

Maria Zambrano amongst the philosophers

Balibrea, Mari Paz; Lough, Francis; Sánchez Cuervo, Antolín

DOI:

[10.1080/01916599.2018.1516997](https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2018.1516997)

License:

None: All rights reserved

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Balibrea, MP, Lough, F & Sánchez Cuervo, A 2018, 'Maria Zambrano amongst the philosophers: an introduction', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 7-8, pp. 827-842.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2018.1516997>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Checked for eligibility 18/09/2018

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *History of European Ideas* on 24/12/2018, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/01916599.2018.1516997>

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preparation of this special issue was supported by grants from the Spanish Ministry of Economics and Competitiveness as part of the project ‘El legado filosófico del exilio español de 1939: razón, crítica, identidad y memoria (FFI2016-70009-R) [The Philosophical Legacy of Spanish Exile of 1939: Reason, Critique, Identity and Memory], and the Spanish Secretary of Culture’s ‘Programa Hispanex de ayudas para la promoción cultural en universidades extranjeras correspondientes al año 2014’ [Hispanex Programme for Cultural Promotion in Universities Abroad, year 2014].

The article ‘The Reasons of Europe. Edmund Husserl, Jan Patočka, and María Zambrano on the Spiritual Heritage of Europe’ was supported by the Austrian Science Fund within the framework of the project ‘Religion beyond Myth and Enlightenment’ under Grant FWF P23255-G19.

María Zambrano Amongst the Philosophers. An Introduction.

Mari Paz Balibrea
Birkbeck, University of London
m.balibrea@bmk.ac.uk

Francis Lough
University of Birmingham
F.Lough@bham.ac.uk

Antolín Sánchez Cuervo
Instituto de Filosofía, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC),
Madrid
antolin.scuervo@cchs.csic.es

As the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) came to an end and General Francisco Franco began to build a dictatorial regime which would survive until his death in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Spaniards of all classes and backgrounds who had opposed the military rebellion which initiated the war and remained loyal to the democratically elected Republican government were forced into exile. Amongst them were the vast majority of Spain's artists, writers and intellectuals, and of all the Spanish philosophers whose works constitute the philosophical corpus of Spanish Republican Exile of 1939 the most well-known today is María Zambrano (1904-1991). While the philosophical writings of important thinkers such as José Gaos, Eduardo Nicol, Juan D. García Bacca o Joaquín Xirau – to name but a few – have not attracted the critical attention they deserve, increasing interest has been shown in the works of Zambrano, especially since 2004, the centenary of her birth. There are no doubt many reasons why this is so: institutional recognition of the importance of her work within Spain since her return there from exile in 1984, which is reflected in the creation in her home town of Vélez-Málaga in 1987 of the María Zambrano Foundation which is now home to her immense archive; the award of the Cervantes Prize in 1988 – the first time it was ever awarded to a woman; the increasing number of conferences and academic activities being organised to explore her life and thought; and the on-going project to publish her *Complete Works* in eight volumes under the direction of Jesús Moreno Sanz.¹ However, the most

¹Zambrano's *Obras completas* are being published by Galaxia Gutenberg (Barcelona). The following volumes have already appeared in print – Vol. 1 (2015): *Horizonte del liberalismo* [The Horizon of Liberalism] (1930) , *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* [Intellectuals in the Drama of Spain] (1937), *Pensamiento y poesía en*

important reason is undoubtedly the attraction of her work itself and its potential to inspire critical thought and reflection. Zambrano represents a unique, personal voice which engages in a highly original manner with some of the fundamental problems of our times and within the main currents of contemporary thought. Her life and the development of her ideas are marked, like those of her contemporaries Walter Benjamin, Edmund Husserl, Hannah Arendt or Theodor Adorno, by the crisis of modernity that culminated in the two World Wars.

Taken as a whole, Zambrano's philosophical works constitute a meditation on the radical crisis which emerges from our experience of war and barbarism in relation not only to modes of rational thought today, but to Western humanism from its tragic origins in ancient Greece. It is an ambitious, complex and unfinished meditation which seeks to return to the source of our battered humanism and its great failures, to rediscover its genealogy in the hope of developing new rational propositions which might lead to a new, non-violent, beginning for humanity today. As a Spanish Republican exile, an experience which in itself is another manifestation of that crisis, Zambrano understood that the collapse of Europe was a symptom of the radical demise of modernity and its systems of thought. She devoted her philosophical career to thinking through that crisis and to reconstructing alternatives to it.

The concept most readily associated with Zambrano's thought is 'poetic reason', a concept which resonates profoundly with a number of present-day issues, questions and debates which lie at the heart of this Spanish philosopher's meditation. These include: the need to re-signify both the meaning and mission of philosophy itself in the light of its now forgotten links with other forms of knowledge and thought, in particular poetry and religion; debates over secularization and the legitimacy of heterodox forms of thought close to mysticism; the implications of this heterodoxy for a feminist vision of philosophy; the place, yet to be rediscovered, of Spain's philosophical and literary tradition in the context of Western thought; her engagement with writers and thinkers of the past from the authors of Greek tragedies to more contemporary figures such as Nietzsche and Heidegger; an investment in a new anthropology of the human, where sacrifice and violence have no place

la vida española [Thought and Poetry in Spanish Life] (1939) and *Filosofía y poesía* [Philosophy and Poetry] (1939); Vol. II (2016): *Nostalgia y esperanza de un mundo mejor* [Nostalgia and Hope for a Better World] (1940), *La agonía de Europa* [The Agony of Europe] (1945), *La confesión: género literario y método* [The Confession: Literary Genre and Method] (1943), *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* [The Living Thought of Seneca] (1944) and *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* [Towards a Knowledge of the Soul] (1950); Vol. III (2011): *Persona y democracia* [Person and Democracy] (1958), *Los sueños y el tiempo* [Dreams and Time] (1955-1960), *El sueño creador* [The Creative Dream] (1965), *La España de Galdós* [The Spain of Gladós] (1960) and *España, sueño y verdad* [Spain, Dream and Truth] (1965, y 1982) and *La tumba de Antígona* [The Tomb of Antigone] (1967); Vol. IV (2014): *Escritos autobiográficos, Delirios. Poemas (1928-1990)* [Autobiographical Writings, Deliriums. Poems (1928-1990)] and *Delirio y destino* [Delirium and Destiny] (1999) (1952).

and radical democracy is widespread; the proposal of a new ‘aurora’ (dawn), a history lived against the grain of the tyranny of modern temporality, and instead attuned to the intimate, submerged times that memory and its ruins reveal; her commitment to political reality and the metaphor of radical exile as bare life, and a defence of the margin as a space of hope, critique and renewal. In short, Zambrano’s writings provide us with multiple echoes of many of the most important philosophical questions of our times. She produced the kind of seminal work that can productively illuminate fields of, and approaches to, enquiry ranging from democracy, totalitarianism, and feminism, to exile, diaspora and memory.

These are only some of the many issues explored by Zambrano. Taken together, they form a critical constellation within which her meditation developed and matured. Polymorphic and polyphonic, open and porous, highly suggestive and inquisitive, it is this constellation which makes Zambrano a uniquely attractive thinker and which explains the growing interest in her life and works in recent years both within and beyond academia. It is precisely because of the wide and diverse range of themes explored and perspectives adopted in relation to Zambrano’s works that her thought, as is the case with other women thinkers of the twentieth century like Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil, is more or less inexhaustible. There are many aspects and facets of her work that still require investigation. Although there have been a significant number of academic publications, doctoral dissertations and conferences on the works of Zambrano, the vast majority of these have been in Spanish. There has, in effect, been a boom in Zambrano studies in the Spanish-speaking world which has resonated to some degree in other countries in Europe, but, until recently, very much less so in the Anglophone world.

This volume seeks to help fill this void and to locate Zambrano’s philosophical thought alongside that of other more widely recognised thinkers in the Western world. This was the main driving force behind the international conference *María Zambrano Amongst the Philosophers. A Reconsideration* which we organised at Birkbeck College, University of London, on the 21-22 of May 2015. The aim of the conference was to consider the work of María Zambrano in an international context, and to recognise that while her thought can be seen as the expression of a Spanish woman whose life was shaped first by the promise and expectations of the Second Spanish Republican and later by more than forty years in exile, it is also the voice of a European whose work needs to be set within the contexts of both the great philosophical debates, currents and problems facing the Europe of her time and contemporary philosophy more widely. In other words, we felt it was important to rescue Zambrano from a marginal position – as a Spanish philosopher in the context of European

thought, as a woman, and as an exile – and to recognise the centrality of her thought to Western philosophy in the twentieth century. Taking as a starting point the notion that Zambrano’s work had not been considered within this context with sufficient precision and complexity, the conference papers focused on the links between Zambrano’s thought and a wide range of themes and ideas associated with other European thinkers including, Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School, Husserl and Jan Patočka’s reflections on Europe, a psychoanalytical reading of the experience of exile, a reading of the metaphor of light in the works of Zambrano through the works of Jacques Derrida y Hans Blumenberg, and present day debates around the crisis and reconstruction of the subject. The point of establishing these connexions was not to argue that Zambrano was directly influenced by or, in turn, that she influenced herself the work of these other philosophers. Given the precarious and erratic conditions under which she had to work and publish in exile, together with the fact that she wrote in a ‘minor’ philosophical language, Spanish, the conditions of possibility for such direct influences and dialogues to occur were most of the time missing. Instead, the aim in exploring these plausible connections was, and is, to render visible a commonality of philosophical concerns, and the originality and worth of Zambrano’s responses to them; to locate Zambrano conceptually and critically where she deserves and where she belongs but is rarely acknowledged to be in any major philosophical language: amongst the philosophers.

The articles in the present volume derive from some of these conference contributions. They are presented here in chronological order of the philosophical concern that they address. In ‘María Zambrano’s Theory of Subjectivity and Modal Ontology’ Karolina Enquist Källgren argues that Zambrano is one of the first early 20th century philosophers to treat subjectivity in terms of performativity and co-creation which, furthermore, can be read as an engagement with the philosophies of both Aristotle and Kant, where human subjectivity is understood as a tension between embodiment and transcendental capacities. In the figure of the ruin, Enquist Källgren states, Zambrano engages Aristotelian physics in order to describe a more passive and a more active mode of the human being, where the latter is equal to active and embodied subjectivity. In turn, in the figure of the soul Zambrano describes the human capacities by which the movement between passive and active modes of being occur, and here she engages Kantian critical philosophy. The author sees in Zambrano’s theory of subjectivity a modal ontology describing the condition of possibility of human existence and that this has important ethical implications since it presupposes the presence of an ‘other’ towards which the expression is directed. As a consequence, the author concludes, Zambrano’s theory of subjectivity can be seen to be

directly connected not only to her political and ethical project – and more profoundly than is revealed in her explicitly political books – but also to contemporary debates about individual identification and performativity. In ‘The Reader of Confession in María Zambrano’ Patricia Palomar Galdón approaches Zambrano’s concept of confession as a literary genre in dialogue with theories of reception. Her article traces confession’s connections with Zambrano’s most relevant philosophical preoccupations. The real purpose of confession is to induce the reader to action, not to contemplation. To understand the effects of confession in the reader, Palomar Galdón takes recourse first to Mijail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘confessional self-accounting,’ and then to reception theory in the work of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and the importance of the performative element in literary writing; to José María Pozuelo Yvancos’ study of autobiography and, finally, to Francisco Marín Díez Fisher’s account of confession itself. These explorations lead to an affirmation of the ethical implications in Zambrano’s concept of confession, of the latter’s capacity, within the parameters of literature, to change society and to intervene in historical periods of crisis. Crisis is therefore for Zambrano, Palomar Galdón concludes, a sign of history moving, something inherent to life’s course, and therefore to be embraced. Confession can only become a method if it introduces changes in our society, and these modifications can only be properly understood through the role of the reader.

In the course of the 20th century, many phenomenologists tried to develop a philosophical understanding of Europe. This philosophical definition of Europe radically differs from the general understanding which takes Europe to be a geographical and political entity. Following Edmund Husserl, philosophers interpreted Europe as a ‘spiritual shape’ of which philosophy is the spiritual heir. The origins of this culture of rationality are suspected in Ancient Greece of the 7th/6th century B.C. where a novel and unprecedented ‘theoretical attitude’ originated. This new theoretical attitude has shaped the spirit of Europe ever since. Following this understanding, Europe is defined as a project or the effect of a project of self-transparent rationality. Although many of the major proponents of phenomenology – Martin Heidegger, Jan Patočka, Jacques Derrida, and others – followed this interpretation in their own respective ways, this single genealogy is far from unquestionable. In its raising the issue of the spiritual shape of Europe, and what determined its spiritual life, activity and creation, the one thing which seems to be distinctly missing is religion. In this context, ‘The Reasons of Europe. Edmund Husserl, Jan Patočka and María Zambrano’ sees Zambrano’s work as a contribution to a genealogical project the purpose of which is to mobilise this spiritual shape of Europe so that it may encompass many different forms of reason and, in so doing,

eradicate the myth of a historical-political origin. By comparing the work of the Edmund Husserl and Jan Patočka with that of María Zambrano, Christian Sternad explores how the Spaniard was one of a handful of philosophers who developed a counter-genealogy of European reason through an assessment of the importance of Christianity in its definition. In 'María Zambrano's and Albert Camus's Communal Ethic,' Roberta Johnson explores the proximity of Zambrano's ideas to existentialism and, more specifically, to the work of Albert Camus. Both authors, Johnson argues, converged on the matter of ethical conscience, focusing their ethical positions especially on the concepts of exile and solitude and the human being's central challenge to overcoming these conditions in order to achieve ethical solidarity. To demonstrate this point, Johnson's article focuses on an analysis of how Zambrano deployed her literary-ethical vision in three works: *Delirio de Antígona* [Antigone's Delirium] (1947-48), *Delirio y destino* [Delirium and Destiny] (1952), and *La tumba de Antígona* [The Tomb of Antigone] (1967), in comparison with Camus' *The Plague* (1947). The identification of characters with differentiated moral positions exposed to extreme situations and forced to make moral choices and the use of third person, neutral narrative voice, both tend to deemphasize the centrality of the modern, liberal, independent individual. Instead, they allow both authors to compare collective versus individual conscience and consciousness, and to search for a sense of community or communal experience as the only one capable of revealing an ethical human existence.

The members of the Institute for Social Research, better known as the Frankfurt School, are praised for having identified that instrumental reason lies at the very foundation of modernity. Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin all developed a critique of society and its established patterns of rationality known as Critical Theory. Although there is much that separates the thought of the Frankfurt School from that of María Zambrano, Beatriz Caballero Rodríguez argues in 'Zambrano's Poetic Reason in the Light of Frankfurtian Critical Theory' that there are also significant parallels which deserve to be explored. Her article examines different aspects of these parallels: the irrationality behind the façade of rationalism and the consequent pursuit of an alternative framework of rationality; the confrontation of the incongruities and the injustices of totalitarian ideology; the ethical and political the core of critique; the consideration of style as a materialization of methodology and education as a political act. Jonathan Davidoff proposes another illuminating angle for comparison with aspects of Zambrano's work. In 'Psychoanalytic Reflections upon the Work of María Zambrano,' he argues that, despite María Zambrano's antagonistic stance towards what she called 'Freudism,' her philosophical thinking about

exile and heterodoxy converge with psychoanalysis in aspects that are beyond the limits of her critique. The polysemic sense that the notion of exile had in her work and life, as well as her characterisation of the relation between *philosophy* and *poetry* are reminiscent of epistemological schisms that also cut across the psychoanalytically understood subject. Davidoff claims that Freud's theory of life and death instincts testifies to the fact that he understood that an epistemology that were to account for the human phenomenon could not do without the sensuous, the bodily and the fictional. In this sense, admitting fictional, literary structures into an arguably scientific discipline like psychoanalysis, argues Davidoff, follows a similar concern to that of Zambrano. Conversely, Lacan's notion of *juissance* provides, for Davidoff, room for a psychoanalytic comparison with Zambrano's notion of the sacred as manifested in her use of notions such as envy, melancholy, ecstasy, love, gratitude and repetition. Moreover, Davidoff also asserts that it is worth comparing the way in which their thinking evolved from being 'metaphysical' to more 'mystical' and to what ends. Both philosophers in their later work addressed the points of convergence in mythical, unattainable homelands which posit those original unities, those moments of Genesis, as far away from the dangers of normativity as any form of thought can be. More productive and innovative connections are explored in María Belén Castañón Moreschi's 'Rethinking the Metaphor of Light. María Zambrano in Dialogue with Jacques Derrida and Hans Blumenberg.' This article proposes a theoretical dialogue that links the centrality of the metaphor of light in María Zambrano's work with the reflections on this topic by Jacques Derrida and Hans Blumenberg. Castañón Moreschi explores a common concern in all three for the nature of metaphor in relation to philosophical thought seeking to answer questions such as: How should the proliferation of metaphors in philosophical texts be understood? What are the defining characteristics of metaphor that have historically linked it to philosophy? Is it possible to think philosophically without metaphors? The answers to these questions, our author tells us, are especially relevant to the work of the three thinkers. They represent a way of approaching philosophy that moves away from a conception of it, inherited from Cartesianism, as a logical knowledge that progresses through the development of concepts, and approaches metaphor beyond purely aesthetic or rhetorical concerns. Specifically, in relation to the metaphor of light, the author argues that Zambrano introduces through it a solid critique to rationalism and announces the metaphor of the Dawn as a new form of knowledge. This new intonation of the metaphor of light opens up an unexplored direction in Spanish thought, Castañón Moreschi tells us, by assuming the political implications of this metaphor and criticizing its heliopolitical configuration. Indeed, Zambrano declares the significance of the metaphor of

the sun linked to the sacrificial structure of history, particularly of Spain, and its necessary overcoming as the possibility of a radical democracy.

Finally, coming from the field of conflict mediation and the philosophy of mediation, Helena Nadal Sánchez argues that it is possible to include certain basic principles of María Zambrano's philosophical thought both in the practice and in the theory of this field. 'What Can María Zambrano Contribute to Mediation and to the Philosophy of Mediation?' claims that with the philosopher's idea of hope it is possible to build new resources that would be most effective for parties in conflict to understand each other. Zambrano's concept of hope provides a new perspective from which to see dispute resolution methodologies that is essential in order to understand the world of human conflict, what the author of the article calls 'emancipatory mediation.' Nadal Sánchez's analysis is a path to an 'applied Zambrano' that puts to concrete uses the fundamental premise of the philosopher's endeavour, namely an alternative to life lived under the dictates of a sacrificial history.

Introduction to María Zambrano's work and to this volume's anthology in translation

The reframing of Zambrano's work within the context of the most critical and relevant aspects of contemporary thought that this volume proposes reveals her to be a thinker deeply concerned by, to paraphrase the title of one of her books, 'the agony of Europe'. This is an aspect of her work which has not featured heavily in the many critical approaches to her work, and even less so in the limited critical bibliography which exists in English. That Zambrano's critique of rationalism and totality was a direct result of her considering them responsible for the catastrophes of modern times and the proliferation of authoritarianism will not strike anyone familiar with twentieth century political philosophy as particularly original. However, what is remarkable, and highly questionable, is that her critique, despite its relevance, is so little known beyond the borders of Spain, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world. With the exception of some articles in specialist journals, there are very few studies in English of Zambrano's work. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, for example, lists her as one of many Spanish Republican philosophers (including amongst others Joaquin Xirau (1895–1946), José Ferrater Mora (1912–1991), José Gaos (1900–1969), Juan D. García Bacca (1901–1992), José Medina Echevarría (1903–1977), who went into exile at the end of the Spanish Civil War but provides no information or discussion of any aspect of her life or works. Indeed, of those listed, only Ferrater Mora and García Mora are mentioned, but only briefly, in other entries. The only twentieth century Spanish philosopher to receive any

significant coverage is José Ortega y Gasset. Fortunately, in the last few years, this landscape has begun to change and several books on Zambrano have now appeared for an English readership. These include: Madeleine Cámara y Luis Ortega Hurtado (eds.), *Between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean* (Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic monographs, 2014); *María Zambrano in Dialogue. A Bilingual Anthology*, a monographic issue of the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* edited by Lena Burgos-Lafuente and Tatjana Gajic (January 2016); Beatriz Caballero, *María Zambrano. A Life of Poetic Reason and Political Commitment* (University of Wales Press, 2017); and most recently, Xon de Ros y Daniela Omlor (eds.), *The Cultural Legacy of María Zambrano* (Oxford, Legenda, 2017).

This recent flurry of publications on María Zambrano is an important point of departure for readers in English but they only begin to scratch the surface. *María Zambrano amongst the Philosophers* brings new perspectives to bear by offering insights into and reflections on, as well as keys to interpreting, the relation of Zambrano's thought to continental philosophy and her place in it which are not explored in the works cited, nor, in some cases, in the already vast bibliography on her work which has been published in Spanish and in other languages. This, however, is only one part of this project. The second is constituted by Part Two of the volume which offers an English readership an anthology of translated texts and so more direct and immediate access to Zambrano's writing. These translated texts include some complete short essays and fragments of some of her more important works such as *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* [Towards and Knowledge of the Soul, 1934], *Persona y democracia* [Persona and Democracy, 1959], *Claros del bosque* [Clearings in the Forest, 1977] and *Los bienaventurados* [The Blessed, 1991]. The texts have been chosen with the dual aims of providing access to some of Zambrano's key ideas (a critique of rationalist thought and human understanding, the crisis of modernity, the concept of poetic reason, and reflections on power and love, confession and on exile and the human condition), and complementing the critical readings in Part One. This is a significant contribution to scholarship on Zambrano in English as, to date, very few of her works have been translated into English. A very early translation of 'Dreams and Literary Creation' by Elaine K Miller appeared in 1966 in the book *The Dream and Human Society* edited by Gustave E. Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois. More recently, two of Zambrano's essays have appeared in book form: *Delirium and Destiny. A Spaniard in her Twenties* (1999) translated by Carol Maier, and *Confession* published in *Two Confessions. María Zambrano and Rosa Chacel* (2015) by Noël Valis; and José Rodríguez García has translated two essays which appeared in

the academic journal *Modernist Cultures* 7:1 (2012): ‘Ruins. A Metaphor of Hope’ and ‘Ruins.’

The anthology included in the second part of this volume is offered as an invitation to navigate the full expanse of the ocean that is the philosophical work of María Zambrano. The texts chosen represent small islands which might guide the reader on this voyage. While this metaphor may seem to be rather simple and hackneyed, it does in fact correspond faithfully to Zambrano’s thought; in fact, it is a metaphor to which she often has recourse, especially when referring to the survival of modern man in the great shipwreck of western reason. To be more precise, during her years in exile in Cuba and Puerto Rico, in the decisive decade of the 1940s, the ‘islands’ would be the metaphorical expression of a reality submerged beneath the appearance of the catastrophic events of history and which emerges to offer hope when faced with the exhaustion on the continents. *Isla de Puerto Rico. Nostalgia y esperanza de un mundo mejor* (The Island of Puerto Rico. Nostalgia and Hope for a Better World, 1940) addresses this very question, without forgetting the condition of inhabiting an island which defines the exile and the ‘blessed’ in general, two figures which, for Zambrano, represent ‘true man’, as expressed in the last book she published during her lifetime, *Los bienaventurados* (The Blessed, 1991). The last text selected for the anthology of this volume is taken from this book.

This allusion to the shipwreck is obligatory in a century as particularly violent as the twentieth of which Zambrano was a witness more or less from beginning to end. On the one hand, Zambrano’s philosophical education took shape in the interwar period, a time which is key to understanding both the deeply critical outlook which European thought would adopt and, in some, the tendency towards totalitarianism. On the other, one of her last articles, ‘Los peligros de la paz’ [The Dangers of Peace] published in Spanish national newspaper *Diario 16* on 24 November 1990, was a critique of the first war in Iraq. Nor should we forget, obviously, Zambrano’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the reason for her long exile and the true beginning, in effect, of the Second World War. All of these experiences conditioned the life and works of Zambrano. Her voyage, therefore, took place in the middle of an ocean full of shipwrecks, hers as well as those of so many others, the shipwrecks of her personal biography as well as those of the social groups of which she formed a part: the unstable liberal bourgeoisie taking shape around the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and the

vague reformist atmosphere it had created;² the new citizenry of the progressive Second Spanish Republic, proclaimed in 1931 with enormous popular support, raising the hopes of intellectuals like Zambrano that Spain could become a democratic, socially just nation state; the ‘pueblo’ with whom the deep layers of Spain’s past and the anonymous subjectivity of the Spanish people were identified; the proclamation of the Second Republic and the civil war as vehicles for the surfacing of their ‘delirium’, in other words, the cathartic expression of realities which had remained abject and forgotten.³ And there were, of course, other, grander biographies, that of the Spanish nation which was in the middle of reinventing itself after the proclamation of the Second Republic and that of Europe which found expression in so many attempts to construct a supposedly emancipated subject who would be called upon to reconcile reason and reality. All of these biographies, the personal and the social, the small and the large, come together in Zambrano’s writings to produce a reconsideration of philosophy as memory and confession, one made urgent by the need to understand what had happened and what were the reasons for the shipwreck. Memory was also essential in order to rescue what had slowly become submerged (as a result of one shipwreck after another) and which was itself essential in order to start afresh. It is not by accident that it is in her essay *La confesión* [Confession] that Zambrano delves deeply into one of her most characteristic images, Plato’s prisoner in the cave, in search of what he forgot after his hasty exit towards the light of the sun. Or, as she says at the beginning of *Filosofía y poesía* (Philosophy and Poetry, 1939), at the very beginning of her exile with the experience of war still in her bones, ‘the hell of light’, a great metaphor, in this case, for the blinding reason of the West which, through violence, has ceased to see reality, and which Zambrano will oppose with the image of the ‘shadows of salvation’.⁴

Voyage, shipwreck, islands, exile, delirium, the people, confession, memory, the shadows... These are just some of the terms which, at times functioning more like metaphors and at others like symbols, could well form a kind of Zambranian philosophical constellation.

²The Free Educational Institution was founded in Spain in 1876 by a group of university professors deeply unhappy with the education system of the time. It was a private, secular institution inspired by the works of the German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. It was associated generally with the liberal, regenerationist movement in Spain at the turn of the 20th century and survived until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

³This is one of the themes which pervades Zambrano’s autobiographical *Delirio y destino. Los veinte años de una Española* first written in 1953, although not published in its full version until 1998 (*Delirium and Destiny. A Spaniard in her Twenties*, 1999).

⁴María Zambrano, *Filosofía y poesía*, ed. Pedro Chacón y Mariano Rodríguez, in *Libros (1930-1939)*, vol I of *Obras completas*. [Complete Works I, Books (1930-1939)], ed. Jesús Moreno Sanz (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2015), 686.

Some of these terms, but not all of them, resonate quite clearly with the thought of one of Zambrano's most influential teachers, José Ortega y Gasset, the leader of the so-called Madrid School of philosophy. In effect, only the first two – voyage and shipwreck – do so with any significance and while they suggest the imprint of Ortega on her thought, the others are far enough removed from his thought to show that this imprint was always relative and nuanced. Zambrano was a heterodox pupil of Ortega, in effect the most heterodox and for that reason the most independent and creative. Between Ortega's 'vital reason' and the 'poetic reason' which matured as a concept throughout Zambrano's work, there is both continuity and an abyss. Between the two, there are numerous differences of many kinds: political, especially during and after the Civil War, but also, and almost from the very first moment, intellectual and even personal. *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* [Towards a Knowledge of the Soul], the essay from which the first text in this anthology is taken, was the cause of one of these differences. What happened after publication of the essay is well known: Ortega calls Zambrano to his office, he receives her standing with the words: 'You have not reached here (pointing to his chest) and you already want to go far', after which she left in tears to take a walk down the Gran Vía in Madrid. What was in the essay that could have irritated her teacher so much?

To begin with, the audacity and independence of his student, not to mention the fact of her being a woman, the only one, in effect, who stood out in the undoubtedly patriarchal environment of the Madrid School and the academic discipline of philosophy in Spain at that time, in spite of the many, if fleeting, attempts made by Republican feminists to change things. However, more than anything, it was because Zambrano's essay was different; it sought to take Ortega's vital reason beyond itself, down paths which Ortega himself had glimpsed but never followed. With his theory of vital reason, Ortega had proposed an alternative way out of the reductionism of idealism and positivism. Faced with the selective primacy of speculative reason on the one hand, and scientific reason on the other, Ortega had reclaimed the experience of life as such, in its concrete circumstances and desires, as a radical reality and the cornerstone of the reform of reason – this is the basis of the comparisons which are often drawn between Ortega and Husserl's concept of the 'life-world' or *Lebenswelt*.

However, from Zambrano's critical perspective, although Ortega's concept of 'life', had set out some guidelines from its earliest formulation in *Meditaciones del Quijote* (*Meditations on Quixote*, 1914), it was insufficient to carry the full weight of the reform of reason. In her view, vital reason had not succeeded in freeing itself completely from the

reductionism of modern rationalism. What Ortega proposed was not, of course, idealism or positivism, but it shared something important with them: the rejection of everything which modern, canonical rationality – in short, philosophical tradition – had always excluded from any definition of reason, that is, passion, desire, hope, feelings and the imagination. This is why Zambrano says in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* [Towards a Knowledge of the Soul] that it is necessary to go beyond vital reason in search of an integral reason or the ‘reason of man’s whole life,’⁵ or, citing Scheler, of ‘an order of the heart,’⁶ or, to be precise, a knowledge of the soul, this being understood as the core of life, that vital connection the human has with the divine and the natural which idealism, first, had reduced to a metaphysical object and positivism then to a notion within scientific psychology.

Zambrano had already provided a glimpse of this knowledge in her first book, *Horizonte del liberalismo* [The Horizon of Liberalism, 1930]. At that moment, it was the political roots of the question which had led her to transcend the limits of vital reason and to discover the same condition of possibility for all logical and analytical thought: intuition, in the broadest sense of the term. In other words, as the epistemological resource of an integral reason or as a non-dogmatic revelation which resolves the contradictions of liberalism in its canonical sense: it frees man as an individual, as a subject in law and, of course, as a property owner, but at the cost of isolating him and destroying him beneath a regime of calculating, destructive and pragmatic reason which has broken the links with its originary vitality. In other words, a liberalism which demands freedom in the fields of politics, the law, culture and religion while becoming an agent of social and economic domination and of the rift between elites and masses. Faced with this, Zambrano demanded a ‘new liberalism’ which would recover its roots in that originary vitality while avoiding its desire to dominate. To put this another way, a liberalism which would be audacious, utopian and ingenuous, and incompatible with the logic of capital; a liberalism much closer to the ethical socialism of Fernando de los Ríos and other members of the so-called Generation of 1914 with their links to the Institución Libre de Enseñanza than to the increasingly conservative, and even hostile to the Second Republic, liberalism of Ortega.

Between the publication of *Horizonte de liberalismo* and *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* the distance between teacher and student had only increased. By 1934, the political positions of both were becoming increasingly divergent and the generational abyss ever deeper. Zambrano’s new integrating reason did not fit comfortably within the limits of vital

⁵ Ibid., 435

⁶ Ibid., 439

reason. In reality, what she was proposing by then, succinctly but clearly, was what she would later call ‘poetic reason’, a term she would only formulate explicitly a few years later during the Spanish Civil War. She first used the term in the epilogue of an anthology of works by Chilean poets who wrote in favour of the Spanish Republic, *Madre España* [Mother Spain], which was published in 1937 during her stay in Santiago de Chile. Written in the form of a dedication ‘A los poetas chilenos de *Madre España*’ [To the Chilean Poets of Mother Spain] whom she thanks for their contribution to ‘the Spanish struggle’, Zambrano refers in this text to the insufficiency of ‘pain’ and of ‘passivity’ on their own as much as of ‘the fierce armed struggle’ as means of confronting the Spanish tragedy of the day. In addition, she argues, poetic reason is needed, one which ‘encuentra en instantáneo descubrimiento lo que la inteligencia desgrana paso a paso en sus elementos’ [is capable of discovering instantly what is little by little lost in the elements of intelligence].⁷ Zambrano would use this term again immediately afterwards, having returned to Spain, in an article in the journal *Hora de España* [Hour of Spain], ‘*La guerra de Antonio Machado*’ [‘The War’ by Antonio Machado, December 1937]. There she alludes to a ‘[r]azón poética, de honda raíz de amor [poetic reason, with a deep root in love]’⁸ in relation to the poet Machado who, it should be noted, had a significant influence on her. However, years later, in the 1980s, looking back on her works, Zambrano would acknowledge that what she had been proposing in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* was, without her being aware of it at the time, a ‘poetic reason.’⁹ For this reason, and for the others noted above, this essay is of particular relevance at the very beginning of Zambrano’s intellectual journey. It is a programmatic and landmark essay for her first period which runs from her first writings at the end of the 1920s until the end of the Spanish Civil War and the beginnings of her long exile.

La reforma del entendimiento español [The Reform of Human Understanding], the second of Zambrano’s essays which features in the Anthology of this volume is also of particular importance as it introduces us directly to her writings on the Civil War and to one of her most important themes, her interpretation of Spanish thought. These two themes, in effect, go hand-in-hand: it is precisely the tragedy of war and fight against fascism which

⁷María Zambrano, *Los intelectuales en el drama de España y otros escritos de la Guerra Civil* [The Intellectuals in the Drama of Spain and Other Writing of the Civil War], ed. Antolín Sánchez Cuervo, in vol I of *Obras completas*, 377-8

⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹For example in María Zambrano, *Escritos autobiográficos. Delirios. Poemas (1928-1990). Delirio y destino (1952)*, vol VI of *Obras completas*. [Complete Works. Autobiographical Writings. Deliriums. Poems (1928-90). Delirium and Destiny (1952)], ed. Goretti Ramírez and Jesús Moreno Sanz (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014), 610.

obliged Republican intellectuals to compensate for the misrepresentation of Spanish cultural traditions offered by fascism. Although Zambrano saw fascism as a European phenomenon, she never lost sight of its expression in the national context. In this regard, she exposed the false and oligarchical nature of the nationalism promoted by Spanish fascism, the result of a mystification which included a traditionalist image, a manipulation of the discourse on decadence and some clichés imported from Italian fascism.

It is also the case that, precisely because of the fascists' belligerent nationalism, Zambrano's appeal to Spanish thought could not avoid a certain militant, apologetic and nationalistic tone. Her nationalist position was, however, quite the opposite from that of fascists and in support of populism, a legitimate form of populism which was based on a penetrating reflection on the past. Several influences from Spanish thought and literature from the first third of the century are revealed in Zambrano's meditations on the Spanish past: the concept of 'intra-history' coined by Miguel de Unamuno, Spain's 'true tradition,' a certain essentialist and romantic residue from the Generation of 1898 although with a serious hint of historicism. Zambrano linked to this idea the concerns of the Generation of 1914 and the Institución Libre de Enseñanza with populist culture. All of these influences, however, become fused and metabolised within an original interpretation which cannot by any means be reduced to a fight with traditionalism and fascism over what constituted the true cultural nation, and who could legitimately claim access to it. Zambrano appeals to the people in the name of a veiled and intimate tradition, invoking a collective subject which had been falsified and forgotten, suppressed and misunderstood by liberal intellectuals. Zambrano would pick up this concept two decades later, having left behind the feverish rhetoric of war, in one of her most important books, *Persona y democracia* (Person and Democracy, 1958). Here, in an extract included in our anthology, she identifies the people with '[t]he reality of the concrete-human, simply. The *substratum* of all history. The subject on which every structure stands, and to which every change occurs; matter to every social and political form; the store of human life at hand to fund any enterprise; in short—substance.¹⁰

Beyond this populism, Zambrano will discover in the depths of Spanish traditional culture an inexhaustible source of inspiration which will help her reply to the violence, not now in Spain, but also in Europe. The fascism overwhelming the continent is for Zambrano not only a mass movement but also, and above all, the catastrophic outcome of modern

¹⁰María Zambrano, *Persona y democracia*, ed María Luisa Maillard, in vol. III of *Obras completas*, ed. Jesús Moreno Sanz (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011), 477.

rationality. Spanish thought, lacking historically in concepts and clear ideas, was, however, and for that very reason, given over to other ways of knowing and illuminating life. Zambrano will articulate these heterodoxies in the context of the idealism of great European culture as responses to the nightmares of rationalism. According to Zambrano – as she notes in *La reforma del entendimiento español* – the Spanish lack of a philosophical tradition derived from the decadence and the nihilistic will of the Spanish State, which had abandoned thought after its last great expression in the School of Salamanca. As a result, the State was taken over by a form of inertia, detached and floating in a sea of failure. In accounting for the melancholy of the historical failure, a new aesthetic form, the novel, and one novel in particular, Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, would find, in addition, a vehicle through which impoverished and 'atheoretical' Spanish thought was able to articulate new arguments and possibilities.

Heterodox modes of knowing and inhabiting reality are illuminated in Cervantes' novel. Firstly, the pairing of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza personify a view of the social as communion and reaching out to one's fellow man, which stands against the eminently egological and solipsistic condition of the modern subject as constructed by the great idealist European tradition.

Secondly, the concept of Spanish realism and Spanish materialism, understood as a forceful attitude of attachment to, and even adoration of, the concrete and beating materiality of life that is free from conceptual abstractions and reductionism, later to be developed in *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española* [Thought and Poetry in Spanish Life, 1939]. This attachment does not represent a will to dominate or to commit violence to reality – as would be the case when European idealist culture constructed its practical reason –, but admiration for reality in its fleeting vital and concrete manifestations. This is what lies behind Zambrano's predilection for inns, roadways, forests as metaphors for the thinking process. Cervantes, by lighting up through his narrative a knowledge which was non-violent and not inspired by failure, channelled a pure will, one incapable of methodical speculation and of objectively reducing reality. This was a poetic knowledge dwelling in the deepest of Spanish cultural traditions, to which Zambrano would dedicate several of her works, and in which she would find fruitful sources of inspiration as her concept of poetic reason matured.

By contrast, that form of knowledge characteristic of cartesian modernity and manifest in idealism was intent on subjugating reality and, as such, was for Zambrano the key mechanism of the totalitarian logics and of their violent resolution in the Europe of her time. Of course, Europe was also one of her great preoccupations and one of the great horizons in

her reflections. Europe represented the great project of Western humanism which had been abandoned in the end, which she had retraced to its origins in Greek tragedy, and which in the middle of the 20th century it was necessary to rectify, rethink and reshape.

La agonía de Europa [The Agony of Europe] was published in 1945, when Zambrano was still suffering the effects of a Europe at war, where she had had to abandon her mother and sister – the latter tortured by the Gestapo during the German occupation of Paris, as she escaped to America. The book included four articles which had been published in different journals in the preceding years. The first of these, published in 1940 and bearing the same title as the book, is included in the anthology, followed by several extracts from what would later become the book *Persona y democracia* (1958) mentioned above. Between these two publications, a stage in the vital and intellectual journey of Zambrano seems, *grosso modo*, to open and close. This stage is characterised, amongst other things, by her detailed analysis of the crisis of the West, her reflections on its origins and manifestations, and the great diagnoses of its present state and future prospects.

It is not difficult to perceive how important Zambrano's reflections on Europe would become during this stage. She would return to Europe in 1953 with her sister Araceli after her exile in Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico. It was, in fact, on these islands that *La agonía de Europa* took shape along with *La confesión* mentioned above. This was not by chance as there is a strong connection between the two books. In both, Zambrano appeals, explicitly and implicitly, to Augustinian interiority as the nucleus of a project which had inspired Europe and its great democratic principles. However, in Zambrano's view, Europe had betrayed itself due to its excessive confidence in scientific knowledge, generating with it a 'naturalism' which inhibited the experiences and desires, beginning with hope, which were characteristic of Augustinian interiority. This 'naturalism,' for its part, was the expression of rational consciousness, reducing time to linear succession and history to a supposedly natural and clear reflection of what has happened. For Zambrano – as she proposes in *Persona y democracia* during her exile in Rome – this is what underlies the sacrificial logic which European man has displayed ever since he acquired a historical consciousness. This man is in tragic conflict, torn between his condition of being half-born and his need to transcend himself, by projecting his hope onto time. This is something he has never been able to realise, except in exceptional and fleeting moments, without producing victims and without creating what Zambrano calls idols – the state, the future, universal spirit. For Zambrano, the history of the West is eminently tragic and sacrificial because it has always resolved itself by the constant abandoning of hope and the acceptance of its failures. Against it, Zambrano

proposes the possibility of an ‘ethical history’ in which tragic conflict finds a liberating way out. This is an ethical consciousness of the present which allows the failed past to speak, thereby making possible something new which is capable of interrupting the continuum of dominant sacrificial inertias – the logic of progress. Only when hope takes hold in the middle of an expansive present, in which multiple times breathe and in which the linearity of rational consciousness does not stifle the past which has been repressed, can this sacrificial logic be broken. This kind of consciousness had, in fact, been the key to the Republican experiment of 1931, just as Zambrano had recorded it in her autobiographical essay *Delirio y destino* (1952).

However, the history of the West evolved in a direction which was instead contrary and unfavourable to this possibility. Between despair and exasperation, it moved from a dream state to deification with its resulting procession of idols and victims taken to the extreme. This had been the recent experience of totalitarianism which Zambrano had in mind when developing the ideas not only for *Persona y democracia* but also for its twin publication, the great book *El hombre y lo divino* [Man and the Divine, 1955]. Taking into account the close link between them, we could say that, for Zambrano, totalitarianism was the culmination of the process by which the sacred was transformed into the divine, a process associated in turn with the very unfolding of Western rationalism. Starting from the first faltering steps underpinning the mythological configuration of the Greek gods and tragic poetry, it had found its highest expression in idealism. That the development of this process had culminated, in Hegel, with the closing of the circle, was a most extraordinary and frustrating realisation. Indeed, in idealism the divine dissolves in an absolute knowledge which absorbs and subjugates life, producing as an outcome the emancipation of the human from the divine – deicide. But, at the same time, it continues to feed of it while constructing a superman who, by his permanently unsatisfied need to become a god, is also the perpetual producer of victims. In other words, he needs a ‘sacrificial history’, whose radical consummation lies in the production of an abyss or a fall in history:

Es una enfermedad que se desata y, aún más que una enfermedad, una caída, un abismo que se abre en la historia, y que devora alucinatoriamente siglos enteros —toda una civilización por momentos— sumiéndola en una situación pre-histórica, más bien infra-histórica, como ha sucedido en Europa en el periodo que acaba de transcurrir.

Bajo las ideologías totalitarias transcurría este proceso de endiosamiento, de regreso a través de unos hombres y de un pueblo —a ese nivel en que el hombre devora al hombre literalmente—.

[It is a sickness that breaks out, and, more than any illness, a fall, an abyss that opens in history, and which devours deliriously whole centuries—a whole civilization, at times—plunging it into a pre-historic, or rather into an infra-historical condition, as happened in Europe in the period that has just run its course. Under totalitarian ideologies this process of believing-oneself-divine regressed through some men and one people—to that point where man devours man literally].¹¹

Zambrano will identify this infra-historical situation with the return of the sacred, by which she means the hermetic and opaque depths of reality, the illegible contact with an obscure and impenetrable reality which envelops and smothers consciousness, leaving it in a situation of radical strangeness; in short, the lowest depths of reality which have still not been codified under the categories of the divine. They have left their mark on the evolution of Western philosophical thought up to its failed consummation in idealist culture and its decadent nihilistic manifestations. In this sense, idealism and nihilism will be, in reality, two manifestations of the same phenomenon, namely the withdrawal of the divine and the impossibility of a human experience of the world. Their opposition is only apparent: , –the Nietzschean superman is for Zambrano nothing other than a replica of the superman foreshadowed by Hegel. Idealism, atheism, nihilism and the return of the sacred therefore form a constellation of negations whose catastrophic blossoming is totalitarianism.

The majority of the remaining texts in the anthology explicitly address the theme of exile, which, in the case of Zambrano, is both fundamental and polysemic, as has already been suggested above. If poetic reason is Zambrano's great contribution to philosophy, if Spanish thought is the tradition in which she was mostly educated and inspired, and if Europe was the backdrop to all of her reflections, even during her stays in the Americas, exile is the unifying thread of her life and works. For this reason, the anthology includes her essay 'Carta sobre el exilio' [Letter on Exile, 1961]; her prologue to her unusual theatrical version of Sophocles's *Antigone*, entitled *La tumba de Antígona* [The Tomb of Antigone, 1967]; one of the articles she published after her return from exile which has the eloquent title 'Amo mi exilio' [I Love my Exile, 1989], and an extract from the last book published in her lifetime, *Los bienaventurados* [The Blessed, 1991]. These four texts on exile bring together the different facets of the experience of exile for Zambrano, from tragic suffering to its most liberating meaning for her, passing through the dense reflections which it always inspired in her. The texts form part of her more mature stages, at least chronologically. They were all

¹¹Zambrano, *Persona y democracia*, 426.

written during her exiles in Europe, when Zambrano explicitly adopted a mystical-philosophical perspective and put more emphasis on the exercising of poetic reason than on reflecting upon it. A good example of this is *Claros del bosque* [Clearings in the Forest, 1977], one of her more cryptic books and the source of the extract included in the anthology, 'La metáfora del corazón' [The Metaphor of the Heart]. These questions will stay with her in her later journeys, during her stay in 'La Pièce,' in the forest of Ferney-Voltaire in France (1964-1978), and then in Geneva until her return to Spain in 1984. This is not to say that Zambrano did not put her poetic reason into practice in the early stages of her work, as the difference is one of emphasis. These questions are in many ways more implicit throughout her work where, they carry less weight and are less visible. But neither do we mean that this mystical retreat, which she mainly undertook starting with her stay in Rome and her interest in dreams, made Zambrano abandon her reflections on politics or her preoccupation with history. B Because, is exile not a distinctly political experience by definition? Does it not have to do with the power of the polis, the state, and the nation? Undoubtedly it does. The politics of 'Carta sobre el exilio' lies in its address to the new generation of Spanish non-conformists who, at that time, had begun to demand reforms in Franco's Spain with a view to a possible transition to democracy, but framed around an idea of 'national reconciliation,' that is, at the cost of forgetting the losers in the Civil War and those Republicans forced into exile. This is why Zambrano also took an interest in a civic and political figure such as Antigone as a way of dramatizing her vision of exile, and why she suggested, in *La tumba de Antígona* (and in some fragments of *Los bienaventurados*, the possibility of a new universal cosmopolitanism and citizenship. The fact is that, after *Persona y democracia*, Zambrano would not write another book on ethics, society or politics, and that, furthermore, her vision of exile would acquire greater allegorical density. The theme itself is not new to her, as the semantics of exile impregnate all of her thought, from her first texts from the end of the 1920s, but it is the case that it becomes increasingly allegorical. In any case, and as Zambrano herself declared in her article from 1984, exile had been something 'essential' for her, something similar to a homeland or 'a dimension of an unknown homeland, but which, once it is known, can no longer be renounced.'¹²

We refer to exile in terms of allegory because, for Zambrano, it is a representation of the human condition; or, rather, of the 'true man', an expression she used on numerous occasions, for example to refer to someone that he had called her *alter ego*, the Cuban poet

¹²María Zambrano, 'Amo mi exilio' in vol. VI of *Obras completas*, 777.

José Lezama Lima. Equally, exile represented existence in its radical bareness, what is left to every human being when he has rid himself of reasons and masks, of the arguments and justifications provided by the great culture of Western humanism. Once again, Zambrano is moving here beyond Ortega's concept of circumstance, and also beyond the reductive phenomenological analysis of subjectivity that existentialism was postulating. Indeed, this is the basis of Zambrano's permanent critical dialogue with Heidegger, whose enquiry into being owed a debt to the violence inscribed in that culture, in the same way that his existential categories would be an obstacle to the ethics of bareness and generosity which she proposes in relation to exile.

For Zambrano, the exile is therefore the prisoner in the Platonic cave when he escapes from the blinding light of the sun. He returns then into the shadows in search of what he had forgotten there: a knowledge of the soul, now transformed in Zambrano's mature years into a 'metaphor of the heart'. The exile will decipher it in order to construct a new subject around it, one whose vocation is to listen more than to see, to hope more than to put himself forth. He is a subject who has renounced, therefore, intentional consciousness – and this is the source of Zambrano's ambiguous and difficult relationship, not only with the existential phenomenology of Heidegger, but with any philosophy of intentionality, beginning with Husserl. He is a subject who personifies the hope which has been repressed by the philosophies of history and which brings with it the seed of what, in *Persona y democracia* Zambrano calls 'ethical history'. Such a history implies a new way of understanding humanism, beginning with those areas which Western reason had relegated to obscurity. These areas now acquire light with which existence which continues to be tragic but without the suffocating effects of sacrificial history, is illuminated and, above all, questions. With his mere presence, the exile is capable of inverting the terms of the exception and the rule, because what is legitimate and normal within the dominant discourses is, for him, the cause of scandal. The exile is both a figure of passivity and of interruption, half way between mysticism and politics.

In the same line as numerous figures within contemporary critical thought – such as Hermann Cohen's 'poor man', Georg Simmel's 'stranger', Maurice Blanchot's 'autroui', Jean Luc Nancy's 'eccitas' or the survivor of the concentration camps who battles between survival and sinking in Primo Levi, Zambrano's exile makes real an intimate connection between alterity and interpellation, temporality and interruption. This can be seen, for example, in several fragments of *Los bienaventurados*, whose manuscripts are dated between 1975 and 1977, in the middle of Spain's transition to democracy. This does not seem to be by

chance, as, in these writings as much as in others from the same years,¹³ Zambrano showed herself to be a veiled critic of the transitional process in Spain, one of whose most characteristic features was, precisely, the forgetting of Republican exile and the victims of Francoism in general. If *Carta sobre el exilio* was aimed at the new, rebellious generations of the Spanish mainland, these fragments seem to point towards the elites of post-Francoist Spain. In any case, in these texts, some of which are included in the anthology, the figure of the exile, for Zambrano, resembles ‘a kind of revelation which he himself can ignore’, he is ‘more the object of a gaze than of knowledge. The object of knowledge is set against the object of vision, which is to say of scandal’, or he is the one ‘devoured by history’ or by ‘Time’, who is the ‘God of sight’.¹⁴ In other words, he was characterised as a figure which makes what is always absent to emerge and which interpellates, for that very reason, to the point that his subjectivity consists in offering himself as a see-through interruption. The exile – Zambrano says – is the personification of a radical and interpellating alterity which questions the logic from which he has been dismissed, the figure of an other who has been cast into oblivion and who, when he succeeds in making himself visible in his darkness, reveals and scandalises, uncovers and unmask.

What the exile reveals with his mere presence is precisely a new form of citizenship, freed from the link with blood and the earth, and inspired by the marginality and negation generated by conventional citizenship, as well as the memory of its exclusions. For this reason, all he asks is that ‘he be allowed to give, to give what he never lost and what he has earned: the freedom which he took with him and the truth which he has earned in that sort of posthumous life that has been left to him’.¹⁵ He is therefore a figure of giving, dramatised perfectly in the tragic character of Antigone. Again, it is not by chance that Zambrano paused to reflect on Antigone, a highly significant character both politically and civically, and whose pain behind the walls of Thebes is the revelation of ‘the New Law’,¹⁶ a revelation which will guide the foundation, ‘in a land never seen by anyone [...] [of] the new city, where there will be no children or parents and where siblings will come to join us’.¹⁷

¹³For example, in ‘La experiencia de la historia (después de entonces)’ (The Experience of History [After That Time]), a text which served as a prologue to the 1977 edition of *Los intelectuales en el drama de España*, Zambrano’s most militant and political book. The text was dated 14th April (the day of the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic) obviously chosen with the very clear intention of showing Zambrano’s political allegiances.

¹⁴María Zambrano, *Los bienaventurados* (Madrid: Siruela, 1991), 32ff.

¹⁵María Zambrano, ‘Carta sobre el exilio’, *Cuadernos del Congreso por la libertad de la cultura* (París) 49 (june 1961), 70.

¹⁶Zambrano, *La tumba de Antígona*, ed. de Virginia Trueba, in vol. III of *Obras completas*, 1117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1157.

Without taking away from other interpretations which reveal the mystical dimension her thought slowly acquired, above all, from the 1960s onwards, Zambrano declared the exilic condition to be the seed of a new cosmopolitanism, a universalism freed from allegiances to particular homelands. The different readings of her work are not mutually exclusive, although the political reading has been less explored. In various texts in which she refers to the homeland ('patria'), in particular, the exile is a figure unlike the banished because of the complete rupture from his country of origin, his loss of the status of citizenship and the impossibility of inhabiting any homeland. He has become detached from everything and even the firmament appears to have retreated from around him; he has lost all forms of mediation which linked him to the world and he lives at the mercy of the elements to the extent of '[n]ot being anyone', not even 'a beggar', as Zambrano will say in terms which, in spite of their poetic and at times cryptic texture, cannot but remind us of Hannah Arendt's figure of the pariah. So, the exile wanders among debris, from one place of banishment to another, 'dispossessed, uprooted, and slowly dies' in each one of them. 'And so he goes on repeating this departure from his place of origin, his homeland and any possible homeland, leaving his cloak behind as he flees from the seduction of a homeland that is offered to him', always fleeing 'a where, a place that could be his own' in order to 'stay only in the place where he might breathe his last freely'.¹⁸ The 'place' which is, paradoxically, the place of exile itself, transformed into a universal homeland or promised land, a homeland in capital letters or a 'true homeland'¹⁹ which emerges in the middle of the desert or of the ocean, and whose substance is, in short, the diaspora. In other words, this place of exile redefines it as a symbolic reservoir which permits every human being to put down roots in his own experience of uprootedness and to convert this into an experience of citizenship without exclusions. Exile as diaspora, a critique of Western rationalism through the concept of 'poetic reason,' a call for the memory of the defeated to be heard in nation-building processes. These are some of the more salient and fruitful contributions that María Zambrano made to contemporary critical thought. This volume makes them now more readily available to an English-speaking readership with the aim of helping Zambrano establish a place amongst the philosophers and amongst those concerned with their work.

¹⁸Zambrano, *Los bienaventurados*, 36s.

¹⁹Ibid., 43.

