

WHEN I FOUND OUT YOU WROTE THE BOOK I READ: APPROPRIATION AND ETHICS

by Raphael Rubinstein

El Otro Camino

Tonight, when soundwaves whisper news of false eyelashes and vibraphones,  
you're already striding down another road,  
the one that leads in the direction of that southern peninsula  
whose harsh melodies make most sense in the wake of voices as rutted and stony  
as your hard-packed route.

The moon or its absence,  
so much better than the afterglow of minor pop masterpieces.  
Your hand reaches out to choke the throats of 20 cool chanteuses  
and the hyper-eclectic DJs who flank them.  
Wolves and shadows of long-expelled Jews  
dart between trees in bitter chorus.  
Big deal! You're on your way to tell some girl  
how her mouth fills with roses and carnations when she laughs.

1.

It wasn't that I'd forgotten, even for a moment, that several lines in "El Otro Camino," the final poem in my collection *The Afterglow of Minor Pop Masterpieces* (Make Now Press, 2007), had been appropriated. In this, it was no different from many other lines in the book, or, indeed, entire poems: the second half of *Afterglow* consists mostly of appropriated texts, grouped under the subtitle "Second Voices." I even knew exactly where I'd found the lines in question: a book on flamenco music and dance, written by an expatriate American aficionado named Donn Pohren and originally published in Spain in the early 1960s. What I didn't realize, and now don't quite know how to understand, was that one of these lines, taken from an obscure volume that I'd picked up somewhere for a dollar, carried with it some highly unpleasant political

baggage.

My belated discovery started one summer evening about two years after *The Afterglow of Minor Pop Masterpieces* had been published. Leafing through Pohren's *The Art of Flamenco*, I came again on the passages that I'd borrowed. The last line of my poem—"how her mouth fills with roses and carnations when she laughs"—comes from an anonymous "*piropo*" (an admiring compliment paid to a woman) recorded by Pohren: "Your mouth fills/ with roses and carnations/and jasmine/when you laugh." The other stolen line—"your hand reaches out to choke the throats of 20 cool chanteuses"—I adapted from the following stanza that Pohren quotes:

Where is Aurelio's hand reaching?  
It is reaching out to choke twenty throats of twenty  
cantaores in order to purify the platforms  
of the noisy jumble of lies;  
and then let sorrow again be sorrow!

What I hadn't noticed when I'd first taken the line, my attention switching rapidly between *The Art of Flamenco* and my own notebook, was that the stanza was not an anonymous flamenco verse like most of the other quotations in the book but, as Pohren clearly explains, an "excerpt from a poem, dedicated to the untainted singer Aurelio Sellés by the poet José María Pemán."<sup>1</sup> How had I missed that? Well, when you write a poem the way I wrote "El Otro Camino," grabbing words from some printed page close at hand or in the lyrics of a song hissing in your headphones, you don't bother to footnote your sources, or sometimes even read them very carefully. My writing process for "El Otro Camino" was similar to how a musician samples a preexisting recording, siphoning a piece of it into an evolving track. And, like many samplers, I like my sources to be hard to identify (though not out of fear of copyright lawyers).

The poem comes amid Pohren's discussion of the decline of "pure" flamenco, which began, he says, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of "cafés cantantes" (taverns that featured flamenco as entertainment) but accelerated during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when theaters and nightclubs became the chief venues for flamenco performances. According to Pohren, Pemán's poem "summed (and sums) up the opinion of knowledgeable aficionados concerning the state in which flamenco found (and still, to a lesser extent, finds) itself." I know nothing about the current state of flamenco, whether it's in a pure or impure phase, but in my poem this musical tradition appears as a challenge to the pop esthetic that pervades the second part of *Afterglow*, an esthetic most evident in poems about the pop singer Sade (this poem is an uncredited translation of a concert review in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*) and the British band Stereolab. While the music of artpop bands like Stereolab and Saint Etienne infuse most of the other poems in "Second Voices," I wrote "El Otro Camino" to the sounds of Radio Tarifa, a Spanish group that blends flamenco with the music of medieval Spain and Arab North Africa. (The town of Tarifa overlooking the straights of Gibraltar is the southernmost point in continental Europe and the closest Spain comes to North Africa.) The "long expelled Jews" in my poem are, of course, the exiled Sephardim, whose culture deeply influenced flamenco. I wanted to invoke the audible pain of flamenco, so infused with tragedies of history,

to challenge the glittering (and, often, to me, beautiful) superficialities of pop. As I recall, the “false eyelashes” in the poem belonged to Wendy James of the 1980s band Transvision Vamp and the vibraphones were Stereolab’s—the cool, floating tones of this instrument seemed like the psycho-acoustic opposite of flamenco’s “harsh melodies.”

2.

I’d never heard of José María Pemán, but his unexpected intrusion into my poem unsettled me, even though I had altered his words, or, rather, Pohren’s translation of them. Why should I have cared if an appropriated line came from the work of an identifiable poet? Why wasn’t I as comfortable with the idea of taking another poet’s lines without credit as I was about grabbing anonymous coplas? The truth is, I prefer my acts of literary plagiarism to involve non-literary sources; it’s the transfer from one domain to another than I find exciting, as much as the act of appropriating someone else’s words.

So, I wondered, who was this José María Pemán whose verse I’d inadvertently recycled? I googled him as soon as I could (being off-line in rural Pennsylvania, I had to wait a few days), and learned from Wikipedia that he was born in Cádiz in 1897, authored numerous plays, as well as poetry, fiction, essays and journalism, and died in 1981. The rather brief English entry (the Spanish version, which I didn’t look at for a while, is much longer) characterized his style as being “equidistant between classicism and modernism” and noted some of his books and awards. It was only the last few sentences that hinted at complications: “Pemán was one of the few prominent intellectuals to support Francisco Franco and the Falangist movement. This ensured his professional success during and after the Civil War, but damaged his international reputation. Pemán was commissioned to write new lyrics for the *Marcha Real*, which Franco reestablished as Spain’s national anthem in 1939. His lyrics remained in use until 1978.”

This didn’t sound so good. I soon learned more, and much worse, from Isabelle Rohr’s book *The Spanish Right and the Jews, 1898-1945: Antisemitism and Opportunism*. It turned out that I had welcomed into my book a writer who was not only a prominent intellectual supporter of Spanish Fascism but who was also the author of an epic titled *Poema de la Bestia y el Angel* (Poem of the Beast and the Angel) that presented the Spanish Civil War as a struggle between God and “the Jewish Satan,” a poem dripping with religious hatred, much of it drawn from that most infamous of anti-Semitic tracts, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” According to Rohr, “Poem of the Beast and the Angel,” which Pemán wrote in 1938, exemplified the Nationalist “blending of Spanish myth with German propaganda.”<sup>2</sup> His epic treatment of the Spanish Civil War celebrates Franco’s destruction, with the help of “two eagles” (Germany and Italy), of the Jewish “Beast” threatening Christian Spain.

Reading the couple of pages Rohr devotes to Pemán, I noticed that the passage she quotes from “The Poem of the Beast and the Angel” links a woman to flower, as does “my” line about roses and carnations, though the intent and tone couldn’t be more different:

Oh, cursed, cursed  
you, the Hebrew; you, unmarried mother: Margarita!  
Name of a flower and spirit of a hyena!<sup>3</sup>

This was certainly no *piropo*. Rohr explains that the target of these excoriating lines was Margarita Nelken (another name new to me), a crusader for women's rights, novelist and art critic who served as a Socialist deputy in parliament during the Spanish Republic. In the 1930s, Nelken was the target of vicious attacks from the right on multiple grounds: As well as being cursed, like all Jews, for having rejected Christ, she was depicted in the Nationalist press, Rohr writes, "as a witch, a temptress who led a scandalous private life [she had two children out of wedlock] and had frightening sexual power."<sup>4</sup>

I do not pretend to have read all of "Poema de la Bestia y el Angel," which fills pages 929-1074 of volume one of Pemán's *Obras Completas* (seven thick tomes, one of which, titled *Doctrina y Oratoria* clocks in at nearly 2,000 pages), nor less that my sketchy Spanish would really be up to the task, but I have spent a bit of time with it. A lengthy allegory that's frequently hysteric in tone, it depicts the enemies of Christian Spain with over-the-top rhetoric that is closer to political diatribe than to poetry. The poem is divided into many sections and subsections, each titled and prefaced by a prose précis of the coming action. Historic events and feverish imaginings are intermingled. The lines about Nelken, for instance, appear in stanza 17 of a section devoted to the 1936 battle for the Alcázar palace in Toledo where a group of Nationalist soldiers were besieged by government forces. The scene Pemán paints is as lurid as the cover of a pulp fiction paperback: Nelken appears as "a blonde Valkyrie, disheveled by the wind" whose bloody hands "profane the serene evening."<sup>5</sup>

For Pemán, the Beast, which (lest anyone miss the point) he frequently refers to as "the Synagogue," represents crass "material" as opposed to the "spirit" symbolized by the Angel. Although clearly entranced by medieval theology and Baroque allegory, Pemán also updates traditional anti-Semitism. In one passage, for instance, he fulminates against the evils of the petroleum industry, denouncing unnamed conspiratorial rabbis in league with "the greasy octopus of Standard Oil!" and "the agile leopard of Royal Dutch!" A amateur literary critic, the Jewish Beast takes time from his general devastation of the earth and profanation of God-loving Christians to send out maledictions against pastoral beauty: "Cursed is the poetry / of the eclogues, / and the gray, slow smoke of the granges."<sup>6</sup> We also learn that la Bestia only has ears for the "Noise of money / in the immeasurable / bottomless pouch of some Cyclops. / Noise without syntax, / of prose hard and proletarian."<sup>7</sup>

Depicted as a kind of iron reptile, this monster eventually meets his fate, killed by the noble Angel, who Pemán compares to dragon-slaying St. George):

When the afternoon, red with blood, died  
in the middle of a green field, the Beast showed,  
against the yellow sun, its last tremors.

Its hard black body, with slow death rattles,  
each time more distant, moaned like the Volga.<sup>8</sup>

Although the beastly "Synagogue" has been vanquished, the poem lumbers on for dozens of pages, as the poet gives repeated thanks for Spain's salvation. In the final "Message of Joy" section, itself composed of nine different poems, Pemán exults at how "the Old World of the West" has taken note of Spain's "lesson," including "Cesar" (Mussolini, imagined standing

underneath the Arch of Titus) and the “Führer.”

There’s a lot, lot more such stuff in “Poema de la Bestia y el Angel,” but this is about as much as I can stand.

While Pemán’s writing seems largely unknown outside of Spain (as far as I can tell, only one of his 60-plus plays has appeared in English translation, in London in 1935), he played a role in a key episode of the Spanish Civil War. On October 12, 1936, a ceremony was held in the great hall of the University of Salamanca to celebrate the “Hispanic Race” on the anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the New World. Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, who was rector of the university, was among those present, as were General Millan Astray, the founder of the Spanish Foreign Legion, Pemán and many other dignitaries. Historian Hugh Thomas describes the impact of Astray:

His black eye-patch, his one arm, his mutilated fingers made him a hero of the moment; and, in the chair, there was Unamuno, rector of the university. The meeting occurred within a hundred yards of Franco’s headquarters, recently established in the bishop’s palace in Salamanca.<sup>9</sup>

Speeches that Thomas calls “hot-tempered” were delivered by Pemán and Dominican Father Vicente Beltrán de Heredia; a certain Professor Francisco Maldonado then denounced Catalan and Basque nationalism (Unamuno was Basque), predicting that they would be exterminated by Fascism. Thomas recounts what happened then:

A man at the back of the hall cried the Foreign Legion’s motto: ‘*Viva la Muerte!*’ (Long live death!). Millán Astray then gave the now usual rabble-rousing slogans: ‘Spain!’ he cried. Automatically, a number of people shouted ‘One!’ ‘Spain!’ shouted Millán Astray again. ‘Great!’ replied the audience. To Millán Astray’s final cry of ‘Spain!’ his bodyguard gave the answer ‘Free!’ Several falangists, in their blue shirts, gave a fascist salute to the sepia photograph of Franco which hung on the wall over the dais. All the eyes were turned to Unamuno, who it was known disliked Millán Astray and who rose to close the meeting.

We know more or less what he said thanks to Luis Portillo’s article “Unamuno’s Last Lecture.”

All of you are hanging on my words. You all know me and are aware that I am unable to remain silent. At times to be silent is to lie. For silence can be interpreted as acquiescence. I want to comment on the speech-to give it that name-of Professor Maldonado. Let us waive the personal affront implied in the sudden outburst of vituperation against the Basques and Catalans. I was myself, of course, born in Bilbao. The bishop, whether he likes it or not, is a Catalan, from Barcelona.

Portillo recounts that here Unamuno paused: “Faces had grown pale. The short silence was tense and dramatic. Expectation neared its peak.”

Just now [Unamuno went on] I heard a necrophilistic and senseless cry: ‘Long live death!’ And I, who have spent my life shaping paradoxes which have aroused the uncomprehending anger of others, I must tell you, as an expert authority, that this outlandish paradox is repellent to me. General Millán Astray is a cripple. Let it be said without any slighting undertone. He is a war invalid. So was Cervantes. Unfortunately there are too many cripples in Spain just now. And soon there will be even more of them if God does not come to our aid. It pains me to think that General Millán Astray should dictate the pattern of mass psychology. A cripple who lacks the spiritual greatness of a Cervantes is wont to seek ominous relief in causing mutilation around him.

At this point Millán Astray could stand it no longer and shouted wildly: “*Muere la Inteligencia*” (To death with Intelligence). “No, long live intelligence! To death with bad intellectuals” [*¡No! ¡Viva la inteligencia! ¡Mueran los malos intelectuales!*], corrected Jose Maria Pemán, a journalist from Cadiz.

After the resulting clamor died down, Unamuno added a few pessimistic words before being escorted from the hall by law professor Esteban Madruga, who, wisely, offered his other hand to Franco’s wife, Carmen Polo de Franco, who was attending the event, to hold off the threatening crowd of legionnaires. This was Unamuno’s last speech: he was quickly placed under house arrest, dismissed as rector and, less than three months later, died (“broken-hearted,” according to Thomas). Pemán went on to serve Franco in a number of official capacities, while producing enormous amounts of writing. During the 1940s he was for a time director of the Spanish Academy. In the decades that followed, he enjoyed success as a playwright, journalist and television writer in Franco’s Spain. Politically, he migrated from fascism to an espousal of monarchism (he apparently had a talent for choosing the winning side). Nonetheless, his name could still provoke anger among his old anti-fascist enemies, as can be seen in this vignette of renowned Spanish poet Jorge Guillén (1893-1984) by American writer Reginald Gibbons:

The last time I saw Guillén, he—in great old age—and his somewhat younger wife had moved to an apartment in Málaga where they had a high view of the sea in all its ancientness and shades of color and light and its rhythmic self renewal. I told him (this was in 1978 or 1980—I no longer remember) that a street in Cádiz, where I had just been, had been named for the notorious Spanish fascist poet José María Pemán, who had been a mouthpiece for Francisco Franco and was then still as alive as Guillén himself. And immediately I saw that a surprisingly youthful vigor of outrage could still shake Don Jorge, even in his physical frailty, forty years after the end of the disastrous Spanish Civil War. One does not forget the brute violations of justice and of ethics, or the corrupt justifications, even of poets—who are often given a lot of slack, once they are safely dead and their behavior, if horrible, comes to seem, to some, merely colorful.<sup>10</sup>

After the fall of the Republic, Margarita Nelken escaped to France, then to Mexico, where she remained until her death in 1968. She resumed her career as an art critic and published numerous monographs on contemporary Mexican painters and sculptors. She was also active in the Spanish government in exile. Tragically, both of her children—whose out-of-wedlock births occasioned vicious right-wing attacks on her in the 1930s—predeceased her (her son died while serving with the Soviet Army during World War II; her daughter from cancer in 1956). A documentary film about her was released in 2006; historian Paul Preston writes about Nelken at length in *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain* (2003).

4.

Does any of this buried history affect “El Otro Camino”? It’s tempting to dismiss my tainted source as nothing more than a bibliographical accident, an interesting footnote to a line in a poem. That a phrase I found in an old book turned out to have a connection to Pemán, a fact that could just as easily have remained undiscovered for years, surely doesn’t impinge on what the poem says, what I wanted it to say. Let’s suppose I never made my belated discovery: No one reading “El Otro Camino,” including me, would ever dream that it owed one of its lines to a prominent fascist poet.

Yet a source, even if undiscovered, is always going to be there as a potential intruder into the history of the poem. Imagine that one day a literary scholar, or even a casual reader, makes the same discovery I made. He or she will wonder if I knowingly brought Pemán into my poem, and whether his story, his political ideology, is part of the poem’s meaning.

But should his ideology matter? Am I making too big a thing out of this? After all, what’s so remarkable about being in artistic debt to a fascist or an anti-Semite? Every week seems to bring news of yet another compromised writer, another enthusiastic collaborator, to add to the illustrious names of Céline, Pound, Eliot, Jünger, Heidegger, de Man. (In *Reader’s Block*, David Markson’s mordant litany of every sort of biographical misadventure, “so-and-so was an anti-Semite”—starting with Saint Thomas Aquinas, ending with Dostoevsky—is a recurring motif.) It’s impossible to engage the creative legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century without being indebted to one or more of these figures. Nor is this only a historical problem; lately, I’ve been pondering the evident anti-Semitism of one of my most treasured art heroes, Jean-Luc Godard.

Isn’t Pemán’s greatest crime that he wasn’t great enough a writer? Céline and Pound wrote worse things about Jews; Heidegger and Jünger occupied more important positions in fascist regimes. If I happened to quote one of their lines, would I feel compelled to write an essay about it? It’s unlikely. Auden claimed that time pardons such figures “for writing well.” I wouldn’t grant them pardons exactly—their deeds continue to haunt their works—but I, like so many others, do keep reading them.

What matters here, ultimately, are not Pemán’s politics, detestable though they were, but whether this intertextual incident has anything to tell us about the writerly procedure that made it possible. That a Jew-hating Spanish fascist was concealed behind my line is less significant than the fact that I employed a method which made it possible for a relationship to be established between the two of us. Pemán’s presence in my poem is a reminder that appropriation institutes a kind of literary open-door policy, and that when any immigrant arrives, it’s always with a suitcase of stories.

Since discovering the source of my line, I’ve been thinking of Pemán’s presence as an unwelcome intrusion, an accident (resulting from my inattentive reading of Donn Pohren’s

book) that I would have rather avoided. But what if I turn to appropriation precisely in order to make such visitations possible? Rather than an undesirable side effect, could the risk of such ideological contagion be exactly what makes appropriation an attractive technique?

5.

In a 2005 talk titled “Identity Theft,” Robert Fitterman asserts that “poets now have access to the language of countless individuals’ feelings and ideas from any historical moment.”<sup>11</sup> Under current socio-technological conditions, plagiarists, the term Fitterman prefers for appropriative writers like himself, are seeking “new ways” to realize their “place as text artists in a network culture.”<sup>12</sup> Fitterman, who highlights the demystifying powers of textual practice based on reframing, also offers a persuasive account of how multiple and appropriated identities were a natural outgrowth for American writers and artists coming of age in the 1970s and ‘80s. Multiple identities are also important for Kenneth Goldsmith, whose 2009 manifesto “Flarf is Dionysus. Conceptual Writing is Apollo” claims that in appropriation-based contemporary writing identity “is up for grabs.” He then asks, rhetorically: “Why use your own words when you can express yourself just as well by using someone else’s?”<sup>13</sup>

It’s clear that a certain freedom comes in speaking with the words of others, and that appropriation permits poets to annex vast new areas of discourse into their work (something that Charles Bernstein has long excelled in) but what does it really mean to take on another’s words? I think that in their emphasis on technology and literary politics, Fitterman and Goldsmith, along with other theorists of appropriation, don’t fully acknowledge the philosophical implications of textual importation. I believe that appropriation exerts a trans-historical attraction. I also believe that it affects the ontological status of the writer who employs it.

We know that writers have been experimenting with multiple or alternative identities since long before the network culture. Fernando Pessoa had his heteronyms, Antonio Machado his fictional doubles Abel Martín and Juan de Mairena and Valéry Larbaud his alter ego A.O. Barnabooth. Perhaps even more fundamentally, the notion of the persona, in which the poetic self dons a mask or masks, has been crucial for poets from Rimbaud (“*Je est un autre*”) to Yeats (the concept of the mask was a pillar of his self-fashioned mythology), Eliot (a.k.a. Prufrock, Tiresias and Sweeney, who denied that the poet even had a “personality” to express), Pound (who titled one of his most important collections *Personae*) and Rilke, of whom Michael Hamburger says: “No other poet of his time had so fluid a personality, so wide a range of masks and styles.”<sup>14</sup> Larbaud could have been speaking for any of these writers when he began a poem that could read as his *ars poetica* with the admission: “I always write with a mask upon my face.”<sup>15</sup>

What called forth all these masks and personae? Likely culprits include the social dislocation of the modern poet and the rift that writing inevitably introduces into the self. Appropriative writing inherits this legacy of disguise, adding to it iconoclastic challenges to notions of originality and ownership, both esthetic and legal. But does it accomplish even more? Although they write under diverse personae and names, Pound and Pessoa are still the authors (in the traditional sense of the term) of their poems in a way that can’t be said of Isidore Ducasse (the encyclopedia passages in *Les Chants de Maldoror*), Blaise Cendrars (*Kodak*) or Hugh MacDiarmid (*Cornish Heroic Songs for Valda Trevlyn*).<sup>16</sup>

I think it could be argued that the technique of plagiarism confronts, more directly than

do the Symbolist devices of the poets just cited, not only the otherness of the I (the “je” as “autre”) but, more to the point, the otherness of the other. In fact, it might even be that the ultimate aim of appropriation is precisely such a confrontation: a recognition of the other, an encounter with a kind of Levinasian alterity.

For Emmanuel Levinas, the encounter with another human being, more specifically, the inescapable acknowledgement of death’s claim on others, is the foundation of ethics. Significantly, he locates the meaning of existence not, as Heidegger does, in a project of self-consciousness, in the ongoing revelation of Being, but in the act of taking responsibility for the other. What Levinas terms the “face-to-face” relationship of self and other overrides the limits of totalizing philosophical systems, and the concept of the sovereign self on which modern Western society is based. Could literary appropriation similarly be a matter of ethics? Could it involve a shift that parallels the one from Heideggerian solipsism to Levinasian responsibility?

Now, I did not deliberately set out to encounter someone radically foreign to my way of thinking. I imported Pemán’s words not because they were “other” to me but because, on the contrary, they said something that I wanted to say myself (though not with my own words). I also imported them because I like this way of getting words onto the page or screen, and because I want to make use of the language around me, and because I was bored by my own subjectivity and all the existing modes of simulating it, and because it was faster to borrow someone else’s authenticity than to dredge up my own. In other words, I turned to appropriation the way Schwitters turned to tram tickets and driftwood, Pollock to dripped lines; Warhol to silkscreens, Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince to rephotography and Cage to four minutes and 33 seconds of ambient sounds.

And yet, because they involved me with the other, in a concrete fashion, Pemán’s words contained the potential for what Levinas would call an ethical encounter.

Levinas warns against the “reduction of the other to the same.” I readily admit that this was my original aim in “El Otro Camino”: I wanted to assimilate someone else’s words into my own poem; I wanted them to serve my own literary ends. This process of assimilation broke down, however, when Pemán’s identity came to my attention. Confronted with what was (for me) a starkly other other, I had no choice but to take responsibility for Pemán within my poem; I had no choice but to embark on this essay.

Pemán’s phrase was a kind of Trojan horse, an attractive gift that concealed an unpleasant surprise, but it was something I needed as well as wanted, and as soon as I need the other’s text to complete my own, I become reliant on the other; I can never again pretend to be a totality.

6.

Despite all that I’ve just said about ethics and taking responsibility for the other, the fact remains that appropriation is still appropriation. It’s an action that relies on a despotic attitude rather than a transaction between equals. I may no longer be a totality, but I am perfectly willing to dragoon whatever sources I need to feed my fractured totality. Is it possible that artistic appropriation, however radical its stance, will always involve placing the other in a subservient position? Must appropriation always be a one-way process?

The practice of poet Tan Lin offers a different way to think about this question. Interested in what he calls “the visual infrastructure of books,” Lin has described his recently published *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004 the Joy of Cooking* (Wesleyan

University Press, 2010)—a 222-page assemblage of texts and images, many autobiographical, others blatantly appropriated—as “not about gut-wrenching emotions but minor feelings/moods that are not quite our own, and... thus consonant with culture or distraction today.”<sup>17</sup> Influenced by conceptual art and Warhol’s upfront approach to the business side of art, Lin foregrounds the mechanics of his book. More to the point here, in conjunction with *Seven Controlled Vocabularies*, Lin and a Philadelphia reading/event series called EDIT have set in motion an array of ancillary publications that involve elements of SCV being revised by and commented on by other writers and various editors. According to a press release, “the EDIT staff will accompany Tan Lin in the reauthoring and republication of *7CV* on the spot in multiple formats. [...] The works to be published include: Handmade book, PDF, lulu.com Appendix, Powerpoint, Kanban Board/Post-Its, Blurbs, Dual Language (Chinese/English) Edition, micro lecture, Selectric II interview, wine/cheese reception, Q&A (xerox) and a film.”

Spinning off a network of multi-author publications parallels the accelerated outsourcing of memory, and even thought in general, that increasingly defines our era; It also creates a new kind of literary space in which the one-way transfer of appropriation explodes into a flurry of reciprocal gestures. Expressing yourself by using someone else’s words is replaced by a collective swap meet in which appropriated texts and passages of old-fashioned subjective lyricism can coexist, in which the distinctions between interior and exterior, between appropriator and appropriatee are impossibly blurred. Besides taking fuller advantage of the network culture, this model also addresses a difficulty in the ethical scenario formulated by Levinas. As Simon Critchley has explained, Levinas “makes the extreme claim that my relation to the other is not some benign benevolence, compassionate care or respect for the other’s autonomy, but is the obsessive experience of a responsibility that persecutes me with its sheer weight.”<sup>18</sup> As a result, our encounter with the other leaves us “in a situation of sheer ethical overload” where we must be responsible even for those who would persecute us, and subjected to guilt for failing to accede to a demand that can never be met.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the shadow of Señor Pemán is beginning to chill me a little. I’ve come to grips with the fact that poems I write can depend on a hateful person, and that appropriation entails unforeseeable meanings—as what text doesn’t? Perhaps what I must do now is to return the gift, see if I can appropriate the appropriator, perhaps by exporting lines from one of my poems into “Poem of the Beast and Angel.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Donn Pohren, *The Art of Flamenco*, Editorial Jerez Industrial, Jerez de la Frontera, 1962, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> . Isabelle Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews, 18989-1945: Antisemitism and Opportunism*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton and Portland, 2007, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Rohr, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> José María Pemán, “Poema de la Bestia y El Angel,” in *Poesia, Obras Completas, Tomo I*, Escelicer, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Cadiz, 1947, p. 1009.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., "La Maldicion de la Terra," pp. 950-51.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., "Pelea de la Bestia y El Angel," p. 1033.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. "Pelea de la Bestia y El Angel", p. 1040

<sup>9</sup> This account draws on two sources: Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, revised edition, Random House, New York, 2001, pp. 485-488, and Luis Portillo, "Unamuno's Last Lecture," in *The Golden Horizon*, ed. Cyril Connolly, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, pp. 397-403.

<sup>10</sup> <http://reginaldgibbons.northwestern.edu/torture-language-poetry-eloquence>

<sup>11</sup> Robert Fitterman, *Rob The Plagiarist*, Roof Books, New York, 2009, p. 17

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *Poetry*, July/August, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960s*, Methuen, London and New York, 1982, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> "The Mask," in Valery Larbaud, *The Poems of A.O. Barnabooth*, trans. Ron Padgett and Bill Zavatsky, Mushinsha, Tokyo, 1977, p. 24

<sup>16</sup> See Raphael Rubinstein, "Gathered, Not Made: A Brief History of Appropriative Writing," *American Poetry Review*, March/April, 1999; republished on Ubu.com.

<sup>17</sup> "Tan Lin" by Katherine Elaine Sanders, <http://bombsite.com/issues/999/articles/3467>

<sup>18</sup> Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, Verso, London and New York, 2007, p.p. 60-61.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 67.