick yellow line on the bottom, beneath a blue sky, and a kind of whirlwind column in whitish yellow descending on to the yellow line. On the page opposite, the poet had written that at Galta there were "dust whirlwinds" and that what he is writing is "the whirling of a word . . . that circles round and round. I am erecting towers of air." (*MG*, p. 12). This painting fits well. And shortly afterwards there is a two page photograph of a hill with a dried up streambed near Galta. The chapter ends with a valley leading to the destination, with children, livestock, monkeys and two pools of pestilential water. The next chapter returns to Paz's meditation on words and things. It begins and ends with the statement that "Fixity is always momentary", a sentence also occurring two more times within the chapter. In the middle of the chapter, Paz says, "...we ought to make our way back upstream against the current . . . and arrive back at the root, the original, primordial word for which all others are metaphors" (*MG*, p. 20). It should be pointed out that he never enlarges his view to include Hindu thinking here, with its primal mantra OM signifying, amongst other things, the beginning of all things, although chapter 24 begins with what is claimed, in the list of illustrations, to be an *Om yantra* from his wife's collection.³

³ Two somewhat similar *yantras* belonging to Ajit Mookerjee are said to be "Omyantras" in Rawson's catalogue of the Tantra exhibition held in the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1971. However in all three cases the central *mantra* is not OM but Hrīm, and the *yantras* are Jain rather than Hindu.

Chapter 5, back in Galta, has photographs of Hanumān shrines, of Galta and then finally a painting by Antoni Tàpies (1923), *Blanc avec signe rose*, N° LXXVII, 1938. In this chapter, Paz has finally arrived at the Gateway, set in a tall wall with faint traces of black and red paint. He walks through the gateway, more traces of red and black paint, a fountain, a temple. He refuses the invitation of “two fat priests” (*MG*, p. 28) to enter. He goes on to climb to the terrace, then enters the court of what he thinks was the harem, and sees a wall “stained with damp patches and with traces of paint” (*MG*, p. 31), representing mountains and the ocean, and above the ocean “a great dark form.” Then we get the painting by Antoni Tàpies, an expanse of white with some deep diagonal incisions almost like the writing of a word near the top, and a short l-shaped brown squiggle near the bottom. On the rest of the page, beneath it, we read of Hanumān, “with dazzling-white teeth”, “a furnace of energy” (*MG*, p. 37), dripping sweat, and demons rise from the deep, “eager to copulate with the chaste simian, to break open his great hermetically sealed jars full of semen accumulated over centuries of abstinence” (*MG*, p. 37), but he “sweeps like a tropical hurricane into the blur of shapeless stains . . . Lanka and its palace” (como un huracán cálido en una confusa región de manchas informes . . . Lankā y de su palacio). All the “indecipherable jumble” (*MG*, p. 37), (espesura indescifrable) of lines and stains are perhaps, Paz suggests, a painting of everything Hanumān saw and did there. The closest connection between the text and the painting is surely the whiteness of semen. In talking of Hanumān’s store of semen, Paz is fully in accord with studies that have brought out the particular significance of semen for Hindu males, studies already referred to in Philip Rawson’s 1968 *Erotic Art of the East*: asceticism and chastity are good not least because they preserve the male life force, which being saved within brings a golden lustre to the body. Here Paz has given his own very powerful rewriting of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in a way that is entirely in tune with modern India.

Chapter 6 juxtaposes Galta and Cambridge: both are stains and thickets, thickets of signs. “You are is I am . . . you are is I . . . I inhabit my demolitions.” (*MG*, p. 37) [Es eres soy . . . eres es soy . . . yo habito mis demoliciones (*MG*, p. 40)], and we also have a juxtaposition between Michaux’s army of inkblots and a Mughal painting of Rāma’s army of monkeys and bears attacking Lanka. This latter painting is the only indication in *El mono* that Rāvaṇa is actually under attack. These two illustrations, along with a couple a few pages further on, are the only ones of Paz’s book that have been discussed, as far

as I am aware. It was in fact Jasper Wilson's treatment of them in his 1979 book on Paz's Poetics that alerted me to the fact that the original French edition had far more illustrations than any subsequent edition. In both the Michaux and the battle scene, says Wilson, "there is a sense of frenzied activity; there are contorted, struggling, dancing, loving and fighting bodies. . . . the pictures become *images* of the teeming, over-crowded mind-flow, "*mes démolitions*" (Wilson, 1979, p. 164).

The chapter that follows, chapter 7, is a surreal erotic explosion, set, we discover, in Cambridge, in Paz's room, where by firelight, Splendor takes off her clothes with one hand, while holding the couple's penis in her other hand. But the description of the man is even more impersonal than that of the woman. She is Splendor, he, who must be Paz, is called only "the man", and at the end of the chapter he is said to look like an animal between the woman's legs.

Lines, black sun rays, a cascade of water, a charred moon (*una luna carbonizada*), surrealist word painting leads into graphic description of love-making, while no less than four paintings accompany the two brief pages of text. The love-making is sandwiched between the two other illustrations that Wilson describes, a painting by Victor Brauner, *L'Aube*, of a naked woman holding a cat and an ink drawing by Max Walter Svanberg of a bird-headed couple, joined by a dumb-bell. Wilson says, "The pictures 'speak' to each other: of dawn, illumination. . . . The double page comes alive." (Wilson, 1979, p. 164). Prior to these two, the first part of the chapter, the surreal multiplicity mentioned above, is the setting for a painting of Jean Fautrier of naked breasts, which also has a strong resemblance to a piece of rock with a cleft in the middle, and a painting by Isamu Noguchi, entitled *Nu, grès* which looks like a rectangle with two cylindrical bumps.

Paz's knowledge of art was considerable, and to attempt to explain the reasoning and purpose underlying his illustrations would take up more space than his own prose poem. Out of 72 illustrations, artworks, photographs of places and of material object, no less than 29 are the work of Western artists (counting the six small pinups by Richard Hamilton as one illustration). Four are pre-modern (Turner, Constable, Claude le Lorrain, Delacroix, and Richard Dadd), the rest all modern and personally known by Paz.

Manifestly, the decaying world of palace and temple, relics of pre-modern Rajasthan, along with villagers, pilgrims, and temple priests are set on a stage whose backdrop is mainly surrealist and other modern painters: the

whole book is a kind of collage, where the text grapples with all forms of representation, in a path of creation that is almost uniquely varied. I know of no other major poet who presents his words so intimately conjoined with other works of art.

I want now to consider one instance of the passage from Indian art to Western in *SG*, where Chapter 10 is a retelling translation of Hanumān looking at Rāvaṇa's sleeping harem, and chapter 11 returns to the account of love making with Splendor in Cambridge. The small extract from the *Sundara Kāṇḍa* of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* is illustrated with two astronomical paintings from Ajit Mookerjee's Tantric collection. The first picture shows a hand amid five stars: this is the lunar mansion called *Hasta* (the Hand), and the other Śraviṣṭha has as its symbol the drum. These both pick up on *Sundara Kāṇḍa* 7.39 where Hanumān fancies that the sleeping women are planets fallen from the sky. The close of this extract from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is followed on the right hand facing page by a full page of a copulating couple where each leans back so that their conjoined and upturned bodies are flat on the ground (black and white). This too is from Mookerjee's Tantric collection. Now, this hardly fits what we have just read about the sleeping harem, where no male is present. In fact Hanumān moves on in the next chapter of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to see the great form of the sleeping demon, with his wives clustered at his feet, also asleep. Since it is night, as the asterisms show, and everyone is asleep save for the monkey, the love-making is not really appropriate. A few chapters further in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hanumān will find the gaunt figure of Sītā—she too is not asleep; she is sighing for her absent husband, Rāma. But the “tantric” painting is entirely relevant to the chapter that begins overleaf, the continuation of Cambridge love-making.

The knitting together of East and West continues with Richard Hamilton's ink sketches of a pin-up, followed by a photograph of a contemporary stone lingam with Kuṇḍalinī wrapped around it. This is followed by a striking collage that old Surrealist stalwart, Toyen, called *In the heat of the night*. This features a double wave of shining brown hair pulled through an open pair of red lips and secured in a spray of diamonds and another much smaller and more open mouth. A hand beneath holds three red lipsticks; one of these, much larger than the other two points, straight up to the mouth like a phallus. Then before the last few sentences of the chapter we have a full page black and white Delacroix *Death of Sardanapalus*, with the bodies of women about to be killed all around the Assyrian king. This surely has some

resonance with the basic form of Rāvaṇa seen by Hanumān in the *Rāmāyaṇa* shortly after the scene that Paz gives, in that we have a large male with many women at his feet. Linda Nochlin in *The Politics of Vision*, remarks that by treating his subject “with such obvious sensual relish, such erotic panache and openness, Delacroix had come too close to an overt statement of the most explosive, hence the most carefully repressed, corollary of the ideology of male domination: the connection between sexual possession and murder as an assertion of absolute enjoyment” (1991, p. 43).

I shall now consider the only two paintings that Paz actually refers to in his book which is so full of unmentioned pictures. Chapter 13 follows memories of Galta in Chapter 12, and brings us back in the first couple of sentences as usual to Cambridge and to the writing poetry experience of the author. But the reader’s eye cannot but jump to the lower half of the page where in a crowded painting animal pairs copulate, and women copulate with animals. This brightly coloured painting, charged with sexual activity, an album miniature from Kotah state in Rajasthan, c. 1780, is taken from Rawson’s *Erotic Art of the East*, and in this chapter Paz must be in Cambridge, looking at this picture in Rawson’s book. I cannot forbear mentioning that in *El mono gramático* a somewhat cropped black and white version of this is given, turned sideways to fill the plate, as often the case there; and in *MG* it is similarly turned sideways, but with the caption at the bottom of the page beneath the shorter side of the rectangle. The poor quality of reproduction pretty well hides the wrong orientation. Perhaps a wish to mute the rather startling sexuality of the image play a role here, and the picture is deferred until the following chapter! In *SG* images are always given in the correct orientation, assisted by the nearly square format of the book. In *MG* the illustration for this chapter, placed opposite Paz’s careful description of the painting’s “universal, ecstatic copulation” (*MG*, p. 78) is a photograph of a solitary monkey sitting on a pavement in Galta.

Paz begins, as he did in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 with “thickets” and “lines”, here referring to the “intertwined figures”, and compares the painting to “space . . . being slowly covered line by line, with letters of the alphabet” (*MG*, p. 77). Most of the short chapter is a fairly careful description of the painting. Paz is not completely accurate. He claims it is always the same lady, *nāyikā*, penetrated nine times. He is wrong about this. Their dress differs, orange is not the only colour of their upper garments; nor, for that matter do their upraised legs clasp their partners nine times: only the horse and the

bear are so clasped. More importantly, Paz is evidently not familiar with, or forgets, that the whole point about *nāyikās* in Indian literature relating to sex is that there are different types, variously coded. The *nāyikā* by definition is multiple, as here.

Such pictures are found shocking by some people. It is impossible to estimate the true frequency of such paintings in Indian court society, because of the reluctance on the part of many people in modern times to acknowledge their existence; and doubtless numerous instances have been destroyed. One parallel painting is in Harvard, known as *The Great Orgy of Maharao Sbatru Sal II* (r. 1866–89), mid-19th century (Finch & Aukeman, p. 33), is likewise divided into two parts, with the animal kingdom copulating in the top half, but the copulations in the lower half are mainly between humans, though four animals enjoy women. In addition, the men fall into three types. Ordinary men, ascetics, and the king, giant in size, satisfying no less than five women at the same time, using hands and feet as well as his penis. The ascetics have giant penises, demonstrating the exceptional powers generally attributed to ascetics, with Śiva as the prime exemplar. Bestiality is by no means uncommon in the erotic sculpture that is found on many medieval Hindu temples.⁴ The chapter ends by looking back to the earlier instance of “motionless space” discussed in the book, all “appear to be saying the same thing, but what is it they are saying?”

The second picture Paz discusses is Richard Dadd’s *The Fairy Feller’s Masterstroke*. It is Chapter 20, and we are back in Cambridge with Paz looking out of the window at the garden. Paz thinks of Dadd’s minute study of a few square inches of ground. Tiny figures, viewed through Dadd’s “microscope of fantasy” are gathered round the axe-man, the Fairy-Feller, waiting for his Masterstroke, as he lifts his axe to split a hazel nut. Paz suggests that the painter’s “incarceration [for murdering his father] and petrification” will end when the woodcutter’s axe splits the hazelnut apart and “breaks the spell.” But that will never happen: “Nothing is happening except anticipation.” (*MG*, p. 125). It is an event “always about to happen” that “will never happen”. (p. 125). The chapter ends with the image of anxiety as a one-eyed centipede—an invention of Paz on the model of Redon’s single eyes (illustrations, p. 113 and p. 135), we may suppose?—lying between “never and always”.

⁴ Desai, 1985, pp. 37, 58, 62, 68, 74, 03, 258; fig. XXI; plates 129–131.

Both these paintings have links with the powerful Chapter 11, where the shadows of “the man” and Splendor thrown on the wall by the firelight are “not the projection of their actions” but “a fantastic spectacle” with no relation to them (*MG*, p. 61). These include a “ragged rock” that cracks asunder “like an idol split apart with an axe” (*MG*, p. 63), or more exactly with blows of an axe. This is rather different from the future splitting of the hazelnut that never happens. The notion of breaking an idol is at variance with the spirit of Hinduism, where the divine manifests itself everywhere in stone and wood, visible objects of devotion. But there is more in Chapter 11 along the same lines, at the end, where the man’s movements reflected on the wall create “a ritual in which a victim is quartered and the parts of the body scattered” (*MG*, p. 68). Splendor’s body is “torn apart, divided into one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten parts.” This dividing up of the feminine as viewed by Paz perhaps bears some relation to the multiplicity of the *nāyikā* in the Rajasthani miniature painting, where the one female multiplied into separate, different bodies, as she copulates with the variety of male animals. Again, he describes how the shadows change into “the thousands of naked bodies locked in embrace of one of the colossal orgies of Harmony dreamed of by Fourier turned into the towering flames that devour the corpse of Sardanapalus” (*MG*, p. 64). Fourier was the guiding spirit of the Third Surrealist Exhibition, 1965, “Absolute Deviation”, and his face, multiplied kaleidoscopically, formed the exhibition poster. His belief that sexual harmony would lead to social harmony underlay the student revolution of May, 1968.⁵

Paz’s engagement with art in *El mono gramático* reaches its high point in these two very different paintings. In one, the mad symbolism of a murderer in fantastic detail, in the other, a panorama of sexual variation totally free of any anxiety or guilt: Victorian England and late medieval royal India. Paz brings together the Surrealism in which he participated and the India he explored in many ways, not least on his day trip to Galta. The poem combines painting and text, Indian and Surrealism, in a uniquely complex way, and Paz’s achievement can only be properly appreciated by a new edition of his Spanish text with the pictures placed exactly as they were in the original French version.

⁵ For Fourier and the Surrealists, see Mahon (2005), pp. 173-181.

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