

BEYOND THE BIBLICAL AND MILLENARIAN: PLACE, SPACE, & MEANING IN THE
POETIC LANDSCAPES OF ERNESTO CARDENAL, NICARAGUA, 1950 TO THE
PRESENT

By

Kevin Artur Fuchs

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Hispanic Cultural Studies—Doctor of Philosophy

2014

ABSTRACT

BEYOND THE BIBLICAL AND MILLENARIAN: PLACE, SPACE, & MEANING IN THE POETIC LANDSCAPES OF ERNESTO CARDENAL, NICARAGUA, 1950 TO THE PRESENT

By

Kevin Artur Fuchs

Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal's *exteriorista* brand of verse is devoid of abstract metaphors. The objective tone of his poetry obscures underlying subjective inclinations. This dissertation analyzes Cardenal's *exteriorista* poetic landscapes to decode the subjectivity of place embedded within them. The study begins with Alexandra Kogl's equation "place = space + meaning," which invites interpretation of place both from the perspective of cultural studies, with a focus on the culturally contested terrain of meaning, as well as from an ecocritical vantage point as it pertains to physical space and how human relationships and interactions with the natural environment can influence identities of place. Kogl's equation is modified to show that Cardenal's landscapes are not static, monolithic, or biblical backdrops, but rather are in dialogue with historical and autobiographical moments as well as with competing narratives that contest meanings of place. *Meaning* and *space* are not mutually exclusive addends. *Meaning* in Cardenal's poetry is influenced by material spaces as well as by activities themselves that alter space. That is to say, Cardenal also responds to the *space* addend, to the narrative that imperialist incursions and exploits have physically "written" over the land and the bodies of its inhabitants.

Cardenal's poetry is considered chronologically across four periods based upon "ruptures" found in his memoirs and in historiographical accounts. Chapter 1 (1950-1970) focuses on the poems "Con Walker en Nicaragua" and "Hora 0." The analysis highlights a trend in his verse which leads from "transcultural identity conflict" regarding U.S.-Nicaraguan relations towards a more sharply defined polarization of identities, linking changes in landscape representation to the

heating up of the Cold War in the 1950s. Chapter 2 (1970-1977) locates linkages between Cardenal's "Canto nacional," "Oráculo sobre Managua," and "Viaje a Nueva York," historical events, and competing narratives prevalent at the time. It is shown how the poet depicts nation as a natural habitat of organisms which form synergetic webs of life, support, and self-defense. The focus on the first-person lyrical voice is amplified as the need for self-realization and self-preservation become increasingly intertwined with national renewal in a time of upheaval. Chapter 3 (1977-1990) considers the collections *Vuelos de victoria* and *Cántico cósmico*, written in the midst of revolution, Sandinista rule, and the Contra War. Landscape representations shift from the euphoria of national renewal towards the "starscapes" of exile. The poet retools landscapes on the scale of the cosmos and enters into competitive dialogue both with narratives emanating from U.S. empire as well as with the autobiographical and historical events that challenge the poet to reframe his nationalist vision. Chapter 4 (1990-2014) explores how the poet wrestles with the neoliberal conceptual apparatus and the fragmentation that it has exacerbated. He advances a unifying perspective of the universe, advocates for a renewed sense of history and for the protection of the "commons." Cardenal's poetry assumes a more transnational character, a transition that coincides with the rampant globalization of free-market capitalism.

This study makes clear that the changing texture of Cardenal's landscapes are not merely the product of a liberation theologian or of an adherent to Marxist ideologies, but the result of a man responding to the historical and autobiographical context of his own life and times. Nicaraguan transformation throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is strongly registered across Cardenal's poetry. By adopting an ecocritical stance, this dissertation makes evident the intersection of the literary, historical, and the ecological and highlights their multiple configurations within the dynamic and primary referent of Cardenal's poetic landscapes.

Copyright by
KEVIN ARTUR FUCHS
2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of those who made the completion of this dissertation possible. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation director Dr. Elvira Sánchez-Blake without whom this project would not have come to fruition. Her insight, dedication, enthusiasm, and energy have been a constant source of inspiration for me from start to finish. She has motivated me not only intellectually but as a role model whom I admire and strive to emulate. Her knowledge of Nicaraguan literature and passion for the subject, her critique of my work, her boundless patience, and her unwavering support encouraged my growth and development and made possible the successful completion of this project of which I am very proud. I can only hope that I, too, will one day be able to mentor students and motivate them to achieve their full potential as Dr. Sánchez-Blake has done with me. She is truly exceptional at what she does and I am forever indebted to her.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the other professors on my dissertation committee, Dr. Edward Murphy, Dr. Danny Méndez, and Dr. Helene Weldt-Basson. I have worked with Dr. Murphy from my first moment at MSU and he has opened my eyes to different ways of looking at Latin American history. The various insights that I gained in his classes and through his guidance during the comprehensive examinations and dissertation writing process were indispensable in my analysis of Ernesto Cardenal's work. Dr. Méndez deepened my appreciation of Hispanic Caribbean literatures and cultures, particularly those of Cuba, allowing me to see the profound impact that it had over Nicaragua. Most importantly, he encouraged me to read with a critical eye and this proved essential to my research and analysis. Dr. Weldt-Basson offered helpful recommendations regarding revisions to improve several

sections of the dissertation. I thank all of my committee members for their support, expertise, and insightful commentaries pertaining to my project. Without them, it would not have been possible.

It is important to me to acknowledge and thank the Department of Romance and Classical Studies, the College of Arts & Letters, and the Graduate School at Michigan State University for selecting me as a recipient of both the Summer Support Fellowship and the Dissertation Completion Fellowship in 2013. This financial support was crucial in allowing me to focus my attention on my research and writing and to finish a quality dissertation in a timely manner.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their steadfast support and constant words of encouragement along this long and winding road. My parents Hardy and Linda, and my sister Angela, have always been there to give me the strength, confidence, and determination to carry this project to completion. When the going got rough, I knew I could count on them and they never let me down. I would also like to specifically thank my friends Oscar and Colleen for offering constant support that kept me going in the coldest stretches of this long winter when I most needed encouragement. I realize that the world doesn't conveniently pause when hard at work on a project like this and my dearest family and friends provided me with unconditional love until the very end. I hope that I can one day return the favor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Exteriorista</i> Poetry	1
Poetic Landscapes	4
Why Landscapes?	7
Place, Space, & Meaning	10
Dialogic Places	18
Ecocriticism	20
Secondary Literature	22
Cardenal's Poetic Landscapes	28
Dissertation Structure	29
Chapter Organization	30
CHAPTER 1: FROM TRANSCULTURATION TOWARDS POLARIZATION— LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY POETRY OF ERNESTO CARDENAL (1950-1970) ..	35
"Con Walker en Nicaragua" and Other Early Poems (1950-1954)	38
"Hora 0"	67
Conclusion	90
CHAPTER 2: WEAVING POETRY AND THE SELF INTO NICARAGUA'S ECOLOGICAL WEB—NATIONALISM AND SELF-REALIZATION IN ERNESTO CARDENAL'S POETIC LANDSCAPES (1970-1977)	96
"Canto nacional"	103
"Oráculo sobre Managua"	139
"Viaje a Nueva York"	150
Conclusion	155
CHAPTER 3: EXILE & UTOPIA—REFORMULATING PLACE & LEGACY IN THE LAND AND STARSCAPES OF ERNESTO CARDENAL (1977-1990)	159
<i>Vuelos de victoria</i>	164
<i>Cántico cósmico</i>	184
Conclusion	239
CHAPTER 4: RETURNING TO PLANET EARTH—COUNTERING THE NEOLIBERAL TURN & OLD AGE IN ERNESTO CARDENAL'S CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE (1990- 2014)	243
Neoliberalism and "Common Sense"	249
Protection of the Biological and Ecological "Commons"	259
Reclaiming the Cultural "Commons"	263
Exposing Neoliberal Inscriptions	266
Spacetime and History	272

Cardenal's Life and Legacy	279
Poetic "Planetization"	284
Conclusion	287
CONCLUSION.....	293
Poetic Landscapes over Time	296
Final Thoughts	306
<i>U.S.-Nicaragua Relations</i>	307
<i>Ecopoetry</i>	308
<i>Citizenship</i>	309
<i>Place</i>	311
WORKS CITED	313

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Modified version of Kogl's equation	18
---	----

INTRODUCTION

*Símbolos y animales.
Animales que son símbolos
y los símbolos animales.
O símbolo-animal en la roca.
Sin que la razón hiciera distinción.
¿El animal pintado y el de afuera
no eran el mismo animal? . . .
Ese antiguo diálogo con la eternidad.
Y con lo cotidiano.
--Ernesto Cardenal ("Las cavernas" 68-9)*

Ernesto Cardenal is widely considered to be Latin America's greatest living poet. Born in 1925 in Granada, Nicaragua, Cardenal is known not only for his verse but also as a liberation theologian, ordained Catholic priest, founder of a Christian artistic community in the Solentiname islands of Lake Nicaragua, member of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, and as Nicaragua's Minister of Culture, a post he filled from 1979 until 1987. He has traveled throughout his homeland of Nicaragua and around the world as an advocate and spokesperson for human rights, justice, and Latin American self-determination. As Tamara Williams points out, Cardenal represents, "in an exemplary way, the fusion of public life and literature that has become characteristic of writers in Latin America" (Introduction vii).¹

Exteriorista Poetry

Over the course of his long writing career from roughly 1940 to the present, Ernesto Cardenal has developed a poetic style which he himself has coined *exteriorismo*, verse created with, as he puts it, "images from the world around us [*el mundo exterior*] . . . an objective poetry: narrative and anecdotal, made with elements from real life, with concrete things, proper names and precise details, exact dates and figures and facts and statements" (Cohen, *With Walker* 6, ellipsis in

¹Each chapter of this dissertation will provide more historical details regarding each respective period in the poet's life.

orig.).² Cardenal expands upon this description in his memoirs, humbly downplaying his contributions to the genre and specifying past writers and literary works of which he considers himself to be heir:

[Poesía exteriorista es un] tipo de poesía que para algunos es originaria de Nicaragua y aun la consideran una escuela fundada por José Coronel Urtecho y por mí. Pero no es así, lo que pasa es que Coronel y yo le dimos ese nombre y la hemos estado difundiendo mucho, propagandizando si se quiere. Nosotros hemos insistido en que esta poesía data desde Homero y es también la misma de la antigua China, y la de Dante y la Biblia y Walt Whitman y casi toda la gran poesía norteamericana. Sencillamente podíamos haberle llamado en vez de exteriorista poesía realista, en contraposición a la surrealista; o concreta, en contraposición a la abstracta. (*Las islas* 414)

During his time at Columbia University (1947-1949), Cardenal spent a great deal of time reading and studying the works of North American poets Marianne Moore, Charles Olson, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound. Of these writers, Cardenal was most drawn to Pound's verse "that allowed an unprecedented degree of flexibility and inclusiveness (the inclusion of history, the direct use of sources, the juxtaposition of these sources to produce meaning, and new and often unclassifiable rhythmical patterns)" (Williams, *The Doubtful Strait* vii). In addition, Cardenal was also influenced by Pound's literary project to create a poetry that served as "a locus of action and change" (Williams viii), a style that sought to include genres "ordinarily associated with the transactions of economic and political power" (Coyle 9).

Williams argues that Pound (and subsequently, Cardenal) wanted to "reinstitute in poetry what

²Mario Benedetti conducted an extensive interview with Cardenal in 1970 which was published in *Casa de las Américas*. This quote is an English translation of an excerpt from that interview. For more information about the original interview, see "Ernesto Cardenal: evangelio y revolución." *Casa de las Américas*. 63 (1970): 175-83.

had become the exclusive territory of prose. . . . To ‘beat the novelists at their own game,’ [setting out] to expand the boundaries of poetry's content and language by reviving a purportedly exhausted genre—the epic” (“Reading Ernesto Cardenal” 44). According to her argument, Cardenal was attracted to Pound’s impulse to “challenge the conventional discursive boundaries of the discipline by including as ‘history’ such things as legal and economic documents, dialogue, and even lyric poetry” (44). Cardenal hence forged the *exteriorista* style, verse that is “readily accessible” to people of varying backgrounds and that also advocates social and political change, because, in his own words, it is “the only poetry that can express Latin American reality, reach the people, and be revolutionary” (White, *Poets of Nicaragua* 141).

In words attributed to Julio Valle-Castillo and related to the reader in Cardenal’s memoirs, *exteriorista* poetry is described as “una suerte de neobjetivismo; más concreta que la poesía concreta brasileña porque *trataba de lo concreto, no de lo abstracto, ninguna subjetividad*, la lengua o el habla de la calle, de los anuncios, de la publicidad, de los periódicos o de las radios...” (Cardenal, *Las ínsulas* 415-6, emphasis added). Due to these stylistic tendencies, Cardenal’s poetry appears to be “austere, direct, [and] free from emotional slither” (6), to quote a phrase from Ezra Pound. These attributes confer upon his verse a façade of objectivity that allows the poet’s underlying subjective message and motivation to have a greater impact on the reader. By using direct citations from historical documents and documentary sources, Cardenal lends a veridical tone to his verse, imbuing his voice with an authentic and authoritative quality, thus making his message all the more powerful and convincing. Cardenal reconstructs, or “reanimates,” the past to further a social and political agenda relevant to the poet’s present (Borgeson, *Hacia el hombre nuevo* 56). As Borgeson argues, Cardenal brings together the past and present by focusing on problems that exist today and establishes historical links of causality

to today's social and economic ills. The poet does not reproduce the past, but rather offers his own version or interpretation of it. He draws upon important historical or autobiographical moments from his own life and times to thus subjectively rearrange or re-present the past through his own subjective lens.

Poetic Landscapes

Given the importance of the external in his *exteriorista* style of poetry, representations of landscape also play a significant role in Cardenal's writing. Given his aversion to metaphorical excess, the inclusion of these physical landscapes can be attributed to something more than simple background accessories, adornments, or techniques used to amplify the aesthetic and picturesque beauty of his verse. As in the case of the fragments of historical documentary sources rearranged to form poetic textual collages such as those found on the pages of *El estrecho dudoso*, "Hora 0," *Cántico cósmico*, and many other renowned poems penned throughout his career, I build upon the same premise in regards to the physical landscapes represented in Cardenal's poetry. Nature has been rearranged according to the message that the poet is attempting to convey, not to portray an accurate likeness of the physical topography and innate characteristics of the territory in question, but to consciously complement the action, world, persons, and other details presented in each respective poem. Also, and more importantly, these poetic depictions and nuances of landscape often offer clues as to other subjective tendencies and inclinations on the part of the poet of which he himself may be less conscious. A quote from Stephan Siddall's *Landscape and Literature* (2009) is instructive here:

As with the visual arts, so with literature. Words are like paint: they can approximate to what the scene is like, but they can't reproduce it. . . . When the land becomes landscape it is, so to speak, consumed. Like the farmer who makes

the land productive, the tourist and the artist are using and adjusting the land they see for their purposes. None is receiving or delivering nature as it is. All are controlling their environment by their toil, their eye or their skill.

This *rearranging* of nature may perhaps provide a setting for a myth, or idealise (sic) a lost world. It may demonstrate nature's power or delicacy, or create shock and wonder. (9, emphasis added)

Like the historiographical documentation woven into Cardenal's fictional verse, so too are certain aspects of the physical landscape shaped subjectively (consciously or unconsciously) by him.

The poetization of the Nicaraguan landscape has long been a national literary tradition and can be found in the works of Rubén Darío and even more so in the poetry composed by those writers comprising the so-called *Vanguardia* Movement of Nicaragua that formed between 1927 and 1931. The three most prominent poets of this generation, namely José Coronel Urtecho, Pablo Antonio Cuadra and Joaquín Pasos, sought to affirm a more authentic Nicaraguan identity and one characteristic of their writing that reflects this goal is the intense focus on the physical environment of their native country (Solis 21; White, "Pablo Antonio Cuadra" vii).³ Sylma García González writes about the importance of landscape in Nicaraguan literature and in the poetry of Ernesto Cardenal:

[Las] hermosas y detalladas descripciones del paisaje centroamericano, específicamente de su amada Nicaragua, no provienen de la influencia de Pound y los poetas en lengua inglesa, sino más bien se trata de un rasgo que ha

³Not only did the *vanguardista* poets of Nicaragua utilize landscape to affirm their local identity during this time period. This is a trend observed in much of the literature produced throughout Latin America. As Jennifer L. French points out in her study of the regionalist novels of the 1920s, "regionalism is characterized by its geographical specificity, its thematic focus on the earth and the natural environment" (9).

caracterizado los versos de Cardenal desde sus primeros titubeos literarios. Por supuesto, hay que señalar que la poetización del paisaje nicaragüense es parte de la tradición literaria del país, de los que “Allá lejos” de Darío y “Tierra que habla” de Pablo Antonio Cuadra son algunos ejemplos. Ya desde algunos de los primeros poemas escritos en su adolescencia, “Amanecer” y “Con la luna llena”, Cardenal poetiza el paisaje. (115)

Paul W. Borgeson’s analysis supports this observation in which he maintains, “La presencia de la naturaleza, fuente de tantas imágenes del Cardenal maduro, y la evocación de un ambiente cotidiano poetizado, serán rasgos constantes de la obra del poeta” (*Hacia el hombre nuevo* 22).

The *vanguardistas* emphasized the endemic qualities and the specificity of the nation’s natural landscape to assert a more authentic, unique, and genuine Nicaraguan voice and Cardenal follows in their footsteps, poetically evoking the regional landscape in his verse as well. As a member of “la Generación de 1940,” a group he formed in 1949 with his contemporaries Ernesto Mejía Sánchez and Carlos Martínez Rivas upon returning to Nicaragua from Columbia University, Cardenal sought to carry the vanguardist vision into new poetic realms:

[The] major task of *exteriorismo* [was] to convert the vanguardist project of concrete, objectivist poetry into one by which poetry would transcend its own productive mode and help transform the very world it sought to render. . . .
(Zimmerman xiii)

Cardenal’s verse, loaded with specific references to his reality, including those pertaining to natural landscapes, seeks to fortify the Nicaraguan identity articulated by the *vanguardistas* while simultaneously utilizing poetic imagery to advocate for change. Upon closer examination, the seemingly objective *exteriorista* landscapes in Cardenal’s verse reveal a great deal about the

underlying subjectivities that inspired their creation. Before embarking on such an analysis, it is important to first define several key terms and concepts and articulate the theoretical framework that girds this study.

Why Landscapes?

Regarding the term “landscape,” some theorists, such as Tim Cresswell, define it merely as being synonymous with the external, material world. Cresswell writes in *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004) that “[l]andscape refers to the shape—the material topography—of a piece of land. . . . We do not live in landscapes—we look at them” (Cresswell 11). He uses this definition of *landscape* to differentiate it from *place*, a term that is the title, and main topic, of his book. He contrasts the two terms by arguing that “[i]n most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place” (10). Place is, on the other hand, “a meaningful location,” according to Cresswell, “a space invested with meaning in the context of power [and] used in the construction of ideas about who and what belongs where and when and thus in the construction of those seen as ‘deviant’ and outside of ‘normal’ society” (5, 12-13). Place, for Cresswell, is a way of understanding “what we decide to emphasize and what we decide to designate as unimportant” (11). He refers to political geographer John Agnew who points to a “sense of place” in his book *Place and Politics* (1987) as being the “subjective and emotional attachment people have to place” (7). Cresswell does, however, acknowledge the importance of landscapes in the establishment of these emotional attachments from the perspective of “visuality,” that is to say, the fact that places have landscapes that we can see (22).

Given *exteriorismo* and the absence of abstract metaphors, internal monologues, and subjective contemplation in Cardenal’s style of verse, the way in which landscape is depicted can reveal a great deal about Cardenal’s notion of place. It is important to not overlook these re-

presentations of landscape even if they are described in a seemingly objective and detached manner, for they give subtle clues regarding Cardenal's own attachment to the place(s) he describes. Cresswell may well distinguish between external landscapes and more internalized and amorphous places, but in Cardenal's poetry, where the emphasis is on the exterior world, landscape is the poetic tool that gives form to the subjectivity of place. Thus, it is imperative to decode landscapes in order to thoroughly unmask Cardenal's subjectivities in this regard.

It is crucial to remember that notions of place are never static but are constantly in flux (the reason that I use the plural "place(s)" in the preceding paragraph). As Cresswell points out, "[p]laces are never finished but always the results of processes and practices" (37), "always and continually being socially constructed" (57). Given Ernesto Cardenal's long career, his poetry lends itself particularly well to explore the changes in representations of landscape over time in order to pinpoint and trace specific historic and autobiographical moments in the poet's life, community, and world. Why is landscape such an important vehicle to see beyond the poetic veil of objectivity and to better expose the particular subjective subtleties in Cardenal's poetry? To better rephrase the question, why are references to landscape so prevalent in Cardenal's poetic constructions of place? Part of the answer can be found by remembering the primacy of geography in the construction of Nicaraguan identities throughout history. In his book *La poesía de Ernesto Cardenal: Cristianismo y revolución* (1984), Eduardo Urdanivia Bertarelli sets forth the following interpretation regarding the landscape of Nicaragua and the consciousness of the people as it relates to the physical territorial characteristics of the land:

La historia de Nicaragua ha estado siempre marcada por su situación geográfica.

Tierra colonizada por hombres en búsqueda del estrecho que uniera los dos océanos, todo parece marcar a Nicaragua como un lugar de tránsito, sus lagos, los

ríos huyendo hacia el mar, y éste aislándola, pero al mismo tiempo abriéndola al resto del mundo a ambos lados del país. (17)

The perception that Nicaraguans have of themselves and of the natural territory that they inhabit has thus, in the view of Urdanivia Bertarelli, been heavily influenced by imperial powers who have, throughout history, defined the political borders of this region and whose economic and geopolitical relationships with the Americas have also affected the national identities of those that are born and reside there. Urdanivia Bertarelli highlights Nicaragua's relevance as a place of transit, as a site of a potential canal crossing that would bridge the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and the effect that this geographical and utilitarian categorization would have on the psyche of the region's peoples and their conception of place. One need not look any further than the title of Ernesto Cardenal's *El estrecho dudoso* to see the insightfulness of Urdanivia Bertarelli's analysis.

Beyond the imaginings of interoceanic passages across the isthmus that began to take shape as soon as the Spaniards arrived, Central America has played an essential role in the development and ascent of the world's dominant economic powers in the capitalist economy. Jennifer French argues that "[i]n the tropical republics of the economic periphery, nature was the source of potential wealth and the site of economic growth and development. Rather than the 'escape' from the realities of industrial capitalism that romanticism offered to European readers, Spanish American nature writing much more directly represents the continent's predominant economic forms and, as a result, its gradual incorporation into the international capitalist system" (13). She reads the "nature myth" in the Latin American regional novel as a kind of "economic and political history" of the region. This point of view can be extrapolated to the case of nature in Nicaraguan poetry of the twentieth century as well. Inserting itself, or rather, being inserted into the capitalist economy as an agricultural and extractive resource has directly affected, and

continues to affect, the “subjective and emotional attachment” the Nicaraguan people have to place as per John Agnew’s observation noted earlier. Cresswell has asserted that “place does not have meanings that are natural and obvious but ones that are created by some people with more power than others to define what is and is not appropriate” (27). Regional resource extraction from a particular physical space certainly influences the meaning attached to place as witnessed by those on the ground where the landscape is physically altered. Moreover, such resource extraction takes on symbolic proportions as its links to social, political, and economic hierarchies of power are observed and experienced over time.

Place, Space, & Meaning

In *Strange Places: The Political Potentials and Perils of Everyday Spaces* (2008), Alexandra Kogl puts forth a definition of place in the following terms, an equation that will be fundamental to this analysis:

$$\text{place} = \text{space} + \text{meaning}$$

In agreement with this equation, space is indeed an important component in defining place (15). Scott DeVries, in his article “Garbage Out” (2010), insightfully proposes the inverse of Kogl’s formula, or “space = place – meaning” (39), an inversion that demonstrates the catastrophic ramifications that can arise as a result of stripping a place of meaning and conceiving of it merely as an empty space. DeVries’ introduces this equation to demonstrate the way in which the periphery is viewed from the metropolis. Conceiving of a place merely as space is to attempt to obliterate the meaning attached to it by its inhabitants. Those involved in resource extraction and exportation, large scale agricultural pursuits which devastate the environment, as well as those who consume the products derived from this exploitation are detached from local meanings of place. By attempting to erase a place of its meaning, the metropolis is able to legitimize the

utilization of its resources within a new narrative, justifying (or perhaps ignoring completely) the environmental, social, political, and economic injustices that occur as a result of such transactions. Indeed many colonial narratives are built upon this myth of empty space.

The relevance of Kogl's original equation is that it allows critics to focus on two essential elements in the dynamic construction of place: physical space and the meaning attached to that space. Using a quote from Tim Cresswell to focus first on the "meaning" side of Kogl's formula: "[p]laces do not come with some memories attached as if by nature, but rather they are 'contested terrain of competing definitions'" (62). Meaning cannot be entirely obliterated to isolate and create empty meaningless space, even if concerted efforts are made to strip place of meaning. In fact, certain meanings can be strengthened and others reformulated as a response to such attempts by others to erase meaning. Even within a particular population, the emotional attachment of place is always in flux, because the meaning that is projected onto space is always different depending on perspective. Meaning is constantly being contested, shaped, and reshaped as a cultural construct. The poet is one important participant in this struggle who attempts to reclaim place by contesting the meaning projected onto any given space by other competing entities and subjectivities. From the time of nation formation, "knowing" place has been enacted on one level or another. As Cresswell asserts, "those who wish to construct relatively large political entities cannot simply draw lines on a map and produce them from nothing. They make concerted efforts to give these territories history and identities in order to make them more place-like and therefore more intelligible to their designated populations" (102). This observation is applicable to nation building projects, state formation, as well as (neo)colonial relationships. Reaching back into history to search for roots to place is a common phenomenon observed in the contestation of meaning. This "sense of place," or "el sentido de arraigo," and its relation to

history is the focus of Lawrence Buell's analysis *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) in which he argues that places are not stable and autonomous entities in themselves, but rather are constantly being formulated and reformulated by both internal and external forces. Places have histories (Binns 65).⁴ Poets, such as Ernesto Cardenal, re-present these places in an attempt to reclaim them from those individuals, groups, or entities that contest the same terrain, in the figurative and literal sense of the word. Cardenal himself has maintained that *exteriorismo* is "the only poetry capable of expressing the Latin American reality... of being good for something: for *building a nation*, and creating a new man, changing society, making the future Nicaragua, as part of the great future homeland that is Latin America" (Cohen 17). This quote highlights Cardenal's awareness of his own role in a nation building project.

Returning to Kogl's formula, place = space + meaning, it should be pointed out that the emotional attachment that is circumscribed by the term "place" is in flux, not just due to the contestation of meaning, but also by human alterations to and deformation of the physical space itself. Space and meaning are not mutually exclusive categories. In many instances, an infringement upon space occurs which causes a crisis of meaning or identity. Spatial upheaval caused by natural calamities can also be considered here. As environmental historian Shawn Miller has observed, "[t]he human relationship with nature is never static. Cultures change, or are changed, sometimes for the ecological better, sometimes for the worse. And nature itself changes, sometimes handing out new, substantial benefits to humans, sometimes painful liabilities, and in a few cases, utter destruction" (Kane 2). Some of these changes in "nature" can be exacerbated or triggered by the activities of humankind. Thus the significance of Kogl's

⁴This summary of Buell's argument is derived from Niall Binns' work in which he relates in Spanish these main points of Buell's thesis: "los lugares en sí no son entidades estables y autónomas, sino que están siendo constantemente formados y reformados por fuerzas tanto internas como externas. Los lugares tienen historias" (Binns 65). The translation of Binn's summary into English in the main text above is mine.

definition lies in the fact that it welcomes analyses regarding the construction of “place” from two distinct but complementary fields, 1) from the perspective of cultural studies, with a focus on the culturally contested terrain of meaning as it appears in conflicting historical narratives, social practices, and the like, and 2) from an ecocritical vantage point as it pertains to physical space and how human relationships and interactions with the natural environment can influence identities of place. The simplicity of the terms in Kogl’s equation invite a plethora of possible interpretations so it is important to provide concrete definitions of *place*, *space* and *meaning* as they will be used in this study. *Space*, as it will be used here, refers to the physical, definite, and bounded environment and its physical attributes, be they the land, natural environment, and the material environs from which resources are extracted and the material earth across which the inhabitants of any particular location walk and carry out the physical and social tasks associated with working and living. Following Yi-Fu Tuan’s definition, space will be considered the “physical substrate on which places grow” (Kogl 14).⁵

Meaning, on the other hand, refers here to the “phenomenological” component of the equation, the realm of ideas, narratives, attitudes, subjective biases and interpretations that one formulates regarding a particular physical space. The resulting *place* thus becomes what Henri Lefebvre calls “representational space,” a concept upon which geographer Andy Merrifield has expanded in the following way: “Place is synonymous with what is lived in the sense that daily life practices are embedded in particular places . . . the terrain where basic social practices—

⁵This use of the term *space* is inspired by Scott DeVries’ utilization of the word in his modified version of Kogl’s formula. Some thinkers tend to reverse the definitions of *place* and *space* respectively, contrary to the way that I use them in my analysis. Michel de Certeau, for example, defines “space as a practiced place” (Mitchell, Preface viii), the inverse of how I use the terms. In the present study, I consider place to be “practiced” space.

consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support, and social reproduction, etc. —are lived out” (Merrifield 522).⁶

There are several important points from Kogl’s analysis regarding the concepts of place, space, and meaning that require further elaboration here as her theoretical contours of place shall also be employed in this dissertation. First, she maintains that “place can include an ambiguous space that lies ‘outside’ the everyday home place but remains in ongoing or permanent relationship to the core space” (15). In Cardenal’s corpus of poetry, the boundaries of place are not fixed geometric lines defining the political territory of Nicaragua, but are in flux as Kogl maintains.⁷ She asserts that place has “permeable and even ambiguous boundaries, . . . sending offshoots into surrounding spaces,” a characteristic of place that is evident in Cardenal’s poetry as he moves between Central America, Nicaragua, the United States, outer space, Africa, the Middle East, and globally, to give some common examples (16).

Second, Kogl writes:

[P]laces can exist within larger places . . . Places can nest within larger places and can overlap with one another. One space may bear a stronger sense of place than another because it may have more meanings attached to it, or more obvious meaning, or a particular kind of privileged meaning, or a longer history of being marked by meaning. (15)

Kogl draws upon the musical “Flower Drum Song” to make her point, providing the following example of overlapping places: “Grant Avenue, San Francisco, California, USA” (15). This

⁶Merrifield comments on terms in Henri Lefebvre’s important work *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Alexandra Kogl makes reference to these quotes from Merrifield’s article on page 14 of her *Strange Places* (see bibliography).

⁷As Kogl points out, “if we confuse place and territory, we are confusing place and state” (16).

reflects a similar argument I will make in Chapter 3 regarding Cardenal's own multi-layered citizenship and sense of belonging as they pertain to the poet's life and are reflected in his work: *Cardenal / Solentiname (or Managua) / Nicaragua / Earth / Solar System / Milky Way / Universe*. I would also like to point out that positionality is important to consider here as well. That is, the perspective, angle, or location from which one views one or more of these overlapping places. The poetic voice in Cardenal's verse tends to exhibit an exilic positionality, particularly in his later collections, an external perspective from which he describes these multi-layered place(s) of which Kogl speaks.⁸

Third, Kogl argues that "a single meaning creates less of a sense of place than do multiple, layered, shared meanings that have been attached to a place over time" (15). This notion of place shall be more succinctly defined in theoretical terms in the following pages of this introduction. In short, meaning is in constant flux as it enters into dialogue with other meanings.

Fourth, turning to the spatial side of the equation, Kogl writes:

[S]pace takes on the texture of a place over time as human activity leaves marks on the environment, which are then partially erased and replaced with new marks, which are then partially erased, and so on. This layered quality contributes to that ineffable "sense of place" of which architects, poets, novelists, landscape designers—those attuned to the aesthetics of place—speak. (18)

Humans and non-humans alike traverse physical space, alter it, deface it, and reconfigure it to a certain degree. This "writing" over space by plants, animals, humans, seismic activity, and meteorological activity is read, deciphered, digested, internalized, and contested as would be any

⁸I will employ the term "exilic positionality" with greater frequency in Chapter 3 to refer to the outside vantage point that the lyrical voice increasingly adopts to look upon particular places as if from exile.

narrative or story. As Kogl is careful to point out, “space is not a passive, static thing but a creation in flux” (28), as are the narratives that arise to answer and contest this spatial “writing.” Of course, the power differential between competing and multiple actors is evident in these markings “written” across space. Kogl notes that “[p]ower invents or at least privileges certain meanings, and reinforces these meanings by marking spaces with them” (17). Those beings and entities that are denied citizenship and access within any given hierarchy of power must resist or contest this spatial writing principally through the construction of counternarratives, that is to say, alternative imaginings, as does the poet central to this study. Contestation can occur, of course, via the myriad of ways that one lives in any given space. Space is “scarred and traced by spatial vectors and movements across its face” (Mitchell, Preface xi).⁹ Even though Kogl does argue that it is essential to avoid “exaggerating the extent to which places are merely passively experienced by ordinary people” (16), one cannot fail to recognize the enormous disparities in power that exist between living subjects, human and non-human alike, on a wide variety of levels, be they economic, social, political, technological, or physical (as in the case of military might). Without the overt power to intervene, stop, or alter the physical markings that are written across space by more powerful subjects, contestation must take place via cultural practice. The poet utilizes the written word as an instrument to construct place and to contest both the “meaning” and “space” addends in Kogl’s equation and this is where Cardenal’s poetic landscapes wield their influence.

Kogl talks about the importance of landscape as follows:

Landscape features—mountains, hills, rivers, the sea—insert themselves into a culture as meaningful, even sacred, and in turn cultures write themselves upon

⁹This quote by W.J.T. Mitchell pertains to Edward Said’s article, “Invention, Memory, and Place,” in which the latter shows the way writing, memory, and imagination produce a “space / place / landscape complex” (Mitchell, Preface xi).

those landscapes, building mounds, standing stones, sacred buildings and dwelling places that embody cultural precepts. . . . Natural features unchanged by human hands become markers of home territory, birthplaces of gods, symbols of the cardinal directions. (18)

The prominent characteristics of landscape such as Lake Nicaragua, the San Juan River, the picturesque island of Ometepe, the towering Momotombo and Masaya volcanoes, even the moon, stars, sun, and the constellations become important cultural symbols and building blocks for vying versions of place. Not only are geological formations important, but so too are archaeological sites such as the footprints of Acahualinca, non-human species of plants and animals such as sharks, birds, and other mammals, as well as human architecture, industry, railroad tracks, billboards, and airplanes which become features that indelibly mark the vistas of place. These are woven into subjective tapestries of place not only to “signify and symbolize power relations,” as W. J. T. Mitchell asserts, but as an “instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions” (Introduction 1-2). Landscapes may be, as Mitchell argues, “a relatively weak power compared to that of armies, police forces, governments, and corporations” (Preface vii), but they certainly do exert a power over people as he notes, and are an important element in the contestations of place as I will argue in the case of Cardenal’s poetic landscapes. In Cardenal’s *exteriorista* brand of verse, landscapes may appear misleadingly to be exterior views that “are,” but should more appropriately be deemed to be cultural practices that “do” and “make” history both within the real and the re-presented environments that the poems depict.¹⁰ By decoding landscape via a panoramic view of Cardenal’s lifetime poetic body of work, the dynamic nature

¹⁰This notion of landscapes as “doing” rather than merely “being” is informed by W. J. T. Mitchell in his preface to *Landscape and Power* (1-2).

of his verse becomes more evident. I will utilize the addends in Kogl's equation, namely "space" and "meaning," as the foundation for this analysis, to demonstrate the dynamic nature of Cardenal's poetic places. I have, however, slightly modified her formula to demonstrate that space and meaning are not mutually exclusive categories. Crises of meaning or identity can arise both as a reaction to direct human interaction with physical space as well as through the dialogue that occurs as multiple meanings attached to place come into contact. Figure 1 below contains a schematic representation of this idea, a modified version of Kogl's original equation:

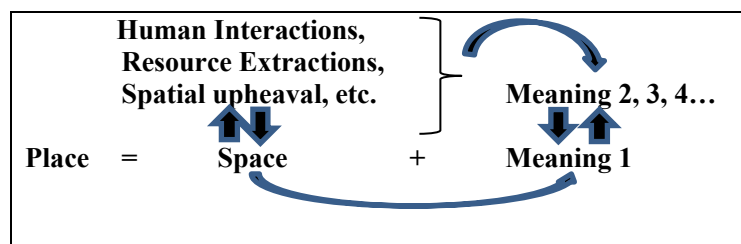


Figure 1: Modified version of Kogl's equation

Ernesto Cardenal's work (Meaning 1) is informed by and in dialogue with particular historical and autobiographical moments that influence his writing at the time of production as well as by neocolonialist/imperialist narratives (Meaning 2, 3, 4) both past and present, as the diagram above indicates. Cardenal's verse also responds on the "space" side of the equation to the narrative that imperialist incursions and exploits have physically "written" over the land.

Dialogic Places

The schematic above visually demonstrates how meanings attached to place are in constant dialogue with other meanings as well as with physical markings that alter a particular space. Regarding the dialogic nature of humanity, Ernesto Cardenal himself writes in *Cántico cósmico*, "Las personas son palabras. / Y así uno no es si no es diálogo. / Y así pues todo uno es dos / o no es. / . . . Las personas son diálogo, digo" (23). If people are dialogic in nature, as the poet maintains, then it must follow that the places they construct, including those of the poet, are also

built in dialogue with others. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism theories have been helpful in integrating a dialogic component to the modified version of Kogl's equation. According to the Russian philosopher, speech is created in dialogue with other speech, in interaction with other utterances. Art, and the very expression of language itself, is an endless chain of utterances and responses that answer previous utterances and illicit future responses (*Speech Genres* 89-92). This observation can be applied to the *meaning* addend in Kogl's equation which I use to analyze Cardenal's verse. The Nicaraguan's poetic "utterances" respond to other competing utterances or meanings attached to place that emanate from other individuals, groups, and/or entities. Due to the power differential evident in (neo)colonial relationships, narratives emanating from empire, particularly from U.S. imperialism, resonate extensively and loudly and are those among which the poet most fervently wrestles.

It is also crucial to look at the dynamic historic and autobiographical contexts in which the poet lives and produces his art in order to analyze the construction of meaning as he attaches them to place. Because utterances are intrinsically linked to the historical context from which they arise, so too must be those that formulate and re-formulate place, such as in the case of Cardenal's verse.¹¹ As this study argues, Cardenal's poetic landscapes reflect the dialogic nature of his artistic creation in terms of the meaning that he attaches to place. These meanings are in constant flux as they enter into dialogue with important historical and autobiographical moments marking the poet's life and times as well as with dominant narratives emanating from U.S. empire.

¹¹I derive these assertions from the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin who also addresses the importance of context in discourse. In *Dialogic Imagination*, he maintains that "[d]iscourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context" (284).

Ecocriticism

Dialogical interactions are also important in considering the spatial component of the modified equation schematically represented above. In analyzing Cardenal's responses to "writing" over space, this study will be informed by the burgeoning field of ecocritical theory. Ecocriticism, as defined in the introduction of *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), is:

[T]he study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.

Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings to an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.¹² (Glotfelty xix)

As this comparison suggests, Greg Garrard argues that ecocriticism is thus a political mode of analysis (3). Steven White finds value in ecocriticism in that it offers the possibility to view poetry simultaneously from a wide variety of disciplines, including biology, anthropology, and environmental studies, among others, in order to consider the relationship between verse and the natural environment which our species inhabits and, in many cases, abuses (*Arando* 19). In an ecocritical study published in Spain, Flys Junquera, et al. write that ecocriticism "allows for the focus on the physical and scientific materiality of place, moving from the abstract, passive, and symbolic to the tangible, all while clearly raising ecological awareness" (qtd. in White 19, translation mine).¹³ The physical marking, or "writing" that occurs over the face of material space affects the inhabitants who actively live and metabolize that space. Resource extraction

¹²This definition is also quoted on page 3 of Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (see bibliography).

¹³See Flys Junquera, et al. page 17. Niall Binns and Steven White have noted that ecocritical studies of Spanish and Spanish-American literature are relatively rare. White considers his 2002 book *El mundo más que humano en la poesía de Pablo Antonio Cuadra* to be the first in Spanish that could be labeled ecocritical (*Arando* 21). Since then, interest has grown and White points to some specific advancements made in the field including the innovative thinkers, recently developed journals, published books and articles, associations, and conferences that have organized to address the topic. See the introduction of White's *Arando el aire* for more information.

and exploitation, deforestation, environmental degradation, contamination, and species extinction, can all adversely affect the human and non-human inhabitants alike of any given region. Given the disparities in terms of political, economic, and social power present in any population, the ability to physically resist these ecologically damaging practices can be limited. One of the poet's functions, then, is to contest these adverse markings written across space by contesting them in his verse. As will become evident in this study, Cardenal does this in his writing by answering the narratives physically scribbled across the material bodies of nation and its inhabitants by imperial capitalist exploitative incursions.

Patrick Murphy offers an important insight regarding the nexus between Bakhtinian dialogics and ecocritical theory and, as such, sheds light on an intersection between the two addends, *space* and *meaning*, that I will focus on in this study:

[Mikhail Bakhtin] provides a valuable set of tools for ecocritical analysis and a method of approaching literary works and their interrelationship with the material world. He can be aligned with [those thinkers and linguists] who have emphasized discourse over language. This emphasis leads to seeing speaking and writing as individual acts undertaken at particular moments in specific configurations of the world. That recognition of immersion leads to emphasizing the speaker/writer as a social individual on the one hand, and as a physical being on the other hand. . . . Bakhtin [recognizes] discourse as an embodied and material activity.

("Dialoguing" 155)

Thus the dialogic nature of discourse is rooted in the physicality of the earth. Cardenal answers this physical "writing" over the material environment while he at the same time contests the prominent narratives that emanate from centers of power that legitimize these imperial incursions

across space. In other words, Cardenal dialogues with the phenomenological and spatial components as per Kogl's equation. The "meaning" and "space" addends further intersect if one considers the importance of the nature motif in Nicaraguan literature as noted earlier. The destruction of ecological habitats leads to the extermination of the very places that sustain alternative imaginings, myths, narratives, and cultural practices (Binns, Prologue 16).

Environmental degradation not only adversely affects the biological health and relationship of organisms that are intertwined ecologically, but damages the aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual connections to physical place as well (Kellert 20).

Secondary Literature

There is an abundant body of scholarly analysis and criticism pertaining to multiple facets of Ernesto Cardenal's poetry. Many scholars tend to link Cardenal's Christian background and his status as an ordained Catholic priest to their studies and categorize his writing as spiritually contemplative in nature. Luce López-Baralt's *El cántico místico de Ernesto Cardenal* (2012), is one such example of a text that focuses on the contemplative dimension of Cardenal's discourse. Using Cardenal's conversion to Christianity in 1956 and his subsequent decision to study under Thomas Merton at a Trappist monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky as a launching point, López-Baralt follows Cardenal's evolution as a mystic, focusing most heavily on *Cántico cósmico* (1989) and his collections that have been published since. Because her principal interest is the mystical experience and transcendence, that is, the poet's attempt to overcome material limitations in order to seek union with God, Cardenal's poetic construction of landscape and place is seen through this lens. The poet's flirtation with astrophysics, quantum theory and evolutionary theory in his later work is considered as a vehicle to explain the mystical experience scientifically in Cardenal's work rather than a dialogic response to historical, autobiographical,

and the material realities that mark the life and times of the poet and the prominent narratives that characterize the particular era in question.

Sylma García González, protégé of Luce López-Baralt, also focuses on the mystical dimensión of Cardenal's work in her book "*Yo tuve una cosa con él y no es un concepto*": *Originalidad y modernidad en la literatura mística de Ernesto Cardenal* (2011). She looks at Cardenal's writing within the literary parameters of that which is traditionally regarded as mysticism and contemplative literature and then looks at the original elements that are particular to Cardenal's style.¹⁴ She studies the rhetorical and stylistic influence that such authors as Ezra Pound, Walt Whitman, and César Vallejo have had over Cardenal's poetry. However, like López-Baralt, García González is drawn to the mystical elements in his verse, considering poetic landscape through this lens. According to this analytical perspective, the poet puts his own stamp on the *Song of Songs* by including endemic aspects of the Nicaraguan landscape in his verse, for example, rather than considering the inverse, that Cardenal utilizes the *Song of Songs* to describe the subjective realities of the Nicaraguan landscape and place.

Despite the temptation to translate the imagery that appears in Cardenal's verse through a Christian prism due to the poet's Catholic formation, I will adopt an approach closer to that of Steven White, who writes:

[E]l lector no debe verse obligado a considerar el *Cántico cósmico* como una obra religiosa en términos cristianos ortodoxos, a pesar de las circunstancias biográficas de un poeta que estudió en un monasterio trapense bajo la supervisión de su maestro de noviciados Thomas Merton y que luego fue ordenado sacerdote.

¹⁴Regarding mysticism in literary tradition, Enrique Turpin notes:

La tradición literaria define el misticismo como un estado pasivo o contemplativo: el tercer y último grado espiritual en el camino de perfección que se propone alcanzar el amor de Dios; los otros dos estados son el purgativo—mortificación del cuerpo y oración—y el iluminativo. (31-2)

Hay otras posibilidades interpretativas para esta etapa de su obra poética. (*Arando* 353)

White looks to the influence that the materialists in philosophy and science have had over Cardenal's thinking and argues that this opens up other possible interpretations for his work beyond mysticism and biblical metaphor:

[S]u profunda aceptación de la perspectiva de los dos mayores materialistas del siglo XIX, Darwin y Marx, disminuye la importancia final de sus preocupaciones místicas, cuyos orígenes son menos cristianos que indigenistas a pesar de su vida como monje trapense y sacerdote católico. (*Arando* 334)

White adopts this stance when analyzing Cardenal's verse, even when reading those poems written between 1989 and the present that exhibit a more "cosmic" quality. White considers the indigenous past as it appears in *Los ovnis de oro* (1988), the poet's collection of verse that focuses on the native peoples of the Americas, and locates the framework for Cardenal's political ideas of utopia in these indigenous civilizations (*Arando* 350). Considering this Native American poetry through an ecocritical lens, White notes the poet's celebration of ecological harmony that existed between the native peoples and their environment in bygone eras and Cardenal's view that these aboriginal societies comprised sustainable and egalitarian communist or socialist communities that should be replicated today to advance economic, social, and environmental justice (351). White looks at *Cántico cósmico* largely as a poetic ecological treatise in which the poet criticizes the capitalist model as the antithesis of harmony with the natural world. According to him, the scientific theories pertaining to astrophysics and the Big Bang in *Cántico cósmico* run the risk of quickly becoming obsolete given the rapid advances made in the field. As such, he argues,

Por eso, es preferible leer el *Cántico* como la representación de todo lo que nos rodea escrita por un poeta con una conciencia ecológica muy desarrollada y también como un vivo reflejo de las ideas materialistas de Darwin y Marx.

(*Arando* 357)

According to White, Cardenal raises awareness regarding the environmental degradation that human activity has caused due to the prevalence of the capitalist model while he, at the same time, calls for solutions on local, regional, and global levels (362).

Analisa DeGrave also reads Cardenal's verse as an important contribution to the genre that she calls "ecoliterature" (90). One crucial element in DeGrave's analysis is her focus on nature or natural habitats in Cardenal's construction of utopia. In her critique of Cardenal's poetry, nature no longer plays a secondary "referential" role, but rather has gained a "primary referential status" (93). Drawing on Françoise Choay's "Utopia and the Philosophical Status of Constructed Spaces" (2000), DeGrave writes,

For the authors I [consider]—Cardenal, José Emilio Pacheco, and Sandra María Esteves—"place" does not play a secondary "referential" role in constructing a new society. Rather, the survival of a threatened "topos" is copresent with the restructuring of society itself, "emphasizing the fact that the institution of society is rooted in the earth, where the speaking animal is bound to the world of nature and of life." (93)

DeGrave focuses on the "edenic and pure Latin American or national garden" as it appears in the works of the writers she analyzes and locates that which undermines this utopia, be it the Spanish conquest, modernization and/or U.S. imperialism (90). In Cardenal's verse, she identifies the "dystopian interrupters" in this edenic garden as the United States, dictators, and "the negative

consequences of modernity” (93). Embarking on a comparative study of three different writers, DeGrave looks at what distinguishes Cardenal’s writing from that of the other authors. She identifies Christian influence and liberation theology as the crux of what sets Cardenal’s “ideal space” apart in relation to that of the other poets (93). She does acknowledge that Cardenal’s poetry does present different kinds of utopias, but finds Christianity to be the common thread in Cardenal’s “conceptualization of a better world” (93). It must be pointed out that DeGrave does compare Cardenal’s poetry with that of Pablo Neruda and notes:

Marxism informs much of Cardenal's poetry, and consequently, the poet's treatment of nature and utopia regularly intersect in a documentary style of poetry that seeks to situate nature, people and place within a larger historical context.
(92)

Her comparative analysis with other poets, however, leads her to distinguish elements that differentiate his work from that of other writers, thus overlooking the transformations that Cardenal’s own poetic constructions of place have experienced over time as a result of changing autobiographical and historical contexts. One important intersection between DeGrave’s analysis and that of Steven White is their argument that, in Cardenal’s garden, “oppression against humankind and the natural world are closely intertwined” (DeGrave 99) and both scholars look specifically at Cardenal’s indigenous poetry in *Los ovinis de oro: poemas indios* to make their case.¹⁵

Another scholar who sees in Cardenal’s work the message that “social changes must necessarily be ecological, too,” is Niall Binns (“Landscapes” 115). Binns looks at Cardenal’s

¹⁵To highlight the importance of Christianity in Cardenal’s construction of place, DeGrave turns to the poet’s “Epístola a Coronel Urtecho,” in which he writes: “Yo he añorado el paraíso toda mi vida / lo he buscado como un guaraní / pero ya sé que no está en el pasado (un error científico en la Biblia que Cristo ha corregido) / sino en el futuro” (DeGrave 93).

nostalgia for the “lost Golden Age of pre-Columbian America and his tenacious faith in its return in a post-revolutionary future” and his “[i]dealization of the supposed organic communities of the past” (117). Binns explores Cardenal’s *Homenaje de los indios americanos* (1969) to make his point.¹⁶ Like Steven White, Binns also looks at the ecological dimension of Cardenal’s *Cántico cósmico*, as well as the much earlier *Gethsemani, Ky* (1960), to emphasize the importance of looking at Cardenal’s poetic landscapes not merely as picturesque views but as places that support the intricate webs that sustain life:

La poesía de Ernesto Cardenal explora, de manera ejemplar, las innumerables relaciones que conforman la red de la vida. *Cántico cósmico* (1992) es una vasta obra de celebración de la vida, y especialmente de la vida humana, pero siempre como parte de procesos cósmicos y microcósmicos complejísimos. Ya en 1963, en *Gethsemany* [sic], Ky., . . . se percibía la atención enfocada y ecológicamente despierta del nicaragüense . . . Vida y muerte, amor y muerte, se entretejen aquí como en tantos poemas pero partiendo de una visión concreta del lugar y también de un conocimiento de los comportamientos ornitológicos y de los procesos bioquímicos que funcionan por debajo y más allá de lo meramente pintoresco. La escena poetizada presenta una intrincada convivencia de la comunidad humana con la naturaleza no humana. (*¿Callejón?* 64-5)

Binns ties the social injustices perpetrated by the Somoza dictatorship to this astute observation regarding Cardenal’s ecology to point out the ties between environmental destruction and social upheaval. Like DeGrave and White, Binns does not embark, however, on a lengthy, comparative study of Cardenal’s writing to highlight the changes in the poet’s construction of place that

¹⁶See also Niall Binn’s *¿Callejón sin salida?* (page 29) regarding the ecological component in Cardenal’s Native American poetry.

conform to the constantly transforming historical and autobiographical configurations of the world. Ruth Kauffmann makes one step closer to recognizing the importance of such a study by noting that “[r]evolution as an ideal [in *Cántico cósmico*] is conceptualized as a state of perpetual change” (4). Applying such logic to Cardenal’s perpetually transforming landscapes, no matter how subtle the changes, and making a link to the historical and autobiographical contexts of the poet’s life is precisely what this study aims to accomplish.

One scholar that attempts to demonstrate that Cardenal’s poetry cannot be “divorced from biography, ideology, and history” is Paul Borgeson (Cohen, “Review” 82-3). In his book *Hacia el hombre nuevo: Poesía y pensamiento de Ernesto Cardenal* (1984), Borgeson does look at the chronological evolution of Cardenal’s work from the early 1940s through the late 1970s, looking at the influence of North American writers and linking changes in Cardenal’s verse to the context of the poet’s life in the 1950s. Borgeson does note the inclusion of the natural world as a constant in Cardenal’s writing, but nature/place plays a secondary referential role, to borrow DeGrave’s terminology.

Cardenal’s Poetic Landscapes

The present study distinguishes itself from previous studies in that it combines a chronological exploration of poetic landscapes and the construction of place in Cardenal’s poetry with a focus on place as a primary referent. Rather than comparing Cardenal’s poetic landscapes and place(s) with those of other writers to note commonalities and differences, this study embarks on an analysis of the transforming configurations of place of one poet over the course of his career within the historical and autobiographical contexts in which the poems were composed. Just as Cardenal’s poetry has been described as being interdisciplinary in nature, the analytical approach will focus mainly on cultural studies, history, and (ecocritical) literary theory but will also

include elements of anthropology.¹⁷ Following Kogl's equation *place = space + meaning*, I will attempt to demonstrate that Cardenal's poetic landscapes and construction of place(s) are in dialogue with other meanings attached to place, both past and present, as well as particular autographical and historical moments. Also, I will pinpoint these specific meanings and moments to show how they enter into Cardenal's re-presentations of place in his verse. Additionally, I shall also look at the spatial component in the construction of place(s) in order to link imperial "writing" over space, as it happens historically, with Cardenal's poetic responses. This latter task will be informed by ecocriticism.

Dissertation Structure

The present study will divide Cardenal's production into four distinct periods based on important historical and autobiographical moments as gleaned from the poet's memoirs.¹⁸ Each chapter will articulate the relevance of the historical events that distinguish each period. The poems will be analyzed in chronological order relative to when each verse was penned and published. As such, one of the criteria for selecting the poems to be analyzed will be the ability to determine with a reasonable degree of certainty the approximate time frame within which each verse was

¹⁷It might appear unusual to describe poetry as "interdisciplinary," but here I borrow from Iván Carrasco's "*Cántico cósmico* de Cardenal: un texto interdisciplinario" in which he writes:

Cántico cósmico [es un] extenso poema que entre sus diversas figuras le concede predominio a la *mutación disciplinaria*, que consiste en la alteración y sustitución de los discursos típicos de la poesía mediante el uso y superposición de discursos de disciplinas no literarias. En este trabajo se destaca la incorporación del discurso de la física cuántica, del cristianismo y del testimonio histórico. (Abstract 129, emphasis in orig.)

¹⁸In an interview conducted by Mario Benedetti forty-four years ago, Cardenal denies that his work can be divided into distinct phases or stages over time:

Creo que no hay tantas diferencias de etapas, sino más bien distintos planos en mi poesía. Hay una poesía histórica, hay una poesía política y hay una poesía amorosa, hecha primero con el tema del amor humano y luego con el del amor místico; pero estas diferentes clases de poesía las he escrito en diferentes etapas de mi vida. No se puede decir que sean ciclos cronológicos sino que en las distintas épocas de mi vida he escrito esas diferentes clases de poesía, sin que influya mucho la fecha. (qtd. in García González 110)

However, a panoramic view of his work from the present vantage point proves otherwise as this study will demonstrate.

composed. Because it is impossible to ascertain the precise date of every element and snippet included within Cardenal's verse, publication dates of the first edition of each collection will also be taken into account if the date of its respective composition proves difficult to pinpoint. This last note is particularly pertinent in the case of Cardenal's epic and voluminous *Cántico cósmico* which, by the poet's own admission, is the final product of over thirty years of work. There is evidence in his memoirs, however, that Cardenal put the finishing touches on his opus in the years following the closure of the Sandinista Ministry of Culture in which Cardenal served as minister until 1987.¹⁹ As such, it is assumed that Cardenal published the finished poem after proofreading it and feeling satisfied with the unity of the text at the point in time that he submitted the manuscript to the publisher.

Two other criteria will be taken into account in the selection of poems for the present study. First, priority will be given to that poetry which makes reference to the United States on some level in order to study the effects of empire on the construction of place. It should be noted that overt references to U.S. imperialism significantly diminish in Cardenal's most recent period of production (from roughly 1990 to the present) for reasons that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Second, attention will be given to the critical acclaim and popularity of each poem. That is, Cardenal's most well-known poems will be selected for each period where possible. A brief summary of the chapters of the present study is included below.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 1: "From Transculturation Towards Polarization—Landscape in the Early Poetry of Ernesto Cardenal (1950-1970)" will focus on Cardenal's first phase of poetic production, a period that extends from Cardenal's return to Nicaragua from study abroad in the U.S. and Europe in 1950 up until, but not including, his Marxist conversion in Castro's Cuba twenty years

¹⁹See page 330 of Cardenal's *La revolución perdida. Memorias III*.

later. The analysis will center mainly on the two poems “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and “Hora 0,” but also includes “Greytown,” “Viajero del Siglo XIX en el Río San Juan,” and “Squier en Nicaragua.” Cardenal’s own account of events as published in the three volumes of his memoirs, *Vida perdida* (1999), *Las insulas extrañas* (2002), and *La revolución perdida* (2004), will also be considered.²⁰ I will locate linkages between certain tropes and rhetoric emanating from U.S. empire in order to demonstrate how Cardenal’s poetry enters into dialogue with these imperial narratives that contest meaning of place. It will be shown how Cardenal’s verse specifically responds to and appropriates specific imperial tropes that have reappeared in various forms, from the writings of Alexander von Humboldt, to U.S. postage stamps depicting hostile Nicaraguan landscapes, to U.S. Cold War rhetoric surfacing during presidential press conferences. This chapter will also highlight a trend in Ernesto Cardenal’s verse which leads from what I will call “transcultural identity conflict” regarding the relationship between Nicaragua and the United States towards a less nuanced and more sharply defined polarization of identities, the latter of which can be linked to major historical events, namely the heating up of the Cold War, the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, as well as to autobiographical moments such as Cardenal’s study abroad in the United States. Finally, it will be shown that landscape provides important clues about Cardenal’s own prejudices regarding citizenship, his ideas pertaining to gender roles and sexuality, and his poetic blurring or erasure of other subjectivities that compete with his vision of place.

Chapter 2: “Weaving Poetry and the Self into Nicaragua’s Ecological Web—Nationalism and Self-Realization in Ernesto Cardenal’s Poetic Landscapes (1970-1977)” will look primarily

²⁰In addition to the poems to be considered throughout this study, each chapter will also include references to these three volumes of Cardenal’s memoirs to complement the analysis and to demonstrate similarities between his poetry and prose. I maintain an equally critical stance when reading his version of events as contained within his memoirs and in no way allow his account to influence the conclusions that I draw from my analysis.

at Cardenal's life and writing between 1970 and 1977, beginning with Cardenal's Marxist conversion in Cuba and ending with the poet's exile from Solentiname in 1977. The analysis will center on the poems "Canto nacional," "Oráculo sobre Managua," "Viaje a Nueva York," and "Ofensiva final." I will also make reference to his memoirs. This chapter will demonstrate how Cardenal, in the face of increasing national turmoil, attempts to 1) reclaim topographical symbols, such as the volcano Momotombo, as well as Nicaragua's non-human inhabitants from neocolonialist narratives, 2) reclaims language and reasserts the legitimacy and autonomy of Nicaraguan-based knowledge in an epistemological sense via the inclusion of endemic non-human species in his poetry, 3) poetically establishes connections between all living entities in Nicaraguan territory, both human and non-human, to unify nation, and blur lines of division between competing subjectivities. Also, from an ecocritical perspective, I will try to show how the poet 4) reclaims space by establishing control over the narrative that imperial extractive resource activities and exploitation have physically "written" over the land. By connecting himself, the national citizenry, and other prominent national poets with Nicaragua's life-sustaining habitat during this period of production, the poet draws together language, labor, and species and unites them to formulate place as one viable, thriving organism or ecological web. Self-preservation and self-realization of the poetic "yo" as subject and as self-appointed spokesperson for nation interconnect and expand to become dominant themes in his verse.

Chapter 3: "Exile & Utopia—Reformulating Place & Legacy in the Land and Starscapes of Ernesto Cardenal (1977-1990)" will consider the years 1977-1990, a period marked by Cardenal's exile from Solentiname, the ouster of Somoza and the Sandinista triumph of 1979, the tumultuous Contra War, and the eventual Sandinista electoral defeat. Two collections of poems will be analyzed in this chapter, namely *Vuelos de Victoria* and *Cántico cósmico*. Cardenal's

memoirs will also be referenced. I will demonstrate how nature triumphs in *Vuelos de victoria*, as well as how harmony between the human and non-human world is restored, competing human subjectivities are blurred and conjoined with landscape, and the peasantry are liberated along with the land that they work. I will explore how hints of an exilic positionality on the part of the poetic voice that first appears in *Vuelos de victoria* continues in *Cántico cósmico* and how this exile becomes a much more predominant theme. I argue that as Ernesto Cardenal is exiled by the historic turn of events during the years considered, the lyrical voice in his poetry simultaneously assumes an exilic stance, shifting towards the “starscapes” of an uncolonized cosmos. From this space and new vantage point, the poet is able to re-envision place and enter into competitive dialogue both with narratives emanating from U.S. empire as well as with the autobiographical and historical events that challenge the poet to reframe his nationalist vision. Cardenal’s exile is akin to emasculation and he utilizes the reformulations of place both to vie for control over a nation increasingly detached from his ideological moorings as well as to restore his wounded masculinity.

In Chapter 4: “Returning to Planet Earth—Countering the Neoliberal Turn & Old Age in Ernesto Cardenal’s Construction of Place (1990-2014),” I will look at four poems found in *Versos del Pluriverso* (2005), Cardenal’s essay “Este mundo y otro” (2011), and five recent poems published in *Hidrógeno enamorado* (2012). I will explore how the exilic positionality seen in *Cántico cósmico* again surfaces in many of these newer poems, but, this time, is woven within a counter-discourse inspired by the neoliberal turn evident around the globe. I investigate how the poet wrestles with the very conceptual apparatus that has allowed neoliberalism to become the dominant mode of discourse and the fragmentation that it has exacerbated. By formulating new spatial and temporal representations of the earth and of the universe in response

to the “time-space compression” observed in neoliberal transactions, Ernesto Cardenal advances a unifying perspective of the universe, advocates for a renewed sense of history and for the protection of the “commons,” the collective body of humanity and the Earth alike (Harvey, *Brief History* 4). Cardenal’s poetry assumes a more transnational character, globalizing along with the neoliberal conceptual apparatus which the poet aims to counter. In a sense, Cardenal’s verse gradually returns to the earth from the cosmos as this period of production progresses, but rather than focusing extensively on Nicaragua, he enters a phase of poetic “planetization” (López-Baralt 125), a transition that coincides with the rampant globalization of free-market capitalism.

By analyzing the construction of place across these four periods of Ernesto Cardenal’s writing career, I will be able to note changes over time in relation to the historical context in which each verse was composed. It will become evident as this study progresses that the poet’s representations of place are social constructs in constant flux, in continuous contact and dialogue with other subjectivities vying to occupy and identify with the same spaces.

CHAPTER 1: FROM TRANSCULTURATION TOWARDS POLARIZATION—
LANDSCAPE IN THE EARLY POETRY OF ERNESTO CARDENAL (1950-1970)

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot – “Little Gidding” (the last of his *Four Quartets*)

From his early childhood, Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal claims to have already formed a deep interest in history, a fascination he recalls in his memoirs:

[E]n aquellos tiempos yo, además de poeta, y tal vez más que poeta, quería ser historiador. Aunque también novelista, filósofo, pintor y escultor. Pero a esas dos vocaciones que desde el principio tuve —la poesía y la historia— se debió que después yo escribiera mucha poesía histórica. Por aquel apasionado de la historia que bajo el poeta siempre hubo en mí. . . . Ya un poco mayorcito en mi infancia, es decir a los 11 y a los 12 años, ya interno en el colegio de Granada pero todavía viviendo en León, lo que en la vida más me interesaba era la historia. La historia colonial sobre todo. (*Vida perdida* 454)

It was not until the years 1947 to 1949 when these two of Cardenal’s greatest passions, poetry and history, were to come together in what has been called a “turning point” in his poetic development (Cohen, *Con Walker* 5). At Columbia University in New York, Cardenal studied British and American literature and was influenced by several prominent North American poets, such as Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and most importantly, Ezra Pound (Cohen 6-7). Cardenal was also able to take advantage of the multiple libraries accessible to him in New York and study the tropics, Latin America, and his homeland of Nicaragua (Cardenal, *Vida perdida* 61). It was in the spring of 1949 when Cardenal was twenty-four years of age that these influences converged and the poet penned what is considered

to be his first *exteriorista* poem, “Raleigh” (Cohen, *Con Walker* 6). This chapter will focus specifically on Cardenal’s re-presentation of landscape and construction of place during his first period of *exteriorista* poetic production from 1950 to 1970, a stage in his life that ends with (but does not include) his conversion to Marxist principles after a trip to Castro’s Cuba twenty-one years later.²¹ Looking at his work that dates to this time period, it is clear that Cardenal incorporates history into his verse as an important element. Interestingly, his poetry reveals not only an intertextuality with other historical documents but is itself molded by the historical context in which each verse is composed. The analysis that follows will trace the influence of autobiographical and historical moments in the life and times of the poet and observe how they manifest themselves in Cardenal’s construction of place, viewing his poetry from the vantage points of “meaning” and “space” as derived from Alexandra Kogl’s equation. As indicated in the introduction, I have proposed modifications to Kogl’s formula to demonstrate that *space* and *meaning* are not mutually exclusive addends. Not only is Cardenal’s work in dialogue with competing meanings that are attached to place, but his poetry is also influenced by material spaces as well as by activities themselves that alter space.

In this chapter, I will first attempt to locate linkages between certain tropes and rhetoric emanating from U.S. empire and demonstrate how Cardenal’s poetry, while not being entirely reactionary in nature, is certainly in dialogue with these imperial narratives that contest meaning of place. Most importantly, by focusing on several of his landmark productions from this period, mainly “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and “Hora 0,” this investigation will highlight a trend in Ernesto Cardenal’s verse which leads from what I will label here as “transcultural identity conflict” regarding the relationship between Nicaragua and the United States towards a less

²¹The analysis in Chapter 2 of this dissertation will cover the poetry that Cardenal wrote following his conversion in Cuba in 1970 and will extend to 1977, the year that Cardenal is exiled from his community of Solentiname after it is ransacked and destroyed by Somoza’s forces.

nuanced and more sharply defined polarization of identities. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this trend towards polarization, or identity “clarification,” can be linked to major historical events, namely the heating up of the Cold War, the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, as well as to autobiographical moments such as Cardenal’s study abroad in the United States.

Secondly, a study of poetic landscapes and the construction of place allows for convincing academic speculation about the links between Cardenal’s verse as a response to specific imperial tropes that have emanated from empire from the time of the Spanish conquest to the poet’s present moment. These tropes have reappeared in various forms, from the writings of Alexander von Humboldt, to U.S. postage stamps depicting hostile Nicaraguan landscapes, to U.S. Cold War rhetoric surfacing during presidential press conferences. As Doreen Massey points out in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), places are not so much “bounded areas as [they are] open and porous networks of social relations. Their ‘identities’ are constructed through the specificity of their interactions with other places . . . those identities will be multiple” (121). Although it is impossible to locate the origins of all references with certainty, numerous elements of landscape re-presentation in Cardenal’s work can provide clues as to what specific interactions with empire regarded by most historiographers as watershed historical moments led to the “responses” in identity refashioning that we read in his verse.

Finally, landscape provides important clues regarding Cardenal’s own prejudices regarding citizenship to his own nation. It becomes evident from analyzing his verse who is included in his vision and which subjectivities are marginalized. A study of landscape demonstrates Cardenal’s ideas regarding gender roles, sexuality, and his poetic blurring or erasure of other subjectivities that compete with his vision of place.

“Con Walker en Nicaragua” and Other Early Poems (1950-1954)

Ernesto Cardenal wrote “Con Walker en Nicaragua” upon returning to his homeland in 1950 after attending Columbia University in New York from 1947-1949 and spending time in Europe (Cohen, *With Walker* 8). The poem serves as an excellent place to begin this analysis because landscape is one of the main protagonists of the poem, if not the principal one, and it is chock-full of important clues that allow the reader to link Cardenal’s construction of place to particular historical and autobiographical moments. A close reading of landscape reveals the influences of transculturation, imperial tropes dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as Cardenal’s own views regarding gender roles, sexuality, and environmental sustainability.

In the first fifteen lines of “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” one of his first poems exhibiting *exteriorista* esthetics, Ernesto Cardenal evokes all five senses: “Y aquel olor tibio, dulzón, verde, de Centro América . . . y un sordo rumor . . . [y] cómo olía a maleza . . .” (42). Color schemes in his landscape descriptions are utilized not only to express the lushness and beauty of the land, but also to convey a certain harmony. Blue, for example, is used to unite water, earth, and sky: “sus lagos azules entre montes azules bajo el cielo azul” (46). This harmony includes the interconnectedness of humanity with nature as represented by “los caminos llenos de diligencias azules” (46). People are one with the earth, water, sky and the common color blue suggests this relationship.

Harmonious landscapes such as these have been described by some critics as conscious poetic constructions of utopia in the Americas. Analisa DeGrave, for instance, states that such representations cast the region as “the edenic and pure Latin American or national garden” (90). According to DeGrave, the work of a number of twentieth century Latin American writers, such as Cardenal, falls into a genre called “ecoliterature,” which portray the natural environment as an

entity which is threatened, “constituting a principal referent of discourse, marking a new moment in Latin American letters” (89). Authors such as Cardenal first construct a utopic image of Latin America in their writing by appropriating the tropes first associated with narratives of European exploration and conquest and then proceed to deconstruct this utopia as it is lost and descends into “dystopia” at the hands of the Spaniards, U.S. imperialism, or modernization. Cardenal’s poetry certainly makes frequent reference to what DeGrave calls “dystopian interrupters in the Latin American garden,” such as the United States, dictators, and “the negative consequences of modernity” (93). In “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” and his other poems from the same period, Cardenal does set out to link the fall from grace to the imperial exploits of the U.S. as represented by the figures of William Walker and other nineteenth century filibusters. However, it would be easy to succumb to the temptation to focus too heavily on Cardenal’s high profile persona as a Catholic priest and to analyze his entire representation of landscapes through the lens of liberation theology and the “poet’s vision of a Christian utopia” (93). Such an analysis would obscure the subtle changes in these poetic portraits of landscape over time and make it difficult to locate ambiguities in these representations that fall outside of the Christian paradigm and to tie them with a degree of confidence to particular historical and autobiographical moments and narratives emanating from empire. Identities of place are social constructs in constant flux, in continuous contact and dialogue with other subjectivities vying to occupy and identify with the same spaces. Connecting the dots using Christian underpinnings through the entirety of Cardenal’s production is to look at his poetry as one body of work rather than poetic steps along the way that traverse different historical and autobiographical terrains. DeGrave’s study delineating utopic and dystopic narratives in Cardenal’s work is very insightful, particularly in that it considers the natural environment as a primary rather than a secondary referent. An even

closer reading of landscape in Cardenal's poetry, however, reveals clues that go beyond biblical interpretations and influences to uncover more discrete subjective leanings and biases.

In "Con Walker en Nicaragua" and "Squier en Nicaragua," two of his earliest *exteriorista* poems, Cardenal appropriates certain imperial tropes and incorporates them into his narrative for his own purposes. In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt analyzes the European need to reinvent and reimagine the Americas in order to reestablish and transform their relations with the region. Pratt maintains that the first step in this process was to construct rhetoric of "discovery" similar to the writings of Columbus and those that had first presented the Americas to Europe. In the Americas, she focuses first on the importance of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and his canonization of three images related to the Americas in his writing: 1) the tropical rain forests, 2) the snow-capped mountains, and 3) the vast interior plains (123). His writings tended to reduce the Americas to that of an image of primal nature, making invisible the people who occupy the land. Cardenal in these earlier poems assumes a similar stance to that of von Humboldt and it has been argued that autobiographically he "initiated his rediscovery of the New World" by viewing his homeland from an exterior vantage point during his years at Columbia University (Cohen 7). Cardenal himself describes this time abroad as follows:

Prefería aprovechar mi tiempo en la magnífica biblioteca de la universidad, y en la que era todavía mucho mejor: la gran biblioteca pública de Nueva York. Allí investigué mucho del trópico, de Nicaragua y América Latina en general, materiales que me sirvieron para mucha poesía que escribiría después. (*Vida Perdida* 61)

Cardenal looks at his time spent in New York as an international student as a productive experience through which he was able to learn more about his homeland. Fellow Nicaraguan poet (and Cardenal's first cousin) Pablo Antonio Cuadra has noted that a "common denominator" in these early poems is "the vision of America from a foreign eye" (7). Cohen goes on to argue that "Cardenal has used the eye of explorers, travelers, journalists and adventurers for recovering the wonderment and otherness of his world" (7). Autobiographically speaking, Cardenal is rediscovering his homeland in a literal sense as he pens these first poems that figuratively reenact the European and American exploration of the Central American isthmus.

Cardenal essentially appropriates these imperial tropes as per Pratt's analysis and turns them on their head by presenting the lush, paradisiacal landscapes common to travel writing of the New World alongside subtle, yet important references to labor and harmonious human/non-human relationships within the natural environment. Similar to von Humboldt, Cardenal visually obscures the inhabitants of the land, but does not hide them completely from view to give the impression of empty space. He reasserts their presence, but camouflages them, removing stark contrasts to heighten the sense of human/non-human oneness. In "Viajero del Siglo XIX en el Río San Juan," the following passage provides a telling example:

Había una casa blanca con barandas verdes
que resaltaba entre el verde-tierno de los bananales
y una vela triangular, sucia y zurcida
temblaba en espera, inflada por la brisa,
junto a las gradas que bajaban hasta el agua.
Una mujer vestida de blanco
cruzó tras la baranda, nos miró un instante

y desapareció entre los bananales. (104)

The description of the woman, the house, her clothes, and the house complement each other aesthetically and give the impression that they all derive from the same material and origin. Again, color schemes are important to unify the images, appearing here in shades of green and white.

Other examples abound in these poems that demonstrate Cardenal's tendency to superimpose the human inhabitants on the landscape as if to suggest that they comprise one entity. Even his early references to resource extraction suggest a harmonious and non-exploitative relationship. In "Con Walker en Nicaragua," Cardenal's description of his native paradise includes the following reference: "Y el repentino planazo de la iguana en el agua, / *el estruendo de los troncos cayendo*" (42, emphasis added). This juxtaposition of the iguana flopping into the water and the rumble of falling timber suggests a human presence that coexists harmoniously with the landscape around it. Logging appears as natural in the landscape as an iguana flopping in the water. True to Cardenal's Marxist tendencies, this verse demonstrates an early sign of the poet's preoccupation with labor and his career long objective to explore alternatives to what he deems to be the destructive capitalist presence as represented by the U.S. in the Americas. Here nature and man's working relationship with it maintain a seamless whole, alluding to a sustainable equilibrium between the natives and their environment that preceded imperial exploitation. In "Squier en Nicaragua," Cardenal paints a similar scene:

Y chillidos...

¡Un grito entre las guanábanas!

El hacha cortando un tronco

y el eco del hacha.

¡El mismo chillido!

Ruido sordo de manadas de cerdos salvajes.

¡Carcajadas!

El canto de un tucán. (84, emphasis added)

Cardenal does not erase the inhabitants from their place to create a seemingly empty and thus easily exploitable space as was common in the travel writing analyzed by Mary Louise Pratt. He uses a similar technique to that of writers such as Alexander von Humboldt but appropriates it to camouflage, rather than eliminate, human presence from the landscape, implying their harmony and their inseparable relationship with it. Ernesto Cardenal's writing, like that of Andrés Bello and José María Heredia before him, reflects what Mary Louise Pratt calls "transculturation," defined as the tendency for "subordinated groups [to] select and invent from materials presented them by the metropole. The periphery 'appropriates' metropolitan narratives" (7). Quite interestingly, these appropriated narratives are used to reclaim meanings of place usurped by the narrative's original metropolitan draft.

A closer look at Cardenal's description of landscape in his early poems of 1950-1954 reveals an ambiguity that tends to blur the dichotomy utopia / dystopia that might initially appear to neatly divide paradise from the fall from grace. In the opening lines of the poem "Con Walker en Nicaragua," a lush green landscape containing "[l]as casas blancas con tejas rojas y con grandes aleros llenas de sol" suddenly gives way to "[u]na ola gris que viene borrando los montes" (42). This grey wave later moves off: "y después la ola gris y el sordo rumor alejándose" (42). This grey in the landscape could be seen as a foreshadowing of William Walker's imminent arrival and the impending dystopia that threatens to envelop the Nicaraguan Eden, but numerous passages offering similarly stark contrasts allow for other possible interpretations, especially

when analyzed in connection with other poetic themes. Another confusing juxtaposition in Cardenal's representation of landscapes can be found in his poem "Squier en Nicaragua," in which he describes "parejas de lapas que pasan gritando, / y el güis, chichitote y *dichoso-fui* / *dichoso-fuiiiiiiii* que cantan en los chagüites *sombríos*" (86, emphasis added). "[P]airs of macaws that pass by squawking, / and the güis, chichitote and 'feeling joy' / 'feeling-joyyyyyyyyy' / which they sing in among the gloomy bogs" (87, translation by Cohen). Joy noticeably clashes with the gloom implied by the description of the bog. In the poem "Greytown," Cardenal plays off of the word "grey" to paint a dreary landscape with an emphasis on the grey color:

¡Greytown! ¡Greytown! Ciudad Gris.

Ahora sólo hay arena *gris* y mar *gris* bajo el cielo *gris*.

Cascos de buques viejos en la costa *seca*.

Chozas de paja *seca* bajo los cocos *secos*.

Sol sobre salinas *secas*. Sal de color de *ceniza*.

Salinas planas. Playa plana. Y mar plano.

Todo tan húmedo. Todo tan estéril. Todo tan verde. (78)

First, this particular passage provides another example of inversion and appropriation of travel writing tropes as presented by Mary Louise Pratt. Much of the rhetoric during the mid-nineteenth century that characterized travel writing around the time that British capital was pouring into Latin America was shifting from a rhetoric of discovery to a rhetoric of "conquest and achievement" (Pratt 148).²² Society was portrayed as being "backwards . . . in need of rationalized exploitation," for "failure" to exploit resources on its own (150). William Walker

²²The period during the nineteenth century during which British capital flow to Latin America heavily increased coincides with the exploits of the *filibusteros* that Cardenal describes in this early collection of poems, as well as the occupation of San Juan del Norte, later renamed Greytown after British Jamaica's Governor Charles Edward Grey in 1848.

himself is quoted as having described Nicaragua as “a country for which nature has done much and man little” (Soodalter). Undoubtedly, the descriptions denoting a lack of life, movement, and color, along with allusion to the empty, lifeless hulls of old ships in the preceding excerpt from “Greytown,” provide further examples of poetic appropriation of imperial tropes in which images of backwardness are pointed back towards empire, placing the responsibility of stagnation and infertility on failed imperialist policies. This notion of infertility will be important later in this analysis. In this particular verse, modernizing imperialist incursions are not the solution to the problems of stagnation, they are the root cause, as the re-presentation of landscape in “Greytown” seems to convey. This theme appears with greater clarity and magnitude in later poems written by Cardenal, such as “Hora 0” as will also become evident as this analysis progresses.

Perhaps more important here, however, is the sense of confusion that these descriptions of landscape cause. The grey, salty, dead landscape clashes suddenly with the juxtaposed image of “Todo tan húmedo. Todo tan estéril. Todo tan verde” (78). This sharp contrast certainly did not appear in this description by accident and the result of its inclusion creates a strong sense of dissonance in the reader. Several important passages provide clues that help uncover the themes that these highly contradictory, dissonant, and somewhat confusing depictions of landscape complement in these poems.

“Con Walker in Nicaragua” poetically portrays the Filibuster War of 1855-1857 as seen through the eyes of an aging Clinton Rollins, a sympathetic character who looks back fifty years to retell his experiences as a recruit in William Walker’s filibuster army. Rollins describes Walker’s exploits and the latter’s eventual capture and execution in Honduras. William Walker is an historical figure that led U.S. mercenaries on a quest to seize control over the Central

American isthmus. Among his brazen escapades, Walker declared himself President of Nicaragua with the hopes of establishing a slave state and eventually attaching Central America and Cuba to the southern Slave States of the U.S. His plans were foiled, however, by the five Central American countries, Great Britain, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, owner of a shipping line through Nicaragua (Cohen, *With Walker* 8). In Cardenal's poem, Rollins paints a portrait of the Nicaraguan landscape, its people, his *filibustero* comrades, William Walker, and relates in great detail the conquest of Rivas, the destruction of Granada, and the assassination of General Ponciano Corral.²³

One particular line that cannot be overlooked in "Con Walker en Nicaragua" in which a sense of confusion is explicitly expressed is the following: "y se nos iban *confundiendo las ideas*" (54, emphasis added). These words, attributed to the poem's narrator, Clinton Rollins, can be traced back roughly to the original writings of Rollins upon which Cardenal based much of the content of these poems. It has since been discovered that the name "Clinton Rollins" was merely a pseudonym for Henry Clinton Parkhurst who did not actually accompany William Walker to Nicaragua but rather travelled there and interviewed members of Walker's expeditions after Walker's death. He later published these serialized stories entitled "Filibustering with Walker: Reminiscences of Wild Days on the Pacific Coast" in the San Francisco Chronicle in 1909-1910 as if he had truly embarked with Walker on his mission. Although a fictitious character, Parkhurst claims to have conveyed via Clinton Rollins a veridical account "and nowhere wandered from truth and fact, but endeavored to produce a reliable history of a small army"

²³General Ponciano Corral (1805-1855) was a member of the conservative *Legitimista* Party in Nicaragua in the mid-nineteenth century which had its power base in the city of Granada. The *legitimistas* was engaged in a civil war with the liberal Democratic Party, the latter of which sought the help of William Walker to regain power from the conservatives. The bastion of liberal power was the city of León. Under duress, Corral signed a peace agreement with Walker, but, fearing that the nation was falling irreversibly into the hands of the *filibusteros*, he sought to forge an alliance with warring factions as well as neighboring Central American republics to reclaim control from Walker. His letters were intercepted by Walker who eventually ordered the execution of Corral despite pleas of clemency from the latter's family (Vega Miranda).

(Parkhurst 1). It is possible to speculate briefly regarding the confusion experienced by Americans and what Cardenal might be alluding to in the line “y se nos iban *confundiendo las ideas*,” if looked at from the perspective of the original source and other historical studies of the time. In his scrapbook, Parkhurst describes the situation of the *filibusteros* as follows:

The spell of tropic life, dislike of colder climes, freedom from restraint and rigid customs—heart entanglements, in some cases—held them to the scenes of their triumphs, their defeats and their downfall. The native population bore no resentment against them, and they settled down contentedly and passed their lives there. (Parkhurst 1)

Certain lines in “Con Walker en Nicaragua” seem to highlight this point made by Parkhurst regarding Americans who stayed behind: “Los que se quedaron para casarse allá después / y vivir en paz en esa tierra / y estarán esta tarde sentados recordando / (pensando escribir tal vez un día sus memorias), / y su esposa que es de esa tierra, y los nietos jugando...” (44, ellipsis in orig.). These passages suggest a crisis of identity on the part of the Americans who participated in Walker’s filibustering campaign, perhaps the origin of the allusion to confusion in Cardenal’s line “y se nos iban *confundiendo las ideas*.” Intermingling with the locals, creating families with them, relocating permanently to Central America does indeed indicate a drastic change from the initial motivations purported to have driven many Americans to take part in Walker’s expedition. In her powerful study, *Taking Haiti*, regarding the culture of U.S. imperialism during the U.S. military occupation of Haiti from 1915-1940, Mary A. Renda argues that “paternalist discourse was one of the primary cultural mechanisms by which the occupation conscripted men into the project of carrying out U.S. rule” (13). She maintains that this paternalism was a “mitigating factor in a largely coercive and racist intervention” and was also structured by gender and

sexuality (15). Renda states: “The complexities of national, racial, and gender identity in their occupation—the marines’ desire to affirm their whiteness, their masculinity, and their social distance from Haitians—created tensions that could not be fully managed by paternalist injunctions” (137). According to her, the marines were faced with a “very real subjective challenge: how to maintain one’s sense of oneself amid the collapse of meanings and distinctions essential to one’s identity; how to maintain one’s sense of oneself as a white man, and as an American, in an occupied Haiti” (164). Of course, Renda’s study deals with Haiti. The U.S. occupation that she describes was an official policy approved by the U.S. government, unlike William Walker’s numerous expeditions to Nicaragua in the mid-1800s which were considered to be privately sponsored missions. However, there are some similarities which can be uncovered if we look at Walker through Renda’s analytical lens.

Walker is said to have looked upon the Nicaraguan people as inferiors, and his own writings, such as *The War in Nicaragua*, make this evident. In order to establish a connection to Renda’s analysis and shed light on the identity crisis conveyed in the lines of Cardenal’s poetry, however, it is more important to look at the state of mind of those recruits that accompanied Walker on his mission and the state of affairs in the U.S. at the time of his expeditions to Nicaragua. Most of his followers were reportedly southerners in these years immediately preceding the U.S. Civil War. Robert Houston, in his foreword to *The War in Nicaragua*, writes: “By now, there was little doubt that a war between the states was brewing, and the country’s attention was turning toward that new excitement. Only in the South, among the pro-slavery people, did Walker still find his needed support . . .” (Houston 10). Why these southern men were attracted to take part in Walker’s plan can perhaps be explained in similar terms to those of Renda’s study of the U.S. marines in Haiti, that is to say, the motivation behind “the marines’

desire to affirm their whiteness, their masculinity” at a time when they felt that their societal position was threatened at home. The following passage from William W. Freehling supports this hypothesis:

Abolitionists called slavery wrong because all men, black and white, were created equal. That version of egalitarianism assaulted poor southern whites’ one basis of superiority. . . . Such attacks united the attacked. . . . The resulting defensive defiance, at least in black-belt districts, customary gave proslavery zealots bountiful support. (43)

Thus, it could be argued that the men who accompanied Walker, the leader who “se proclamó Presidente / y decretó la esclavitud y la confiscación de bienes” were confused between their initial motivations and goals of the expedition and the ensuing identity crisis that followed upon contact with the land and its people (“Con Walker” 56). Cardenal writes the following from the perspective of Clinton Rollins: “Y nos enamoramos de las mujeres de esa tierra” (50). Much like the marines in Renda’s Haiti, Walker’s men had embarked on a project marked by racism and paternalism in an attempt to uphold their own superiority that they felt was dwindling at the hands of the abolitionists back home. This project began to falter as the lines demarcating the identities of the subject and the other began to blur. Rollins, the narrator of Cardenal’s poem, mentions explicitly that “se nos iban *confundiendo las ideas*,” and the seemingly contradictory details provided in the representation of landscape heighten this sense of confusion.

It is important to not focus too heavily on the allusions to the American crisis of identity here and overlook the main topic at hand, namely Ernesto Cardenal and the reasons for which a general sense of confusion pervades throughout “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and other poems from this time period. As Steven F. White has maintained, Cardenal has “defined an *ars poetica*

that entails consulting original sources and then artistically manipulating these sources to fictionalize history and thereby create works of literature” (*Modern Nicaraguan Poetry* 165). This was pointed out earlier in the introduction of this analysis regarding Cardenal’s representation of landscape and utilization of historiographical documents. It is not the veracity of the American identity crises in the original text or even Cardenal’s manipulation of it that is central to this argument. It is the fact that this American transcultural identity conflict seems to have resonated with Cardenal and he chose to include it as a major theme in this earlier poetry that deserves close attention.

Perhaps a good starting point for launching this discussion is to stress the importance of the fact that Cardenal decided to include a sympathetic American narrator in his poem in the first place. Brady Harrison has argued,

Americans rarely give Central Americans speaking parts, so Cardenal’s work contrasts with them. Also, it “hard-wires into the poem” . . . the positional superiority of the U.S. over Central America. If Americans can ignore Nicaraguan history, Nicaraguans cannot afford to ignore the presence of the U.S in their history. (162)

While it is true that Cardenal gives such Americans as Clinton Rollins and Ephraim George Squier central parts, the most important task here is not necessarily to compare and contrast American and Nicaraguan representations of one another, but to compare and contrast Cardenal’s poetry itself. It is most notable here that Cardenal makes the American explorers not only the main narrators, but sympathetic individuals. Clinton Rollins and his comrades recognize the beauty of the Nicaraguan women and the landscape (a connection that I will expand upon later in this chapter) and many of them stay, marry locals, and live out their lives in Nicaragua

rather than returning to the United States. Steven F. White proposes an argument in his study regarding this inclusion of Americans as protagonists:

By adopting the sympathetic viewpoint of one of Walker's soldiers, Clinton Rollins, Cardenal transforms into literature the "tensions" of the crucial episode of Nicaraguan history that he has assimilated in a way that is deeply personal, given the fact that his family is from Granada, the city destroyed by Walker. The poet submerges himself in the persona of Clinton Rollins and allows the filibusters to describe and, finally, to condemn themselves. (White 166)

This explanation does not try to explain why Cardenal *was able* to feel compassion and sympathy for some of the filibusters he represents in his poetry and was capable of comprehending their sense of confusion as a result of their transcultural contact. Interestingly, in the related footnote, White expresses that "[i]t would be interesting to approach 'Con Walker en Nicaragua' psychoanalytically, given the poet/victim's latent identification with (admiration of?) the oppressor" (204). Perhaps, that is what this analysis strives to achieve in some sense. I do think White is wrong to suggest, however, that "[t]he unethical filibusters are juxtaposed with the highly ethical Nicaraguan heroes Artola and Estrada" only. Cardenal's ethical identification and admiration includes some of the Americans as well. These American characters are juxtaposed with other Americans, thus revealing, neither admiration nor hostility towards the oppressor, but a confusion as how to interpret the American character.

While depicting Walker and his exploits from the perspective of one of his American followers, it can be argued that Cardenal presents a sense of identity crisis on the part of the American protagonists, because the poet himself harbors a sense of confusion regarding American influence in Nicaragua and U.S.-Nicaraguan relations. In "Con Walker en Nicaragua,"

the figure of William Walker draws a sharp contrast with many of those that accompany him, much like the grey cloud blots out the green of the lush landscape. In “Los filibusteros,” he describes the men by writing, “Hubo rufianes, ladrones, jugadores, pistoleros. / También hubo honrados y caballeros y valientes” (72). It is as if he does not know what to make of his neighbors to the north and he recognizes these two faces and clearly depicts the two extremes manifested in the figure of the American invaders.

Jonathan Cohen argues that Cardenal’s Walker “personifies this chapter in the mutual history of the United States and Nicaragua” (*With Walker* 10). As he does in *El estrecho dudoso*, the poet uses history to establish links to the conditions in his present moment. William Walker and the Filibuster War of 1855-57 may be “lost” in American history today, but as Cohen points out, he is still well remembered in Central America as a precursor to subsequent American incursions into Nicaraguan sovereignty (8). Robert Houston expands on this point:

All over Central America, William Walker is remembered as the pattern and paradigm for American intentions. He has become the core around which their national myths have been created: the heroic and successful struggle of the people of Central America against the arrogance and power of the North Americans—as they see it—has sustained them through all the years of other American interventions since Walker’s first and ‘unofficial’ one. (Houston 9)

Houston succinctly explains here the connection that Central Americans see between Walker and their present predicaments and relationship with the United States. It is essential to remember that Cardenal interprets the years 1855-1857 from the vantage point of 1950 and represents his landscape and the poetic protagonists from his historical and autobiographical present at the time of writing. To better understand the seemingly contradictory American character present in his

poetry of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is important to refer to an historical analysis of this time period.

Latin America was no stranger to U.S. intervention from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. As historian Greg Grandin points out,

[B]y 1930, Washington had sent gunboats into Latin American ports over six thousand times, invaded Cuba, Mexico (again), Guatemala, and Honduras, fought protracted guerrilla wars in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Haiti, annexed Puerto Rico, and taken a piece of Colombia to create both the Panamanian nation and the Panama Canal. (*Empire's Workshop* 3)

According to Grandin, the United States eventually abandoned its militarism under Franklin D. Roosevelt, after decades of Latin American resistance to these U.S. imperialist forays (3). Under this “Good Neighbor” policy, the United States promised to recognize “the absolute sovereignty of individual nations, renounce its right to engage in unilateral interventions, and make concessions to economic nationalists” (3). As a result, Latin American republics were drawn “tighter into [the United States’] political, economic, and cultural orbit through a series of multilateral treaties and regional organizations” (4). This change in policy and rhetoric towards Latin America ushered in a new era of cooperation between the nations of this hemisphere, albeit for a short period. Many Latin Americans began to see the United States in a new light.

It was this neighborly rhetoric, followed by the hope that surged as the allies defeated fascism during World War II that sparked a renewed belief in the noble ideals of democracy as stated in the founding documents of the United States. Greg Grandin notes the Allies’ victory in WWII invigorated a “democratic firmament that took shape throughout Latin America between 1944-1946,” one of the “brightest stars” of which was the “October Revolution,” as the newborn

government of Guatemala in 1944 was to be called (*Last Colonial* 4). According to Grandin's study, democracies around Latin America flourished between 1944 and 1946:

In 1944, only five Latin American countries—Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, and Colombia—could nominally call themselves democracies. By 1946, only five—Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic—could not. Dictators toppled throughout Latin America, and governments extended the franchise and legalized unions. (5)

Even though Nicaragua is included in this list as one of only five of the Latin American dictatorships that existed by 1946, other historical studies do demonstrate that this spreading belief and hope in democracy, at least during the time period mentioned, did in fact influence the Nicaraguan public as well as the relationship between the people and the Somoza government. Michael Gobat has noted the U.S. campaign of “democratization” which was adopted during the Great Depression and World War II years (268). He attributes the formation of the National Guard and the failure of this democratization campaign to Somoza's tightening grip on power in Nicaragua, but at least during the time period mentioned, the rhetoric of “democratization” still held sway over much of the population. Somoza even utilized a populist platform to engage the workers and peasantry of Nicaragua with reformist rhetoric, legalizing unions in 1944. His support of laborers continued through the late 1940s when he began to adopt a more repressive approach and rely more on the National Guard, the elite, and the United States to remain in power (Gould 58).

According to Grandin, the years 1947-1948 “were bad for global democracy” (*Last Colonial* 8). Throughout Latin America, 1947 “marked the beginning of a continent-wide reaction,” and many countries experienced a “sharp veer to the right” (8). The United States was

entering into a new phase of Cold War politics and shifting its vigilance away from right wing groups and toward Communists (8). Important for this analysis is Grandin's observation that "the increasingly heavy hand of the United States in hemispheric and world affairs reawakened anti-imperialist resentments that had lain dormant during the wartime popular front," hence, it should be suggested here, the resurgence in interest regarding Walker's exploits (9). Latin Americans were confused by the contradictions emanating from Washington, first inflated by hope as the Nazis were defeated and democratic rhetoric resounded throughout the hemisphere, and then frustrated by a drastic shift in tone and policy towards one of anti-communism where democratic gains and freedoms were curtailed or suppressed. Ernesto Cardenal composed his poems regarding the *filibusteros* of the previous century right in the midst of this collective confusion and disappointment as the "democratic values represented by the United States created a crisis situation in nearly every country across the continent" (Grandin, *Last Colonial* 9). We see this confusion manifest itself in Clinton Rollins' recollection of events as mentioned earlier and the descriptions of landscape that accompany his tale.

In "Con Walker en Nicaragua," Cardenal poetically utilizes the climate extremes of his homeland in his description of landscape to complement and contrast the extremes encapsulated in the American figures of Clinton Rollins and William Walker, respectively. The abundant water and lush green foliage of the rainy season is contrasted with the dry season that follows: "La estación de las lluvias había cesado . . . y se oían los gritos de los enfermos que deliraban pidiendo agua / — ¡Agua, agua! " (58). It is almost as if to say that American intervention since the time of Walker and the relationship ever since between the two nations has become such an intrinsic part of the landscape and Nicaraguan reality so as to be as inescapable as the wet and dry cycles of the regional climate. At one moment, the climate offers hope, life, fertility, love,

and protection. Later, dryness, smoke, dust, and sun cause coughing, thirst, delirium, and destruction, the opposite of life giving qualities. This confusion of identity that wavers between admiration and sympathy for the Americans and resentment of their invasive policies is reflected in the poetic landscape in Cardenal's early poems, but it is not the only place in his writings where one can observe a connection between the natural landscape and his confused emotions when contemplating his and Nicaragua's relationship and proximity with the United States. In the first volume of his memoirs, entitled *Vida Perdida* (1999), Cardenal describes his arrival to the U.S. as follows:

Algo me divirtió y me sorprendió porque no lo esperaba encontrar en Estados Unidos: los cocoteros, los bananos, el bambú. Había rincones cerca del aeropuerto que a la luz de la luna parecía que uno no estuviera en los Estados Unidos sino en el río San Juan de Nicaragua o en lo que entonces era un territorio en litigio, casi despoblado, entre Nicaragua y Honduras. Creí que yo ya había despedido de la vegetación amada de mi país y Dios se rió (sic) y me la vuelve a poner en los Estados Unidos. Parecía como que Él hubiera hecho que entrara por Miami *para que me diera cuenta qué cerca están los Estados Unidos y Nicaragua, y que Estados Unidos es también un país del Caribe, y que no debía considerarlo ahora como tierra extraña—porque mi sentimiento había sido como que me iba al destierro—sino como mi misma patria.* (12, emphasis added)

This passage describes Cardenal's arrival to the United States in 1957 as he traveled to the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani in Kentucky to study under Thomas Merton. As the Cold War intensified in the 1950s and nationalist sentiments surged throughout Latin America, Cardenal was reminded by the landscape of the close geographic proximity between the two nations and

experienced an identity crisis of affiliation between Nicaragua, “mi país,” and the United States, “mi misma patria.”

Two other characteristics common in travel writing as well as in colonial narratives in general that Cardenal attempts to appropriate and turn back towards empire via his poetic landscape representations are the erasure of subaltern histories and the feminization of the Other. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said locates numerous stereotypes common in the construction of the oriental “Other” that persist to legitimize and justify colonial occupations. Specifically, he highlights the tendencies of Western political-intellectual power structures to depict the East as eternal and unchanging, sexually insatiable, and as a feminine exotic, among other traits. Said’s analysis can be extrapolated to include the Americas and other studies that reach similar conclusions, at least in part, such as Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* and Mary Renda’s *Taking Haiti*. As noted in Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes*, travel writers often erased human inhabitants from the lands that they described, thus erasing human history and presenting these regions as eternal and unchanging landscapes, as per Said’s argument, in need of the civilizing prowess of the colonizers. Cardenal uses landscape to invert this (neo)colonial trope and uses the mountains and other prominent landmarks in his poetry to reassert the history of place and to contrast the longevity of his homeland with the seemingly youthful forays of Americans who represent a young and naïve United States. In “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” he writes, “En el Golfo de Fonseca, tras las islas azules, / viejos volcanes ruinosos como pirámides, parecían mirarnos” (48). The volcanoes here represent a long history, as suggested by the reference to the pyramids, as they look down as elders with silent wisdom upon the arrival of the brazen and ambitious youth who come in search of riches. In “Squier en Nicaragua,” Cardenal repeats this theme: “Nindirí: / el nombre musical que te dieron a ti / cuando Roma era joven todavía / (*Ninda*, agua; *Diria*,

tierra) / nos habla en una lengua antigua y olvidada de la laguna y el volcán (92, emphasis in orig.). Here again he ties together the history of language and people with the landscape and suggests that the roots of place go back farther than even those that claim a glorious heritage connected to Rome's past which pales in comparison. Lars Schoultz provides ample evidence that bigotry and condescension lie beneath U.S. perceptions of Latin Americans who American officials perceive to be childlike in their unruliness, immature, emotional, corrupt and in need of supervision. He states that "[a] belief in Latin American inferiority is the essential core of the United States policy toward Latin America because it determines the precise steps the United States takes to protect its interests in the region" (xv). Cardenal's representation of the tall, old volcanoes that look like pyramids and that precede the Roman Empire turns this notion on its head as he rewrites the history of Walker's men arriving from a nation no more than 80 years old at the time of the Filibuster Wars of 1855-1857.

Another trope that Cardenal seems to appropriate from paternalistic (neo)colonialist narratives throughout these early poems is the notion of the feminized subaltern. As was highlighted in the reference to Said's *Orientalism* earlier, the "Other" in (neo)colonial narratives is often depicted as an exotic, sexually insatiable, feminine being. Mary Renda makes this case in her study of the U.S. marine occupation of Haiti from 1915-1940, a period which largely coincides with a similar U.S. invasion of Nicaragua from 1909-1933. The title of Lars Schoultz's *Beneath the United States* alone seems to suggest a sexual connotation in reference to U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America in which the latter is a subjugated, feminized, submissive object that is at the whim of the masculine, dominant United States. The main argument of his book backs up this inference as it relates to official U.S. attitudes towards the region. Cardenal appears to appropriate this trope and uses this notion of the feminized Nicaragua throughout

these early poems in almost Jungian fashion to highlight all of the positive qualities associated with the female dimension present in all beings, namely “maternal solicitude and sympathy, . . . all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility” as well as “woman’s characteristic passivity” (Jung 81, 90). It is noteworthy that only twice in “Con Walker en Nicaragua” are Nicaraguan males explicitly mentioned in the text, as is the case in the line “y los hombres dando de beber o bañando a sus caballos” (52) and later the references to General Ponciano Corral who was executed by William Walker. It could be assumed that Cardenal who writes from the perspective of an American observer of the conflict merely adopts the tendency of the invaders to feminize the “Other” that they have come to subjugate. I would argue instead that Cardenal utilizes this trope of femininity to purposefully cast Nicaragua in a positive light as the innocent victim of U.S. aggression, and that this incorporation of a feminized Nicaragua into his verse furthermore, and perhaps less consciously, reflects the poet’s preferences and prejudices in regards to gender and sex. His representation of landscape as the poetic foundation of these themes will be analyzed in detail here.

The landscape in “Con Walker en Nicaragua” is notably depicted as feminine in nature, as in the description of the island of Ometepe, one of the most well-known and awe-inspiring characteristics of the Nicaraguan landscape with its twin volcanoes rising out of Lake Nicaragua.

The protagonist tells of the following scene:

Cuando vimos por primera vez el lago de Nicaragua
al llegar la vanguardia a una vuelta del camino,
hicimos alto, *con una sola exclamación:*

—*Ometepe!*

El liso lago azul y la Isla

con sus dos volcanes gemelos *como pechos*
unidos al nivel del agua por sus bases,
que parecía que se hundían en el agua,
y el humo *humilde* de sus aldeas levantándose.
Y por la transparencia del aire

parecían cerca. (48, emphasis added)

There are several important elements in this passage that are worthy of discussion. First, the reader's attention is drawn to the likening of Ometepe to a woman's breasts and the connotations of nurturing that this symbol implies as it connects with the poetic representation of the green countryside, the water, the harmony suggested by associations with blue, and the laughter of women. We see this melding of female with landscape in several other poems as well, most notably in "Squier en Nicaragua," where the women and the landscape are free, harmonious, sensual, and beautiful:

en el agua una mujer con los pechos desnudos
y una falda de púrpura,
lavando ropa en una roca blanca,
con el agua hasta las rodillas;
y el largo pelo lacio le caía suelto hasta el agua;
y la falda de púrpura,
los pechos desnudos,
el pelo negro,
el bote negro,

reflejados en el agua. (90)

The image of her bare breasts and her figure in the water reveals strong similarities with the description of Ometepe as quoted above. In the description of Ometepe, it is also imperative to note the passivity suggested as this feminized feature of the landscape appears to sink into the water, a notion that is strengthened in the next line by the reference to humility. Finally, it is interesting to observe the American narrator's ability to recognize the beauty of the amazing sight that stands before him and his comrades, a characteristic of this sympathetic protagonist that contrasts sharply with the representation of William Walker as shall be dissected next.

Other references abound in the text that suggest the innocent and pristine essence of the land and her people. Cardenal includes the name of the steamship, *La Virgen*, aboard which the Americans embarked as they traveled across the country, likely a conscious attempt to link this notion of the untainted and pure with the women and the national territory. Later, we are told of the destruction of the town of Granada at the hands of Walker and how the locals mourned the loss and the manner in which they loved the town as if it were a woman: "Amaban a Granada como a una mujer" (62). Cardenal in these early years considered himself a pacifist and these passages reflect that. Nowhere in "Con Walker en Nicaragua" does the reader witness a violent act of retaliation at the hands of a Nicaraguan. The poetic landscape, however, does undergo a transformation as the conflict unfolds, as once feminized landmarks such as Ometepe are subtly masculinized. The volcanoes that once appear as the breasts of a woman are later described as "los dos volcanes callados como dos guardas azules" (50), a subtle change as the "pechos" now become guards. The previous notion of passivity seems somewhat intact as the adjective "callados" denotes, but the line that follows halts the earlier description of the volcanos which initially appeared to sink into the water, this time casting a sense of immobility: "El lago estaba inmóvil" (50). Later, the poet completes this masculinized conversion of landscape when he

describes Ometepe as “los dos volcanes hermanos / que se levantan de las aguas” (64). A clearly masculine metaphor is coupled with the motion of rising out of the waters, a clear contrast to the once passive and nurturing image of Ometepe. These representations of landscape coincide with descriptions, such as the one in this passage that follows, that appear to suggest 1) a link to the militarization of Nicaragua as a result of American meddling in Nicaraguan affairs and 2) a claim of innocence in retaliating against the invaders as an act of self-defense. To reiterate, the poet does not directly link any acts of violence in this poem to Nicaraguan hands.

En los balcones en los que antes se sentaran las muchachas
con sus ayas,
ahora asombaban con sus largos rifles,
los rifleros,
y en vez de polkas y vales, los disparos. (58)

Cardenal reveals his attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality in these passages, fashioning masculine heroes as those that 1) are capable of recognizing the feminine beauty of women and the natural landscape, and 2) are willing to stand up to protect the homeland and the native women when threatened. In fact, not only are Nicaraguans who “[a]mbaban a Granada como a una mujer” (“Con Walker” 62), presented in a positive light through this lens, but a sharp contrast is drawn between Americans worthy of adoration and those that are despicable for representing the antithesis of these heroic traits. Looking back to the passage in which the sympathetic Clinton Rollins recognizes the beauty of the twin volcanoes and exclaims in awe “Ometepe!” (48), it is important to remember that he also admitted “Y nos enamoramos de las mujeres de esa tierra” (50). Many of his comrades, as mentioned earlier, stayed behind and married local women and had children and grandchildren. These Americans are capable of

recognizing the beauty of the women and the land, and of feeling a certain sympathy for them, and, in many cases, they defect to the other side by not returning to the U.S. They are heterosexual males who differ from their leader, William Walker, in this ability to sense feminine beauty.

There is a consistent focus on Walker's physical features in the poem. His eyes are described as "sus incoloros ojos de hielo" (54), "de color de ceniza" (60), or being without pupils like those of a blind man: "sus ojos grises, sin pupilas, fijos como los de un ciego" (46). His skin reveals its "palidez" and its "pecas borrosas," his voice is "descolorida como sus ojos, fría y afilada" and produced by "una boca sin labios" (46). These characteristics describe a man who lacks a sense of sight keen enough to see the beauty of the landscape, whose very being rejects or is rejected by the sun of the tropics as denoted by the freckles on his pale skin. His masculinity is even called into question: "Y la voz de una mujer no era más suave que la suya" (46). We are told that he once had a girlfriend, but it is noteworthy that she, too, was incapable of sensing the world around her and he was incapable of saving her:

Y aquel hombre que había tenido una novia en Nashville,

Helen Martin, sordomuda,

que murió de fiebre amarilla,

—por la cual aprendió el lenguaje de manos

y trazaban entre ellos signos silenciosos en el aire . . . (54)

This passage describes a couple alienated not only from the world around them, but even from each other, perhaps a subtle hint to his homosexuality. His masculinity seems to be questioned by suggesting that he was not capable of protecting the woman figure in his life. Later in the

poem, there is another implicit reference to homosexuality when Walker tends to Henry at his bedside:

Y Walker se sentó a la cabecera de Henry,
y se hundió el sol y salió la luna
y allí él estaba todavía
y transcurrió toda la noche
y allí él estaba todavía,
humedeciéndole la cara con paños mojados,
y al amanecer salió, y relevó la guardia. (66)

Later in the same scene, it is suggested that Henry commits suicide by putting “morfina” in a glass and drinking it down with “limonada verde” (66). Walker, incapable of seeing beauty that Cardenal’s idealized masculine heroes are able to perceive, is incapable of loving, nurturing, or protecting beauty. Any doubts about Cardenal’s inference to Walker’s homosexuality are put to rest by the following passage found in his memoirs:

Mi tía Trinidad había conocido al filibustero William Walker cuando ella tenía como 13 años . . . y me decía que era feo. Eso debe haber sido un falso recuerdo de ella. Porque en los daguerrotipos no se ve feo; tampoco guapo, pero sí de facciones finas y aun delicadas (posiblemente era homosexual, y en Granada hubo la leyenda de que era mujer). Lo que sí se percibe en esos rasgos es el espíritu duro, cruel e implacable, que fue lo que más lo caracterizó. (*Vida perdida* 391)

Cardenal deems the possibility that Walker was homosexual important enough that he makes specific mention of it in his memoirs. To him, this is a defective trait that he points to when

highlighting the weakness in another male, as in this description of Wilberto Cantón, who attempts to seduce Meche, one of Cardenal's girlfriends in his younger years:

En mi cólera le dije que él era homosexual. Ella me dijo que a todo aquel que yo consideraba que podía ser mi rival lo llamaba homosexual. La verdad es que él tenía unos modales algo delicados y una delicada tez de porcelana, aunque su defecto físico es que era desmesuradamente alto. Así terminó nuestro noviazgo.

(Vida perdida 51)

These lines make evident Cardenal's biases towards homosexuality and highlight his tendency to characterize males he deems to be weak or deeply flawed in terms of their sexuality.

William Walker in "Con Walker en Nicaragua" is depicted in the lines of Cardenal's poems as a flawed man, lacking a certain masculinity and incapable of forming a loving, fertile relationship with a feminine companion. His eyes are incapable of seeing the beauty of the land or of the women. Rather than producing life, as do several of the more admirable, masculine, heterosexual Americans who remain in the country and marry, live in peace, and have children and grandchildren, Walker is portrayed as life's destroyer, the grey in his eyes denoting a certain sterility and the feminine nature of his voice alluding to death: "Y la voz de una mujer no era más suave que la suya: / la de los serenos anuncios de las sentencias de muerte..." (46). This inability to see the beauty and harmony in nature, in short, makes it easier for a cold, impervious being like Walker, represented here as a symbol of sterility in an otherwise fertile land, to attempt to exploit wealth for his own gain. Niall Binns has pointed out the following: "[v]er el entorno como una especie de espacio despersonalizado es sucumbir a la trampa y la condena de lo moderno: vivir en el desarraigo y la alienación," and this observation seems particularly relevant here (*¿Callejón?* 19). Cardenal's poetic narrator paints the portrait of a man completely

isolated from the world around him. We are told that nobody was his friend, “[n]inguno fue su amigo” (46), of his failed relationships, and his propensity towards destruction. As the poem’s ending suggests, this detachment from the natural world and this blindness to its beauty, only leads to infertility, destruction, and eventually to one’s own demise: “Y allí quedó sin coronas ni epitafio junto al mar William Walker de Tennessee” (70).

Seen from an ecocritical perspective, as in the quote from Nialls Binns above, Cardenal’s poem can be interpreted as a denunciation of ecological degradation at the hands of capitalists who exploit the environment for their own gain without placing value on the integrity and harmony of the natural world with its human inhabitants. This ecological theme develops more in his later collections, but he does undoubtedly establish a link here between ecological disasters and American involvement in this destruction: “Y habíamos venido a una tierra extraña en busca de oro / y allí estaba el humo negro por todas partes / y las calles llenas de mercancías y de muertos” (58). Laura Barbas-Rhoden’s observation regarding Latin American authors who challenge the economic globalization of today can also be applied to collections such as this one by Cardenal: “[T]hey make explicit connections between specific historical processes begun centuries ago and the violence that persists today against the natural world and the humans . . . who inhabit it” (4). The biggest difference between this poem and those that Cardenal pens later in his career is the explicit inclusion here of American figures worthy of respect, dignity, and admiration in the text. The poet seems to have hope that the better half of the American dichotomy as represented by Rollins/Walker will suppress the destructive tendencies represented by the darker side. In the poems analyzed above, Cardenal expresses his preferences and prejudices regarding those attributes that he considers worthy of respect. He draws connections between the negative aspects as those embodied by the alienated figure of Walker and his

suspected homosexuality. A closer analysis of the representation of landscape in his poetry has helped highlight these aspects of his verse.

“Hora 0”

Turning now to Ernesto Cardenal’s “Hora 0,” it is possible to identify several similarities between representations of landscape in this poem and those that he wrote shortly after returning to Nicaragua in 1950 after spending approximately three years abroad in the United States and Europe. The stark differences between “Hora 0” and these earlier collections, however, are quite pronounced and raise several questions. How have the representations of landscape and place evolved over time? To what autobiographical, national, and international developments can these changes be attributed? As I will attempt to demonstrate, portraits of landscape in “Hora 0” reveal similar attitudes on the part of the poet in relation to his own subjective notion of gender roles and ecological balance between humans and the non-human world. On the other hand, the apparent inversion of particular representations of landscape that appeared in earlier poems suggest a reconfigured view of Nicaraguan/U.S. relations, the poet’s changing stance towards revolutionary violence, and possible intersections between the poet’s portrayal of Central America and the rhetoric emanating from U.S. empire during the 1950s.

“Hora 0” is divided into four sections that were originally written as separate poems but then combined to form the final version that readers know today. David Shaw has argued that “Cardenal’s readers are not challenged to decipher language [in “Hora 0”] but rather the zigzagging treatment of time (58),” as the first section deals primarily with the 1940s, while the latter sections move from the late 1920s to early 1930s, and then to the April Rebellion of 1954 and beyond.²⁴ I would argue that a close reading of “Hora 0” as seen within the historical context

²⁴The April Rebellion, or “April Conspiracy,” is the name given to an orchestrated assault on the Presidential Palace of Nicaragua on April 3, 1954 by opponents of the Somoza regime. Ernesto Cardenal participated in the uprising

of the period and based on the geographic terrain covered in the verse greatly diminishes the zigzagging effect to which Shaw refers and reveals the poem's textual unity. Cardenal opens this poem with a section that sweeps through the Central America of the 1940s from the northwest to the southeast, following the political geography of the isthmus. His references move quickly from the Guatemala of Jorge Ubico y Castañeda, who remained in power until the October Revolution of 1944, the El Salvador of the Maximiliano Hernández regime, implied but not named specifically, who ruled through 1944, the Honduras of Tiburcio Carías Andino who officially held power through 1948, and then concludes the introductory stanza with a reference to the Managua of Somoza. He completes the first section by describing Honduras and Guatemala and their trials and travails as a result of the exploitation of their natural resources, specifically banana plantations, at the hands of U.S. corporations and banana magnate Sam Zemurray (1877-1961). This first section is followed by a poetic history of Nicaragua which proceeds in chronological fashion from Sandino's rebellion (1927-1933), to his assassination (1934), through the April Rebellion of 1954, ending with an undetermined present "Hora 0" in which, as the poem suggests, rebellious sentiments are converging and strengthening into a potential force to counteract the injustices and atrocities committed throughout the preceding decades. By focusing the analysis on the geographical sweep that the poet makes through the isthmus towards the central focus of Nicaragua, Cardenal not only draws the reader's attention to the present "Hora 0" temporally, but he spatially carries him/her to the "Ground 0" of Nicaragua.

Cardenal is said to have written "Hora 0" and many of his *Epigramas* sometime between 1954 and 1956. It can be said definitively that "Hora 0" was written after April 3, 1954, the date

and dedicates the entire first chapter of his third volume of memoirs, entitled "La rebelión de abril," to events surrounding the rebellion. The martyrs of the failed assault, later known as "los Mártires de Abril," which included Adolfo Báez Bone among others, were utilized to galvanize opposition to the Somoza dictatorship (*La revolución perdida* 25).

of the so-called “April Conspiracy,” a failed assault on the Presidential Palace of Nicaragua in which Cardenal took part and which he includes in the poem (Cohen 12). The year 1954 is also characterized by several watershed moments during this decade of Cold War tensions that could be increasingly felt worldwide. On June 27th, 1954, democratically elected Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz resigned from power after a *coup d’état* organized by the United States, an event that marked the United States’ first Latin American Cold War intervention (Grandin, *Last Colonial* 4). Grandin goes on to describe the significance of this U.S. operation:

The overthrow of Arbenz was a decisive step forward in the radicalization of continental politics, signaling as it did the destruction of one of the last, and arguably most influential, democracies established in the 1944-46 reform cycle. It confirmed growing suspicions among many democrats and nationalists that the United States was less a model to be emulated than a danger to be feared and led to more militant tactics on both sides of the Cold War divide. Che Guevara, who witnessed firsthand the destruction of the October Revolution, repeatedly taunted the United States in his speeches that “Cuba will not be Guatemala.” (5)

Cardenal’s memoirs, specifically the first volume, supports this claim by Grandin that the overthrow of the Arbenz government was perceived as an important, almost personal attack on all Latin Americans, even those outside of Guatemala.²⁵

The term “radicalization” in the quote above from Grandin is important to keep in mind when analyzing “Hora 0,” because the imagery in the poem suggests polarization from the outset. Much like in “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” the colors serve initially to unify the landscape, but

²⁵ Cardenal personally visited Guatemala with a group of Mexican students when Dr. Juan José Arévalo was president. He uses the overthrow of Arbenz as a reference point of time in his memoirs on certain occasions when telling the story of his past and describes how he came to discover the news regarding such events as the death of Castillo Armas in Guatemala, for example, during the time of his residence in the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani in Kentucky. For more information, see pages 51 and 163 of *Vida Perdida*.

this time the prevailing colors are not blue and green, but rather dominated by black and white. Shades of grey are limited, thus conjuring up a sense of polarized light. There do exist allusions that serve to provoke the five senses, but there is a notably heavier emphasis on sounds and the lack thereof, such as those of dogs, doors slamming or being knocked upon, doorbells ringing, interrogations, sirens, the sounds of silence, and even the sound of music emanating from parties at the presidential palace. This concentration of reference to sound intensifies the sense of darkness, the shadows, and the black imagery, as if one must try to navigate the landscape with a diminished sense of sight.

This color polarity also helps to draw a strong line of distinction between “[c]aras en la oscuridad,” among which the poetic voice makes himself known, and the seemingly impotent, artificial light “de palacios presidenciales” of Central America and that of “la Casa Presidencial” of Nicaragua. American officials such as “[e]l Ministro Americano Mr. Whelan” and their American surrogates, the complicit “diputados nicaragüenses” and el “Sr. Presidente,” occupy these artificial zones of restricted light which fail to illuminate the landscape of the region, alluding to their weakness, infertility, impotence, and illegitimacy within the backdrop of the more permanent and persevering “lagunas y volcanes bajo la luna” (Cardenal, “Hora 0” 27). Urdanivia Bertarelli argues that “al paisaje natural centroamericano de lagunas y volcanes se suman los cuarteles y los palacios presidenciales los cuales han llegado a ser parte esencial del ambiente,” (67) an observation which, in part, seems true. The lights and palaces have become a very prominent characteristic on the Central American and Nicaraguan landscape. However, the poet makes repeated references to the fragility and illegitimacy of these structures specifically via contrasts with the natural landscape. Unlike the wise and ancient pyramid-like volcanoes that date back to the time of Rome’s youth and look down silently upon the brazen and naïve

followers of Walker in Cardenal's earlier poems, the people of the region are now at the foot of palaces depicted as "un queque rosado" and "de bizcocho de chocolate," clearly parodical references to their impermanence and foreignness among "las montañas" and other natural, endemic surroundings (27). This parody of presidential power which is responsible for the suffering and cruelty imposed upon Central Americans living at the whim of dictatorial regimes recalls works by other Central American writers, such as Miguel Ángel Asturias, who in his novel *El Señor Presidente* eventually allows the reader to peak behind the curtain to reveal, not a demonic, all-powerful tyrant, but rather a drunk, incompetent buffoon who vomits "un chorro de caldo anaranjado" on the main protagonist of the novel and then is later dragged to bed crying and screaming (Asturias 338). Donald Shaw has noted the metaphorical principle in Cardenal's poetry which highlights the superiority of nature to man-made conditions and we see that in "Hora 0" (59). More importantly, however, is the poet's construction of heroes as a function of their ability to recognize this superiority and to not fall prey to the attractive but nonetheless frail and false façade of American capitalism.

The light/darkness dichotomy that is ever present in this poem emphasizes the polarized contrast between the two parties that inhabit the landscape: 1) those in the artificial light of the presidential palace in which Americans and the corrupt local officials gather to celebrate ostentatious displays of wealth and greed, and 2) those that suffer at the hands of tyranny and are separated from the prosperity enjoyed by those in power. The darkness unifies those on the ground with "la montaña negra" and with each other (36). The differences between "el flaco, el descalzo, el de la bicicleta, el negro, el trompudo, aquella la de amarillo, el alto, el chele, el pelón, el bigotudo, el ñato, el chirizo, el murrucó, el requeneto" are erased as they come together to form a collective of "sombras," suggesting a growing threat to the tyranny that governs the

region (46). It is also important to note how Cardenal paints this large swath of the population with whom he himself associates with a broad brush, erasing subjectivities that would further divide his group into smaller units and thereby weaken his representation of the oneness of the downtrodden masses. The governing elite who prosper from the extractive and export economy and the establishment of infrastructure that fails to provide “ningún beneficio para la nación” but rather allow the powerful to separate large tracts of land for their own benefit are themselves divided from “la gente,” those that live in the shadows, away from the artificial, palatial light (30, 46). Fernando Mires has argued from an ecocritical perspective that “[n]o se puede dividir la naturaleza de un país, sin hacerlo con sus habitantes” (63-6), an argument that could be made here in reference to Cardenal’s “Hora 0.” The natural world has been divided, sold, and exploited for the sake of profit and the people who derive sustenance from the land reflect this chasm. The representation of the landscape in terms of black/white emphasizes this division.

The light/darkness motif also allows the poet to enhance the presence of his idealized hero in the poem, Augusto César Sandino, by presenting him as a natural light that shines like “una estrella” against the backdrop of the juxtaposed “montaña negra” (36). Unlike the men whose impotent, artificial light fails to illuminate the landscape or whose “foco en los ojos” of Nicaraguans in torture chambers fails to blind them from seeing the real light, Sandino represents “un hombre de esa tierra” (45), not only in figurative terms as the spirit of rebellion that will rise from the ashes and despair of tyranny, but also one that recognizes the beauty of the feminized Nicaragua (an argument upon which I will expand below) and lives in harmony with the natural cycles of the land. The poet thus describes Sandino:

Su cara era vaga como la de un espíritu,
lejana por las meditaciones y los pensamientos

y sería por las campañas y la intemperie.

.....

Había dos rostros superpuestos en su rostro:

una fisonomía sombría y a la vez iluminada;

triste como un atardecer en la montaña

y alegre como la mañana en la montaña.

En la luz su rostro se le rejuvenecía,

y en la sombra se le llenaba de cansancio.

Y Sandino no era inteligente ni era culto

pero salió inteligente de la montaña.

“En la montaña todo enseña” decía Sandino . . . (37, emphasis added)

Aside from the parallels that can be drawn between Sandino and biblical representations of Christ, Cardenal seems to intentionally characterize the figure of Sandino as one that is in harmony with the natural world from an ecological perspective. He is not hidden away in a fragile, man-made edifice illuminated by artificial light as are the corrupt antiheroes in the palace, but instead his very being reflects the light of dawn and the dusk that marks the end of the day. He closely feels the Earth's pleasure and her pain as if their bodies were conjoined as one entity. Sandino does not draw on wealth and the false promises of capitalism to placate the doubts in his soul but turns to the non-human world to contemplate, meditate, and to seek guidance. Those that separate themselves from the natural world, enclose themselves in artificial enclaves of wealth and luxury and exploit natural resources for material gain, live an alienated, uprooted existence. The following passage from Cardenal's chapter "Notas del noviciado" in *Vida Perdida* reiterates this theme:

La riqueza es mentira. El hombre en el paraíso habría sido pobre como San Francisco y como los animales. Habría admirado una piedra bella o un metal bello desinteresadamente. Uno lleva un traje o va en un automóvil como si el traje o el automóvil fuera uno. Mientras que la pobreza es la sinceridad: Apréciame por lo que soy, no por lo que tengo. . . .

El rico cree que lo que tiene eso es él. También cree que el espíritu puede poseer algo material. Somoza veía una tierra bella reflejada en el agua. La compraba. Y seguía siendo tan distante de él como antes. Podía así comprar y comprar y comprar y no se saciaba nunca de tierras. (255)

He seems to imply that the commodification of the world leads to emptiness and alienation, an interpretation that could be made on a spiritual level in biblical terms but that could also be made in ecological terms as highlighted by the description in *Vida perdida* of Somoza's yacht located in "aquellas aguas polucionadas" of el Parque Central de Managua (98). The actions of the antiheroes in "Hora 0" alienate them spiritually and physically from the natural world, making them capable of committing atrocities against the other more humble sectors of society (or, more specifically, in Cardenal's representation, the other all-encompassing singular sector of which he is a part). This correlation between alienation and the capacity for cruelty harkens back to the color blind representation of William Walker who was incapable of appreciating the beauty of the feminized landscape and thus more prone to (self) destruction.

Another of Cardenal's poems that draws a connection between this alienation, again symbolized by artificial light, and self-destruction is "Oración por Marilyn Monroe," written in the wake of the movie star's death in 1962 and published several years later. In this case, the actress, driven by a need to be loved, is lured by false promises and flashy allure (similar to the

Adelita of Sandino's song in "Hora 0"), but the spotlight is artificial and empty, ultimately leading Marilyn to her own demise. "[E]n este mundo *contaminado* de pecados y *radioactividad*," Cardenal writes, "su sueño fue realidad (pero como la realidad del *tecnicolor*)" (Cardenal, "Oración" 89, emphasis added). He later describes a romantic kiss given to Marilyn as fiction: "[s]e descubre que fue bajo *reflectores* / y apagan los reflectores! / y desmontan las dos paredes del aposento (era un set cinematográfico)" (90, emphasis added). The star's alienation from reality is inextricably linked with the artificial world established by Hollywood's cinematic productions, fraudulent, fragile, and deceptive representations that mask reality and further estrange humankind from ourselves, each other, and the natural world. This divide ultimately leads to environmental degradation (as symbolized by "radioactividad") and to our own destruction, as evidenced by the death of Marilyn Monroe. Interestingly, Cardenal presents the American actress as a helpless, innocent "huerfanita" who falls victim to the false promises of fame and material riches as she searches for "la seguridad del seno materno" (88). Estrangement from reality and the natural world leads to one's alienation and self-destruction and this tendency knows no political boundaries, but rather affects all.

Another similarity between the two poems, "Con Walker en Nicaragua" and "Hora 0," is the feminine representation of the natural landscape of the homeland. In the former poem, it was the twin volcano of Ometepe resembling a woman's breasts and sinking slowly and submissively into el Lago de Nicaragua. In "Hora 0," this theme takes the form of a Mexican *corrido*, or folk song, that Sandino and his men sing as they gather and dedicate themselves to the protection of the land from U.S. invasion and occupation. Only one verse from the song appears once in its entirety and then later several fragments from the same verse are repeated.²⁶

²⁶"La Adelita" is a Mexican *corrido*, or folk song, that dates back to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). It is said to have been a battle hymn for the Villistas (supporters of Pancho Villa) where *soldaderas*, or female soldiers, were

Si Adelita se fuera con otro

La seguiría por tierra y por mar

Si por mar en un buque de guerra

Y si por tierra en un tren militar. (“Hora 0” 35, emphasis in orig.)

While also being a parody of the Mexican Revolution within the context of Cardenal’s poem, “La Adelita” in the *corrido* as sung by Sandino and his men represents Nicaragua as a woman in need of a masculine, heroic savior that will protect her. The song implicitly suggests that Adelita might go with the other suitor on her own volition, a suggestion that corresponds not only with the biblical notion of Eve being persuaded to partake of the apple but also with the complicity of the “diputados nicaragüenses,” the traitors that might sway Adelita (Nicaragua) to veer towards the other (el otro) ill-intentioned figure that symbolizes the United States.

In “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” Clinton Rollins embodies the sympathetic masculine character, able to recognize the beauty of Nicaragua and its women, but he plays a more passive role as a compassionate storyteller. In “Hora 0,” the hero is Sandino, a Nicaraguan, “un ‘nica’ de Niquinohomo” (33), that not only sympathizes with the threatened Adelita but vows to protect her and dedicates his life to her protection. Just as Clinton Rollins and his comrades were able to leave behind offspring as a consequence of their manhood and the fertility of the Nicaraguan body, symbolized by the women and the land, the masculine, dedicated, heterosexual figure of Sandino is capable of reproducing life as the final line of the poem indicates (notably coinciding with the color green): “Pero el héroe nace cuando muere / y la hierba verde renace de los carbones” (51). This differs immensely from the destructive, life taking qualities of William Walker who killed for his own warped ends and whose life ended thus: “Y allí quedó sin coronas

known as “Adelitas” (Reséndez Fuentes 540). Sandino twice resided and worked in Mexico, first in 1923-26 and again in 1929-30. He is said to have been influenced by the Mexican Revolution, the military battles of which had just concluded when Sandino first arrived (Hodges 7).

ni epitafio junto al mar William Walker de Tennessee” (*Con Walker*, 70). The final line of the poem highlights this notion of Walker as the embodiment of sterility.

Another difference between the two poems is the overtly masculine nature of the vast majority of the cast of characters as presented from the beginning in “Hora 0.” Aside from Adelita (Nicaragua’s body), “la Llorona,” the weeping woman who cries on the banks of the rivers upon the death of Sandino (42), “las inditas” that are about to make corn mush (42), and the subtle allusion to “aquella la de amarilla” (46), the only girl among the masses who silently gather in the streets, all characters are men. Like “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” where the landscape is gradually masculinized to symbolize the rising to the cause of protecting the endangered body of the nation, the men have stepped forward out of necessity to rescue Adelita in “Hora 0.” This time the heightened sense of crisis is evident from the beginning of the poem and the masculine hero-protector is embodied by the figure of Sandino and his harmonious relationship with the natural world. Even so, the poet is careful not to attribute acts of violence to the Nicaraguan rebels. There are relatively more allusions to the potential for violence than in earlier poems, as the militaristic imagery in the song about Adelita demonstrates, but Nicaraguans are not portrayed as having a natural propensity to take up arms.

In “Hora 0,” descriptions of landscape and the non-human world are poetically used to justify the right for self-protection when under attack.

Como la guardatinaja que salió del matorral
a la carretera y es acorralada por los perros
y se queda parada delante de los tiradores
porque sabe que no tiene para dónde correr... (“Hora 0” 39)

This description of a paca, a species of mammal endemic to Nicaragua, portrays an animal that has nowhere to turn for its own protection, a theme that corresponds with that of the cornered Nicaraguans, led by native son/sun Sandino, who must consider the option of rising up to protect their land. Even the “yo” poetic voice that appears, representing Cardenal’s voice in the third section of “Hora 0,” admits that he learned to “manejar una ametralladora Rising” to participate in “la rebelión de abril,” even though no verse in the poem describes him using it (44). Cardenal historically professed his belief in non-violent movements as a means to bring about change during this time period and even beyond. In his second volume of memoirs, he even claims to be of this mind as late as 1967: “A mí me encantó la idea de una rebelión de no violencia” (*Las insulas* 138). It is said that he began to accept the idea of armed revolution after visiting Cuba in 1970, but even at the time of the publication of his third and final volume of memoirs, *La revolución perdida*, Cardenal still insists on portraying himself as one who is not naturally inclined to take up arms, and even comes close to retracting the line from “Hora 0” above regarding the Rising machine gun: “En la *Hora 0* digo falsamente que aprendí a manejar una ametralladora Rising; en realidad Ribas Montes me enseñó, pero no aprendí; nunca he aprendido a manejar un arma” (17). Whatever the case, the poem “Hora 0” certainly does portray the growing possibility of a just rebellion and the representation of landscape stresses this theme as observed in the depiction of the paca that stands its ground in self-defense. The poet does avoid, however, the portrayal of any member of the heroic cast of masculine characters as directly responsible for acts of violence.

In addition to the cornered *guardatinaja*, other verses in “Hora 0” expand upon the notion of disturbance of the natural environment, as if the human conflict has spilled over to disrupt the non-human world. The coyotes and bears cry, the owls hoot, the birds cackle, and the ducks

quack, all sounds that mark a disturbance of paradise and an unraveling of the implicit natural harmony of the area. It is not by accident that many of the allusions to these outbreaks of restlessness occur along the rivers that flow across the landscape. Rivers for the poets of Nicaragua have long been utilized as metaphors for the unspoiled essence and harmony of the land. As Cardenal quotes Nicaraguan poet José Coronel in his memoirs: “El río es para nosotros un símbolo del paraíso. Allí es donde tendremos que reunirnos alguna vez, en este mundo o en el otro, que no es otro, que es este mundo al revés, mejor dicho, al derecho, la cara que ve Dios” (*Vida perdida* 324). This quote demonstrates a striking similarity to Cardenal’s own description of el Río Escondido in “Hora 0”: “con los patos gritando cuá-cuá-cuá, y los ecos / los ecos, mientras el remolcador va con las tucas / resbalando sobre el verde río de vidrio / hacia el Atlántico...” (43). The glassy water of the river appears to reflect the purity of unspoiled paradise in a figurative sense, the utopia that precedes the dystopia created by empire.

The rivers have gained a symbolic importance for Nicaraguans in a political sense as well. José Coronel, in the quote above, refers to the San Juan River which, as mentioned earlier in the quote by Urdanivia Bertarelli, is an important characteristic on the Nicaraguan landscape, not just because of its aesthetic beauty but also because the attention it drew from the conquistadors as well as American explorers in search of a trans-isthmus canal. As Tim Rogers, editor for the *Nica Times*, has written:

Nicaragua’s territorial claim to the river, mixed with historical—and sometimes paranoid—suspicions of Costa Rica’s intention to steal it, makes the Río San Juan a symbol of national unity. Although most Nicaraguans have never actually seen the river that connects Lago de Nicaragua to the Caribbean Sea, the

mere mention of its hallowed waters prompts patriotic citizens to stand up a little straighter and quickly blink the mist from their eyes. (Rogers 276)

Throughout history and to the present day, the river has been the source of pride, conflict, and identity. It is not surprising then, that the rivers of the landscape would serve a dual function of symbolizing the beauty of the land but also, metaphorically, a reflection of the turbulence caused by societal and political unrest and instability due to international conflicts in the region and with empire.²⁷

As in the case of “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and other earlier poems, specifically “Greytown,” one way in which Cardenal poetically suggests the source of Nicaragua’s woes in “Hora 0” is by appropriating (neo)colonial rhetoric and turning it on its head by placing blame on empire for economic stagnation and environmental degradation. As previously mentioned in the case of Mary Louise Pratt’s analysis in *Imperial Eyes*, colonizers built their justification for intervention upon the premise of “discovery” where the imperial eyes fell on a land often depicted as being devoid of inhabitants, or of a space full of promise but not able to achieve its full potential because of the inadequacies of the locals. This time around in “Hora 0,” the stagnation and waste are depicted to be not just byproducts of capitalist abandon as in “Greytown,” but rather are described as purposeful strategies carried out methodically and destructively in order to maximize profits.

²⁷The San Juan River has appeared in numerous travelogues written by European and American conquistadors, explorers, and adventurers who traversed the isthmus. It was the site of a proposed interoceanic canal route and Vanderbilt Cornelius (1794-1877) founded the Accessory Transit Company that transported migrants and gold seekers across the isthmus en route to California. The San Juan River appears as an important metaphor and allegory symbolizing Nicaragua in the writing of numerous Nicaraguan novelists and poets. José Coronel Urtecho published a collection of autobiographical essays and travelogues entitled *Rápido tránsito: Al ritmo de Norte América* (1953) where he engages the texts of nineteenth century U.S. diplomat Ephraim G. Squier as well as those of Mark Twain who also traveled the river and wrote of it in his diaries. Nicaraguan poet and novelist Gioconda Belli also utilizes the river in her novel *Waslala: Memorial del Futuro* (1996) to represent a magical space that embodies collective/national and individual memories. Belli is also said to have been heavily influenced by the travel writing of Squier in her depiction of the San Juan River in *Waslala* (Esch).

El banano es dejado podrir en las plantaciones,
o podrir en los vagones a lo largo de la vía férrea,
o cortado maduro para poder ser rechazado
al llegar al muelle, o ser echado en el mar;
los racimos declarados golpeados, o delgados,
o marchitos, o verdes, o maduros, o enfermos:
para que no haya banano barato,
o para comprar banano barato.

.....

Y los bananos pudriéndose en los vagones del ferrocarril.

Para que no haya banano barato

Y para que haya banano barato.

.....

Y abandonadas las plantaciones, que ya no sirven para nada. (30-31)

These verses echo the main tenet of dependency theory, as epitomized by Eduardo Galeano in his book *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (1973). Galeano analyzes the causes and effects of underdevelopment in Latin America and sums up his conclusions in one concise sentence: “Underdevelopment isn’t a stage of development, but its consequence” (285). Galeano argues, as the title suggests, that Latin America is the lifeblood of the prosperity enjoyed by the metropolis and by sucking away this lifeblood, the chances of development and the freedom for Latin Americans to seek their own destiny are taken away. Galeano looks at the infrastructure of Latin America in this light, including port cities and internal railways which solely provide a means to ship raw materials to port for the metropolis,

but which provide no internal benefits for the people of the exploited country. Cardenal's "Hora 0" demonstrates an uncanny similarity in this regard to Galeano's analysis:

[A]unque seguía disfrutando de las exenciones de impuesto
y los 175.000 acres de subvención para la Compañía,
con la obligación de pagar a la nación por cada milla
que no construyera, pero no pagaba nada a la nación
aunque no construía ninguna milla
.....
y después de todo el tal ferrocarril de mierda no era
de ningún beneficio para la nación
porque era un ferrocarril entre dos plantaciones
y no entre Trujillo y Tegucigalpa. (29-30)

One particular thread that is not central in Galeano's analysis but that does seem to traverse Cardenal's "Hora 0" upon closer scrutiny is the exploitation and consequent devastation of the natural environment. Cardenal describes the ensuing lawsuits between banana magnate Sam Zemurray and plantations throughout Latin America in which the end result is "las tierras agotadas que ya no le servían ni a Guatemala ni a Honduras" (32). Not only has capitalism mired the people in a permanent state of underdevelopment, poverty, and victims of social and economic injustices as per Galeano's analysis, but so too has the land itself been exploited and depleted of its richness, according to Cardenal.

While "Con Walker en Nicaragua" and earlier poems are peculiarly silent about the complicity of Nicaraguans in the Filibuster Wars that he describes, this is not the case in "Hora 0," verse which Cardenal himself describes as "antisomocista" (*Las insulas* 158). A main theme

is the corruption and participation of elite Nicaraguans in the exploitation of the homeland and its people by American enterprise. Galeano echoes this sentiment about this “legion of parasites” in *Open Veins*:

But what sort of “national bourgeoisie” was ours, composed of landlords, big wheelers and dealers and speculators, frock-coated politicians, and intellectuals of borrowed cultures? . . . The bourgeoisies of our countries came into being as mere instruments of international capitalism, liberally oiled cogs in the global mechanism that bled the colonies and semicolonies. These shop-window bourgeois, moneylenders, and merchants who monopolized political power had no interest in developing local manufactures, which died in the egg when free trade opened the doors to the avalanche of British merchandise. (116)

According to Galeano, the bourgeoisie mistake their own lack of creativity for the emptiness of an entire nation. In terms of this analysis, the alienation at the center of Walker’s figure as well as those in “Hora 0,” enclosed from the world in palaces illuminated by artificial light, leads to the erasure of meaning and the emptying of place, prompting this bourgeois sector to unrelentingly exploit the people and the land on which they depend. Cardenal employs an interesting nature motif to emphasize his criticism of homegrown corruption and complicity in the imperialist project. He draws a parallel between Somoza and what was once thought to be a species of shark endemic to Nicaragua:

Con sus ojos rojos y turbios como los de los tiburones
pero un tiburón con guardaespaldas y con armamentos
(*Eulamia nicaragüensis*)
Somoza estaba bailando mambo

mambo mambo

qué rico el mambo

cuando los estaban matando. (46)

Eulamia nicaragüensis was the name given by biologists upon discovering the bull shark (*Carcharhinus leucas*) in the waters of Lake Nicaragua and mistakenly concluding that this shark was an endemic freshwater species. It was later determined that bull sharks in fact migrated to the freshwater lake from the ocean along the San Juan River from the Caribbean Sea. The sharks in the lake have long fascinated explorers to the region and often served as symbols in foreign accounts to characterize the wild, savage, and dangerous essence of the Americas, a theme which often coincided with the feminization of the periphery as per Mary Renda's analysis and its discovery by the imperial gaze as per Mary Louise Pratt's. The following passage, taken from C.W. Doubleday's 1886 account of his participation in the Nicaraguan Filibuster War, demonstrates this literary evocation of the local shark as a symbol of endemic danger:

Seeing a female of mahogany-colored complexion in the act of filling an earthen (sic) jar with water nearby, I asked her what kind of fish they were. "They are sharks," she replied, "and *they will eat you if you do not come out of the water.*" I stood not on the order of my going, and learned afterwards that the sharks came up the San Juan River from the Atlantic Ocean into this large inland lake. The possibility of finding them in fresh water had not before occurred to me. (11, emphasis added)

Doubleday ties together a number of imperial tropes in this one description, namely the female (feminization) native of color (non-white) in a savage environment characterized by sharks (wildness) in this large body of freshwater that is so uniquely tied to Nicaraguan identity.

Cardenal uses the shark in “Hora 0” as a symbol to portray the cruel and tyrannical figure of Somoza to perhaps criticize his treasonous character, but also interestingly turns another imperial trope back towards empire. He evokes a symbol often used to depict the untamed Nicaraguan landscape and utilizes it as a metaphor for savage antiheroes that work as paid surrogates of the American government. It is impossible to tell whether or not Cardenal knew at the time of penning his poem that the species name *Eulamia nicaragüensis* had in fact been discredited as being an endemic species of Nicaragua, but it is interesting to contemplate this possibility in that it would fortify this portrayal of Somoza as a fraudulent citizen of Nicaraguan that Cardenal is attempting to convey. The following passage from “Hora 0,” in which Somoza speaks of his assassination of Sandino, builds upon this theme:

“I did it”, dijo después Somoza.

“I did it, for the good of Nicaragua.”

Y William Walker dijo cuando lo iban a matar:

“El Presidente de Nicaragua es nicaragüense.” (43)

Somoza speaks English better than the Americans themselves as suggested by this juxtaposition with a quote in Spanish from Walker. This verse further discredits Somoza’s legitimacy as a Nicaraguan by drawing parallels between Somoza and Walker, the antihero of his filibuster poems.

Another similarity between the Somozas and William Walker, apart from their aforementioned alienation from the natural world, is their apparently soft, less than rugged appearance. While the hero Sandino and his hombres walk around in “Hora 0” “descalzo[s] o con caites . . . chapoteando . . . en los charcos del pueblo” in the harsh environment of the

“montaña,” (34-5), Tachito Somoza is described as being “[b]lanco, con su camisita amarilla de manga corta” (49-50), a figure that contrasts with the heroic Sandino, stoic and dedicated general of the Nicaraguan rebels. The parodical and soft representation of antihero Tachito with his little yellow shirt portrays an individual capable of torture, cruelty and destruction on a massive level, much like his poetic precursor, William Walker, antagonist of “Con Walker en Nicaragua.”

Turning now to the American cast of characters in “Hora 0,” it is noteworthy that they contrast sharply with the sympathetic Clinton Rollins of “Con Walker.” They appear separated from the landscape and make only sporadic appearances in person, such as in the case of a celebration at the presidential palace during which “El Ministro Americano Mr. Whelan” exclaims “*Fine party!*” (48). Words of contemplation as those attributed to Clinton Rollins have been replaced with cold, detached legal prose as if cited from contracts. Although the names of American officials do appear, such as in the case of Mr. Whelan above, the landscape is dotted with faceless and amorphous company names, hiding the identities of those that are at the helm of the exploitative power structure: Piermont Morgan & Cia., United Fruit Company, Tela Railroad Company, Trujillo Railroad Company, Cuyamel Fruit Company, Vaccaro Brothers & Company, and Standard Fruit & Steamship Company are but some of the names mentioned (28). The landscape that Cardenal paints in “Hora 0” is characterized by bodiless entities that deliver communications from absentee power brokers that work from afar to manipulate the local landscape for the sake of company profits.

Mientras la subsidiaria Tropical Radio cablegrafía a Boston:

“Esperamos que tendrá la aprobación de Boston

la erogación hecha en diputados nicaragüenses de la mayoría

por los incalculables beneficios que para la Compañía representa.”

Y de Boston a Galveston por telégrafo
y de Galveston por cable y telégrafo a México
y de México por cable a San Juan del Sur
y de San Juan del Sur por telégrafo a Puerto Limón
y desde Puerto Limón en canoa hasta adentro en la montaña
llega la orden de la United Fruit Company:
“La Iunai no compra más banano.”
Y hay despido de trabajadores en Puerto Limón.
Los pequeños talleres se cierran.
Nadie puede pagar una deuda. (30-1)

The information travels through telegraph networks to reach its destination, deepening the notion of an extensive separation between the landscape which is the object of imperial exploitation and those that are capable of perpetrating injustices from a distance to maximize profits. These communication circuits know no boundaries and circumvent porous borders. Unlike the individual faces of the filibuster villains, power here is faceless and the poet amplifies the alienation inherent in the figure of William Walker by erasing any vestiges of humanity left in the imperial formations that move across the landscape. Unlike Walker who displays one fleeting moment of humanity “como si una compasión fugaz como el vuelo de un párpado / hubiera cruzado entonces sus incoloros ojos de hielo” (*Con Walker* 54), this time telegraph communications bounce from location to location across the landscape, methodically communicating orders in mechanized fashion. Anthropologists and historians Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan have argued that while empires are “‘things’, imperial formations are not.” They argue that “[i]mperial formations are polities of dislocation, processes of dispersion,

appropriation and displacement. They are dependent upon moving categories of populations” (8). They point to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of pinning down definitions to describe empire, imperial formations, and imperialism, due to the continuously changing, squishy, fluid, unstable nature of empires themselves and allusions to such attributes that appear in Cardenal’s writing. The passage from “Hora 0” above describes the mass layoff of workers who are displaced according to orders received via telegraph from invisible entities and Cardenal thereby poetically communicates a certain frustration inherent in the rebellion that occupies the latter half of the poem. A faceless enemy now presents himself in ubiquitous fashion across the land via surrogates and an uneven technological advantage, a parallel to the metaphor of the *guardatinaja* cornered in his own land by hunters’ dogs and nowhere to escape.

Cardenal’s representation of landscape dotted by telegraph communications impressively highlights the disparity in technological development between metropolis and periphery. Eduardo Galeano has noted that Latin America is “condemned to suffer the technology of the powerful, which attacks and removes natural raw materials, and is incapable of creating its own technology to sustain and defend its own development” (244). Cardenal describes this phenomenon with great clarity. The telegraph as described in “Hora 0” easily circumvents all boundaries throughout the hemisphere but must reach its final destination “en canoa hasta adentro en la montaña,” once it reaches the backwaters of Central America, the region maintained in a perpetual state of underdevelopment precisely because of development in the metropolis, as per Galeano’s analysis.

Cardenal does imply that rebels seeking to mount opposition to the injustices inherent in the current system engage in subversive activity by appropriating precisely these same technologies. He eulogizes a sixteen year old Nicaraguan martyr who at the end of the poem

transmits by night “mensajes clandestinos / a Costa Rica, telegramas temblorosos a través / de la noche, desde la Nicaragua oscura de Tacho” (50). This turning of the tables in technological terms parallels the poet’s appropriation of imperial tropes prominent in (neo)colonial narratives as well as the themes of armed rebellion and militarization which arise out of the need for self-defense.

As mentioned earlier, Cardenal’s “Hora 0” sweeps through the Central American dictatorships of the 1940s from the northwest to the southeast, following the political geography of the isthmus from Guatemala to El Salvador and Honduras and concluding in Somoza’s Nicaragua. This geographical arc through the Central American republics towards the central focus of Nicaragua draws the reader’s attention not only to the present “Hora 0” temporally, but spatially to the “ground 0” of Nicaragua as well. In the historical context of the time 1954-1956 during which the poem was written, this technique has several important implications. First, it implies a certain historical domino effect of dictatorships that have risen up and swept across the isthmus as if casting Central America into a perpetual night. On the other hand, at the time “Hora 0” was written, the poem could also be seen to suggest a sun rising on the isthmus in a similar domino like fashion. Poetic references to Central American dictators that have fallen strengthen the message of Somoza’s impending doom. It is not possible to determine whether this historic sweep through rising and falling leaders of Central America in Cardenal’s verse was influenced by rhetoric emanating from Washington, but it is interesting to note the similarity between its inclusion in “Hora 0” and an official U.S. narrative taking shape at the time. On April 7th, 1954, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower first expounded upon the “domino theory” at a press conference in relation to conflicts in Indochina, a term that would eventually become one of the most commonly used phrases of the Cold War. In “Hora 0,” this temporal and spatial shift from

Central American territory towards Nicaragua carries the reader to the present moment and to a “ground zero” in terms of person and place. In the final section, the reader sees Nicaragua from the vantage point of a clearly identified “yo” narrator that learns to operate a Rising machine gun and stands at the ready as protector of the national body. He seems to make the plea to the reader to do the same.

Conclusion

By focusing on landscape representation as a specific reference point in Cardenal’s earliest *exteriorista* poems and “Hora 0,” several important tenets of the poet’s subjective notion of place come into view. This construction of place is dynamic and notable shifts in its poetic representation appear to correlate with particular autobiographical and historical moments dating to the time of production. In this analysis I have highlighted five principal similarities in both of the main poems analyzed here, namely “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and “Hora 0.” 1) The geologic landscape is used to reinforce the idea of history that long predates the “discovery” of the Americas and the foundation of the United States as a country and burgeoning world power. 2) From an ecocritical standpoint, the poems’ thematic content establishes a connection between physical and psychological alienation from the natural world, and social alienation, environmental degradation, and a stratified society characterized by injustice, instability, and upheaval. 3) Ecological violence and disharmony with the natural world engenders violence among humans as well as with the non-human world. 4) Both poems reveal Cardenal’s preferences and prejudices in terms of gender roles and sexuality. As mentioned in the introduction, an attachment of meaning to place inevitably draws lines between legitimate citizens and those considered outside of the norm. Cardenal upholds the rugged, masculine, heterosexual male as prototype of the ideal heroic protector of objectivized females, be they

human or the physical body of the national territory. The poet contrasts Clinton Rollins, a sympathetic American capable of recognizing the beauty of the Nicaraguan women and landscape, with the cold, effeminate, and seemingly blind William Walker who recognizes no such beauty and thus is inclined to destroy the object from which he is alienated. In “Hora 0,” he contrasts the figures of Sandino and the Somozas along the same lines, helping to construct the heroic myth of the native Nicaraguan son/sun that rises to the occasion when his maiden Nicaragua (Adelita) is under duress. 5) These poems reveal a certain tendency on the part of the poet to appropriate imperial tropes and to turn the inverted narrative back towards empire, as I attempted to point out by highlighting parallels between travel writing, U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, and other trends common in colonial and neocolonial narratives such as the feminization and wilding of the subaltern body, both human and environmental.

On the other hand, an analysis of landscape representation and the poetized human relationship with the natural world has revealed certain changes over time in Cardenal’s verse regarding certain key themes. I have attempted to highlight four of these major differences. 1) Color and landscape representations that appeal to the reader’s senses evoke a greater sense of polarization in “Hora 0” than in earlier poems. I have argued that certain key historical events provoked this poetic polarity in Cardenal’s work. Two such watershed moments that have been identified by historians as radicalizing events that precipitated the political polarization seen throughout the world during the Cold War are the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala as well as the April Rebellion in Nicaragua in 1954. 2) “Hora 0” and the earlier poems seem to indicate a changing attitude about violence on the part of the poet. The imagery of the cornered *guardatinaja* fortifies the notion of a Nicaraguan populace left without other alternatives. The poetry comes increasingly close to justifying violence as a legitimate means of self-defense

while never expressly condoning it. In “Con Walker en Nicaragua,” the landscape manifests increasingly masculine characteristics in the face of filibuster hostilities and appears to rise up in defense. In “Hora 0,” this defiance is embodied in the figure of Sandino, a man who coexists in close communion with the natural world and vows to protect her from aggression, offering his life for hers. 3) The poet’s attitude towards Americans appears to have shifted over the years dividing the poems. Many filibusters in the earlier collection are described in sympathetic terms as supported by their purported love for the Nicaraguan women and recognition of the beauty and allure of the local landscape. Immediately prior to the writing of “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and the other poems published in the Cohen collection, Cardenal had just returned to Nicaragua after two years abroad in the United States and Europe. He seems to have held a certain affinity to Americans and their ideals but was confused by the other face of the United States that seemed to contradict the democratic values, neighborly promises, and anti-fascist rhetoric of World War II and the years immediately following the Allies’ victory. In “Hora 0,” however, all Americans that are specifically mentioned are either walled off from the natural world in the presidential palace or completely removed from the landscape where their actions and policies wreak havoc. Their alienation and detachment from the environment is a predominant theme. Technology has allowed an absenteeism and exploitation to coexist, thus increasing their alienation from the natural world, a tendency that Cardenal seems to suggest as being the crux of the problem.²⁸ 4) In “Hora 0,” in contrast with earlier poems, Cardenal’s writing seems to reflect

²⁸ It should be noted that Cardenal does include verse in “Hora 0” that depicts some Americans in a favorable light when describing residents of the mountains that spy and relay messages for Sandino during his campaign. Among these spies are foreigners, including Americans: “y [Sandino] recibía mensajes de todas las montañas / y parecía que cada cabaña espiaba para él / (donde los extranjeros fueran *como* hermanos / todos los extranjeros hasta los ‘americanos’) / --‘hasta los yanquis...’” (37, emphasis added). Notice the distinction implied here, as indicated by the comparative word “como,” between the foreigners who are “like” brothers and the fellow Nicaraguans who *are* brothers: “‘Todos nosotros...’ ‘Todos somos iguales.’ / ‘Aquí todos somos hermanos’, decía Umanzor (35, ellipsis in orig.). Furthermore, Cardenal appears to make the distinction between the U.S. government and its people,

parallels to the nascent dependency theory which was just emerging at the time as a criticism of modernization theory, as indicated earlier via references to Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971). Cardenal uses the image of rotting bananas as a metaphor for purposeful destruction at the hands of the Americans who make profit by holding the periphery in a state of underdevelopment. He also uses landscape to demonstrate the technological deficit suffered by Latin America as is evident in the description of telegraph communications that deftly bounce around the international borders only to make inroads into Nicaragua by canoe.

Given Ernesto Cardenal's religious affiliation and clerical relationship with the Catholic Church as an ordained priest, it is not surprising that many critics tend to analyze his poetry through edenic, biblical, and millenarian lenses. I have attempted to show other possible interpretations of his verse with a particular focus on landscape representation to demonstrate how Cardenal's writing is not only a product of his Christian ideals but also of the life and times during which he penned several of his most renowned works. As I maintained in the introduction of this study, place is a social construct that is in constant flux as it is tooled and retooled in dialogical contact with other subjective meanings projected onto any given space. As I have argued, many of the tropes that appear in Cardenal's poetry appear to be reworked elements appropriated from (neo)colonial narratives. I have relied heavily on Mary Louise Pratt's analysis of transculturation in travel writing to make this claim.

Another important aspect of Cardenal's poetic production during the 1950s and 1960s is his pioneering ecological message that is seldom viewed by critics outside of the realm of biblical interpretation. Ecocritics emphasize the literary representation of human relationships with the non-human world from an ecological perspective and I have attempted to argue that one

viewing the latter as victims of a corrupt system, as in the case of "Oración por Marilyn Monroe," swayed by the false promises of capitalism as are many of the Nicaraguan people.

key component of Cardenal's construction of place has been his advocacy in favor of a society with undivided access to the natural world that maintains the integrity of the land, recognizes its beauty and understands the importance of protecting it and establishing harmonious relationships with it.

This is not to say, however, that biblical, edenic, and millenarian interpretations of Cardenal's work are wrong. On the contrary, these are important elements that are indispensable in any complete analysis of his poetry. In the poetry that I have analyzed here, Cardenal portrays the harshness of the Nicaraguan climate, the historical influence and continued presence of the United States in internal affairs, and the existence of Somoza and his rise to power as being irrefutable realities and essential parts of the Nicaraguan landscape. From a Christian perspective, some could argue that Cardenal sees all humans as being universally culpable for the depravity that we witness in the world as if it were linked to original sin and that this biblical good/evil dichotomy is reflected in his representation of the natural world. In *Las ínsulas extrañas*, Cardenal indeed links the rise of the Somoza dynasty and its approximately forty three year grip on power in Nicaragua to the notion of a collective guilt: "el somocismo fue un gran pecado del que todos éramos responsables" (49). But I would argue that the main target of his criticism from a political, social, economic, and ecological perspective is increasingly along Marxist lines in terms of modes of production and consumerism in a capitalist economy in which the consumers are ultimately the engine that propels capitalism forward on its destructive path. In "Oración por Marilyn Monroe," he writes, "Ella no hizo sino actuar según el script que le dimos. . . . Y era un script absurdo. . . . Perdónala Señor y perdónanos a nosotros / por nuestra 20th Century / por esta Colosal Super-Producción en la que todos hemos trabajado" (Cardenal, "Oración" 89). The consumers are sold what they demand, ultimately leading to their own demise in a system

propped up by their own participation. Cardenal's hope lies in his belief in freewill and humankind's ability to choose between the two opposing metanarratives that continued to polarize as the Cold War intensified. In "Hora 0," he writes:

“Si a mí me pusieran a escoger mi destino
(me había dicho Báez Bone tres días antes)
entre morir asesinado como Sandino
o ser Presidente como el asesino de Sandino
yo escogería el destino de Sandino.”

Y él escogió su destino. (45, quotation marks in original)

Nations of people can collectively choose their destiny and Cardenal uses the representation of landscape in his verse to reimagine nation and give meaning to place along his own subjective terms.

CHAPTER 2: WEAVING POETRY AND THE SELF INTO NICARAGUA'S ECOLOGICAL
WEB—NATIONALISM AND SELF-REALIZATION IN ERNESTO CARDENAL'S POETIC
LANDSCAPES (1970-1977)

*Buey que vi en mi niñez echando vaho un día
bajo el nicaragüense sol de encendidos oros,
en la hacienda fecunda, plena de la armonía
del trópico; paloma de los bosques sonoros
del viento, de las hachas, de pájaros y toros
salvajes, yo os saludo, pues sois la vida mía. . . .*
--Rubén Darío ("Allá lejos")

*Ésta es tierra con perfume sólo para nosotros.
Crecen mangos, jocotes, guayabas y chocomicos
y un montón más de frutas de monte que se cultivan solas en el
Mombacho.*

.....
Esta tierra es nuestra con toda su hermosa floración de costumbres . . .
--Joaquín Pasos ("Desocupación pronta, y si es necesario violenta")

The years from 1967 to 1979 mark a particularly tumultuous period in the history of twentieth century Nicaragua. Beginning with the death of Luis Somoza Debayle in 1967, Nicaraguan society increasingly underwent a process of polarization and radicalization that culminated in the overthrow of the Somoza regime and the triumph of the Sandinistas in 1979. Ernesto Cardenal had returned to Nicaragua in 1965 from Colombia and established an intentional Christian community in Solentiname where he remained until Somoza's forces destroyed his island village in 1977. It was here that Cardenal penned some of his most important works. This analysis of Ernesto Cardenal's poetry considers the year 1970 as a demarcation line that separates his earlier poetry, which was examined in Chapter 1 of this study, from those poems created post-1970 through his exile from Solentiname in 1977. Ernesto Cardenal himself has pointed to the importance of 1970 because it was in this year that he experienced what he calls a second "conversion" during an extended stay in Cuba. He gives an

extensive account of his trip in his book entitled *En Cuba* (1970) and dedicates an entire chapter to it, “Mi conversión en Cuba,” in the second volume of his memoirs, *Las islas extrañas* (2003).

It is in Cuba where Cardenal witnesses what he believes to be the manifestation of his Christian ideals within a revolutionary society structured on Marxist principles. He comes to the conclusion that the “primitive Christian Church was much closer to Marxism than to capitalism” (Walsh). In 1970, two other revolutions occurred in Latin America, which also influenced Cardenal’s thinking. In his memoirs, he writes: “Cuando mi segundo viaje a Cuba estuve en otras dos revoluciones: la del Perú y la de Chile” (*Las islas* 293). In relating the influence that these revolutions had on him, Cardenal explains how a Jesuit Chilean priest, Gonzalo Arroyo, who would later become the Minister of Agriculture in Salvador Allende’s administration, points out to him that nowhere does Marx in his writings discuss the existence or non-existence of God. He continues, “por lo tanto se podía ser marxista y creer en Dios y en la trascendencia. Ya eso me cambió a mí. Yo me había declarado socialista después de mi viaje a Cuba; marxista no, porque no podía serlo por el ateísmo, según yo. Pero ya no seguí en ese error” (293). Cardenal had witnessed Marxist revolutions unfold in different ways in different countries and came to believe that it was a viable alternative to the system that had existed in Nicaragua throughout the twentieth century.

The term “conversion” that Cardenal uses to describe his transformative experience is important to consider here, because it implies an increased focus on the self that parallels the development of his revolutionary vision for the rebuilding of a nation. In the poems that will be considered in this chapter, namely “Canto nacional” (1972), “Oráculo sobre Managua” (1973), “Viaje a Nueva York” (1973), and an excerpt from “Ofensiva final,” a poem included in his

collection *Vuelos de victoria* (1985), a heightened presence of the “yo” voice becomes evident in comparison with earlier poems and notably coincides with the “zooming in” of the poetic lens on the territory or natural body of Nicaragua. In other words, there is an increased focus on the “yo,” the lyrical voice, and his personal space, or “place,” to return to the terms of Alexandra Kogl’s equation “place = space + meaning.” Self-preservation and self-realization of the poetic “yo” as subject and as self-appointed spokesperson for nation interconnect and expand to become dominant themes in his verse. The poet makes a conscious effort to rewrite place to wrest symbols from neocolonialist/imperialist narratives in order to reclaim them, repossess them, and to re-present his idea of nation as an ideal model.

In the introduction, I present a modified version of Alexandra Kogl’s equation to argue that the addends *space* and *meaning* are not mutually exclusive categories. The contours of meaning can be influenced both by material spaces and the activities that alter these spaces as well as by contact with competing meanings that are attached to place. In the face of grave uncertainty surrounding the tumultuous national and international events that characterize this period of Nicaraguan history and the poet’s life, I will apply this modified formula to Ernesto Cardenal’s verse to demonstrate how it is informed by and in dialogue with neocolonialist/imperialist narratives both past and present while also responding to imperial “writing” across physical space. In the poems written between 1970-1977, Cardenal attempts to 1) reclaim topographical symbols, such as the volcano Momotombo, as well as Nicaragua’s non-human inhabitants from neocolonialist narratives, 2) reclaims language and reasserts the legitimacy and autonomy of Nicaraguan-based knowledge in an epistemological sense via the inclusion of endemic non-human species in his poetry, and 3) poetically establishes connections between all living entities in Nicaraguan territory, both human and non-human, to unify nation,

and blur lines of division between competing subjectivities. By connecting the national citizenry with Nicaragua's life-sustaining habitat, the poet draws together language, labor, and species and unites them to formulate place as one viable, thriving organism or ecological web.²⁹ Finally, looking at the "space" side of the equation from an ecocritical perspective, that is, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xvii), Cardenal also aims to 4) reclaim space by establishing control over the narrative that imperial extractive resource activities and exploitation have physically "written" over the land.³⁰

After Ernesto Cardenal's return to Nicaragua in 1965, several events occurred that had a huge impact on his life and writing.³¹ Cardenal was ordained a Catholic priest in Managua at the age of forty and, shortly thereafter, began work to carry out his plan to found an independent Christian community on the island of Mancarrón in Lake Nicaragua (Williams, Introduction ix).³² The idea to form this small contemplative commune, which Cardenal named "Nuestra Señora de Solentiname," was originally conceived in conversations with Thomas Merton who also planned to join the group but was later denied permission by Rome to do so (Cohen, *Songs of Heaven and Earth*, xvi). Cardenal's verse, commune, church, and cultural center were to become widely known internationally, as was the poet himself, as the Nicaraguan conflict intensified and garnered media attention throughout the world. During his time in Solentiname,

²⁹ In *The Magical State* (1997), Fernando Coronil emphasizes the materiality of nation as a life-sustaining habitat and advances the argument that the configurations of metabolism between society and nature are also important to the creation and sustenance of national imaginings. His thesis will be applied to the poetry of Ernesto Cardenal later in this chapter.

³⁰ Using the definition of ecocriticism as presented in Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks of Literary Ecology* (1996), Steven F. White applies this definition in his introduction and translation of Pablo Antonio Cuadra's *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light* (*Siete árboles contra el atardecer*): *A Bilingual Edition* (2007).

³¹ After spending the years 1957-1959 at the Trappist monastery at Gethesemani, Kentucky, Cardenal moved to a Benedictine monastery in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where he remained until 1961. Afterwards, he entered the Cristo Sacerdote seminary in La Ceja, Antioquía, Colombia, and stayed there until his return to Nicaragua in 1965 (Williams, Introduction viii).

³² Solentiname is an archipelago consisting of thirty-eight little islands located in the southern part of Lake Nicaragua (Cohen, *Songs of Heaven and Earth*, xvi). Mancarrón is the largest island.

Cardenal practiced the gospel with the island community and the group became more involved with revolutionary activities in opposition to the Somoza dictatorship. In 1977, ten years after its founding, Solentiname was destroyed by Somoza's forces in response to its opposition to the dictatorship.

Of utmost importance during the time period being considered in this chapter is the death of Luis Somoza Debayle and the subsequent rise to power of his younger sibling, Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza Debayle, in 1967. "Tachito" was notably the head of the National Guard of Nicaragua and his ascension to the presidency only solidified his authoritative rule. On January 22, 1967, the Guardia Nacional massacred hundreds of anti-Somoza Nicaraguans by gunfire during a political rally in Managua just prior to the presidential elections in which Tachito was a candidate. The opposition and Conservative candidate Fernando Agüero lost the elections and later signed a pact with Somoza, thus closing the doors on any possible democratic hopes or means of political reform.

Historians attribute the armed resistance and the eventual Sandinista triumph of 1979 to these key events. Historian Peter H. Smith describes how Tachito's governance sowed the seeds for a violent rebellion in the following way:

Self-seeking and corrupt Anastasio Jr. ("Tachito") clamped an iron rule over the country but offended thoughtful Nicaraguans by his excesses, most notably his extraction of windfall profits from the reconstruction of Managua after a devastating earthquake in 1972. He also made the mistake of excluding the country's traditional elite from his entrepreneurial activities.

Unlike El Salvador, where the existence of legal institutions encouraged a reformist option, the near-complete absence of representative institutions in

Nicaragua meant that opposition to Somoza could take only one form: armed resistance. (173)

Ernesto Cardenal's own account reinforces this notion of radicalization and polarization as a response to Tachito's tyranny and complete disregard for democratic reform:

Y el contacto con la pobreza de los campesinos en Solentiname, y la realidad nacional cada vez peor, también contribuyeron a que yo y nuestra pequeña comunidad nos fuéramos politizando y radicalizando. . . . [Y]o conversaba con [José] Coronel [Urtecho] en San Carlos, y me dijo que la situación en Nicaragua con Tachito Somoza había llegado a un extremo tal, que no podía seguir en la pasividad. (*Las insulas* 204)

These quotes highlight not only the political radicalization that followed Tachito's ascension to power, but also the acceptance of violence as a viable strategy for the opposition.³³ These quotes manifest a sense of desperation to find an exit from an increasingly brutal authoritarian regime.³⁴

In addition to Tachito and specific examples of torture and corruption linked to his government, several other national, international, and historical events had an influence over Cardenal's writing. The devastating earthquake that shook Managua on December 23, 1972 had important political implications and Cardenal's "Oráculo sobre Managua" revolves around this cataclysmic event. As Jeffrey Gould points out, "The 1967 massacre and 1972 earthquake realigned oppositional forces [in Nicaragua]" (*To Lead As Equals* 271). The manifestation of

³³ Marc Zimmerman, in his introduction to Cardenal's *Vuelos de victoria* (1985), supports this argument: "In the early 1970s Cardenal had already begun to diverge from the Mertonian ideal of non-violence because, as he was to say, 'In Nicaragua, as in other parts of Latin America, nonviolent struggle is not possible'" (xviii).

³⁴ Other Nicaraguan poets also prolifically penned poetry during these tumultuous years and several noteworthy collections date to this same decade, namely Pablo Antonio Cuadra's *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light*, written between 1977 and 1978, Gioconda Belli's *Sobre la grama* (1972) and *Línea de fuego* (1978), and Claribel Alegría's *Sobrevivo* (1978).

revolution in the geological and non-human Nicaraguan landscape is an important motif in Cardenal's poetry and the 1972 earthquake is the most well-known example of this theme.

Another key event that adversely affected Cardenal is the death of Thomas Merton, Cardenal's mentor, on December 10, 1968.³⁵ The construction of Cardenal's Christian-based community in Solentiname in 1965 was largely inspired by Thomas Merton's guidance and Merton had long talked of making a trip to the islands to visit his former disciple. Cardenal describes the occasion of Merton's death in his memoirs: "Aunque Merton tenía solo (sic) 10 años más que yo, para mí era como mi padre y su muerte fue el mayor dolor que yo había tenido" (*Las islas* 235). Thomas Merton was an important father figure in Cardenal's life. His loss was akin to being orphaned by the most prominent philosophical, political, and theological influence that had theretofore molded the poet's thinking. Merton's passing was undoubtedly an important factor influencing the evolution of the poet's work between 1970-1977, particularly as his verse adopts a more paternal tone as he poetically represents several young Sandinista revolutionaries as national sons in his own image.

Finally, another event of international importance that occurs during this time period is the Apollo 11 moon landing of July 20, 1969. This high profile mission to the moon profoundly influences Cardenal's poetry in which the lunar body emerges as an important symbol and is melded with the Nicaraguan landscape as a site to challenge narratives emanating from centers of power.

³⁵ After his first spiritual conversion to Christianity in 1956, Cardenal entered the Trappist monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky and it was there that he studied for approximately two years under the tutelage of Trappist monk, scholar, and writer Thomas Merton before moving to Cuernavaca, México and later to Colombia. Cardenal would return to Nicaragua in 1965.

“Canto nacional”

Turning first to Ernesto Cardenal’s “Canto nacional” (1972) for closer analysis, this poem was the first one that he explicitly dedicated to the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). The poem opens with references to the natural landscape including a summary of the seasons of Nicaragua. The poet describes the movements and activities of various birds, iguanas, frogs, lizards, alligators, and turtles in relation to the rainy season, calendar months, and day/night. He later launches into what Richard Curry identifies as the main theme of the poem:

En “Canto nacional” el acto principal y los individuos reprendidos son los préstamos concedidos a Nicaragua en los primeros años del siglo XX (1911 y siguientes) por los banqueros de Nueva York. Lejos de ser la ayuda filantrópica que pretendiera una perspectiva burguesa paternalista para estos préstamos, su efecto real son el interés creado y la explotación. (“Poeta/militante” 92)

Cardenal sets out to satirize those institutions and leaders responsible for the corruption in Nicaragua and then to present the mythical figure of Sandino in conflict with these dominant power structures (“Poeta/militante” 96). He then calls upon the reader to rebel against this establishment and its capitalist/bourgeois imperialist ideologies (97).

Not surprisingly, many critics, such as María Ángeles Pastor Alonso, interpret the opening lines of “Canto nacional” through a biblical lens, likening the Nicaraguan landscape “como un paraíso en estado edénico, expresado jubilosamente en los pájaros y sus cantos” (374). Richard Curry has argued that Ernesto Cardenal follows normative bourgeois poetic tradition by creating a *locus amoenus*, that is, an idyllic setting which serves as a background for a violent encounter or abrupt change that is about to occur (“Paradigma” 39). Curry does maintain that Cardenal simultaneously subverts this bourgeois technique by utilizing localized imagery more

often associated with vanguard poets beginning in the early to mid-twentieth century, rather than the universal backdrop more common in poetry with roots in the European Renaissance.³⁶

Cardenal's landscape in "Canto nacional" extends far beyond mere Edenic symbolism or the inclusion of localized imagery as per Curry's analysis, however. Rather than idealizing the landscape, as is common in the traditional poetic creation of *locus amoenus*, a closer examination of these descriptions of ecosystems reveal a sense of heightened alert, desperation, and a contemplative shift of focus inward toward a more emphasized first-person poetic lyrical voice who struggles for self-preservation and self-realization as the future of a nation in turmoil hangs in the balance.

The representation of the natural environment is characterized by an increased sense of mimicry and reflection as if the topography were gazing upon itself through a giant poetic mirror. The bird calls introduce this reflective motif as the toledo bird sings "TO-LE-DO," the pijul sings "PIJUL," and the trespesospide sings "TRES PESOS TRES PESOS" ("Canto nacional" 61). In later passages, the poet expands upon this reflective imagery: "La luna sobre el lago y el agua color de luna . . . y va un bote de remo río abajo también reflejado / va como cortando vidrio" (69). Later, "[g]arzas blancas en las orillas y su reflejo blanco bajo ellas" (70), . . . "el quetzal canta su bello canto territorial, / inmóvil, no lo ves, mimetiza la luz" (72). These allusions to reflection are heightened by the oft repeated references to flight in the poem.³⁷ Other scholars have highlighted this theme of flying in Cardenal's verse, such as Marc Zimmerman, who writes:

³⁶ As one specific example of vanguard regionalism, the Nicaraguan poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra (1912-2002), one of the founders of the *vanguardista* movement in Nicaragua, also uses this technique of linking specific local spatial and temporal coordinates with his representation of non-human species in his poetry (White, "Pablo Antonio Cuadra" xiv). This can be seen in Cuadra's collection, *Siete árboles contra el atardecer*, which contains poems penned during the 1970s, as the insurrection against Somoza was mounting.

³⁷ The repetitive quality of the verse in itself is another literary technique employed in "Canto nacional" that further heightens the sense of reflection.

Like so many other Nicaraguans, Ernesto Cardenal has always been fascinated with flying and soaring, with birds, with wings, with airplanes and all planes: with skies, aerial views, the moon, the stars, the Milky Way, and all the ecstasies and terrors of flight. Of course all his poems have been flights into the Nicaraguan past or into the heart of Central American life. So in his “Canto nacional” (“Nicaraguan Canto”) Cardenal weaves Sandinista visions with the flights and sounds of Nicaragua’s native birds. So he writes of aerial views in his “Viaje a Nueva York” (“Trip to New York”). So he writes in “Oráculo sobre Managua” (“Oracle over Managua”) of Leonel Rugama’s Apollo poems and of planes bringing food and clothing the Somozas confiscate . . . (xi-xii)

Flight is also important in terms of contemplation and self-reflection that coincide with the mimicry of bird calls and lake/sky reflective imagery. The aerial perspective of birds and the moon soaring over the land, looking down upon the Nicaraguan landscape from above, emphasize an essential theme in this verse of an increasingly inward focus on the self as the nation is under threat. In reference to Cuadra’s *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light*, White has noted that “to contemplate place means to meditate on oneself as an individual and also on humanity in its long relationship with an ecosystem” (“Pablo Antonio Cuadra” x). Concepts of self-realization and self-preservation clearly become intertwined with nation in “Canto nacional,” written at a time when Tachito’s repressive tactics were becoming more predominant.

Scottish scholar Tom Nairn has conceived of nationalism as a function of the uneven distribution of industrialization and modernization throughout the world. He posits that smaller, backward nations who have not equally shared in the modernization tend to bridge gaps by going nationalistic. Intellectuals in these regions, according to his reasoning, contribute by creating

national awakenings in order to fight their own marginalization (Eley 13). With the closing of democratic paths toward possible reform, Cardenal focuses on the central theme of oppression in his verse as a result of tyranny and government corruption. He writes, “Opresión. Tras la opresión, la liberación. . . . Sandino se gloriaba de haber nacido del ‘vientre de los / oprimidos’ / (el de una indita de Niquinohomo) / Del vientre de los oprimidos nacerá la Revolución” (65). Oppression implies restraints on self-realization and Cardenal advocates shedding the yoke of national oppression to free the self in the image of Sandino.

In “Canto nacional,” the line between self and nation becomes blurred as Cardenal unifies the cacophony of voices within the natural landscape and merges them with the lyrical speaker. “Ésta es la tierra de mi canto,” he writes, comparing himself to the birds, “yo soy como el pocoyo crepuscular, el / pájaro triste que canta JODIDO” (79). The reflective attributes of nature, the water, mimicry, and repetition, coupled with the perspective from aerial flights looking downward upon the national territory coincide with the dual and simultaneous contemplation of place and self. One particular quote from Cardenal’s memoirs stands out in clarifying this interrelationship:

[La soledad] la necesitamos para encontrarnos a nosotros mismos, y a Dios dentro de nosotros. Como lo dice el título de un libro de [Thomas] Merton: *Los hombres no son islas*. Y estamos unidos con todo aquello en lo que también habita Dios, es decir con todo: “Una iguana un tractor, una galaxia, tampoco son islas”. (*Las insulas* 151)

Likewise, in “Canto nacional,” the poet gazes at place/nation and sees himself and views both entities as being interconnected and sharing a common fate.

Several poems penned by other Nicaraguan writers during this time of intense national conflict reveal striking parallels in the merging of self and nation as depicted through the representation of landscape. One notable example is the work of poet Gioconda Belli, particularly her collection, *Línea de fuego*, written between 1974 and 1978. As Ana Patricia Rodríguez points out, Gioconda Belli erases the lines between personal history and national history and writes from an intimate space. Unlike Cardenal, however, Belli emphatically establishes poetic linkages between the oppression of nation and the sexual, social, and political liberation of the feminine self and this conflict takes place on the physical plane of poetic landscape. As Steven White has noted, “la ética feminista insiste en destacar conexiones entre la dominación de la mujer y la de la naturaleza” (*Arando* 34). Belli’s work likewise links her liberation in feminist terms with the liberation of the body of the national territory, as seen in her poem “¿Qué sos Nicaragua?,” in which she describes her country as “un triangulito de tierra perdido en la mitad del mundo” (*Línea* 14). Belli likens Nicaragua to the pubic triangle in the middle of the body that has yet to be discovered prior to a (sexual) revolution. As the insurrection against Somoza gained strength throughout the 1970s, an increased awareness of this small Central American nation spread globally, shedding light on a country that was once ignored and silenced in the face of oppression. Belli’s own self-discovery as a sexual female coincides with her renewed love for the national/natural body with which she identifies and to which she makes numerous poetic references in *Línea de fuego*. Her struggle for self-determination and self-realization as a female in a patriarchal society overlaps with her fight to liberate the body of her nation which has been subjugated by empire much like females have been repressed by their male counterparts.

In “¿Qué sos Nicaragua?,” Belli’s verse intersects with that of Cardenal as she makes an intertextual reference to the opening lines of his “Las campesinas de Cúa”: “¿Qué sos / sino dolor y polvo y gritos en la tarde, / — «grito de mujeres, como de parto»—?” (*Línea* 15). Like Belli, Cardenal also poetically establishes connections between landscape, topography, and the fertile ground upon which the human population of Nicaragua depend and the female human body. However, Cardenal does not poetically create space for voices representing gender equality as does Belli. The mothers of Cúa in this case represent a more traditional gender role in a patriarchal society, that of giving birth and mourning the males who have lost their lives carrying out traditional male responsibilities. Cardenal’s representation of landscape similarly reflects this bias in favor of a male dominated society. In fact, he perpetuates the very tradition of depicting Nicaragua as part of a helpless, feminized periphery in need of capital from the masculinized metropolis as found in the (neo) colonialist narratives from which Cardenal seeks to liberate himself and nation.³⁸ In Cardenal’s equation, the blood of the pantheon of national sons of Nicaragua, including Sandino, Rugama, and the aforementioned boys of Cúa, spills onto the fertile soil of the feminized, submissive Nicaragua, leading to the rebirth of nation. In terms of landscape metaphors, this is seen most clearly in “Hora 0” discussed in Chapter 1: “Pero el héroe nace cuando muere / y la hierba verde renace de los carbones (51). Belli’s Nicaragua diverges drastically from Cardenal’s rewriting of nation on this point. Cardenal emphasizes the masculinity of his nationalism, while Belli’s is interwoven with feminist liberation.

In addition to the tendency of landscape in “Canto nacional” to bridge place and self, its reflective qualities further connect the poem to the autobiographical landscape in which Cardenal

³⁸ In *The Magical State*, Fernando Coronil makes this point in his criticism of Marx: “His account of the productive engagement of Monsieur le Capital with Madame la Terre unwittingly serves to confirm dominant representation of a world polarized by a masculine and creative order which is the home of capital in the metropolitan centers and a feminized and subjected domain where nature passively awaits capital’s fertile embrace in the periphery” (57).

penned these verses. Expanding upon the island motif as mentioned earlier in the title of Merton's book, *No Man Is an Island* (1955), Cardenal contemplates nation from the vantage point of the isolated and secluded islands of Solentiname where he attempts to construct a community (a mini-nation) in his own image. In his memoirs, he draws a connection between his community and Nicaragua at large: "[Nuestra comunidad] la veíamos como una 'revolución en pequeño', una preparación espiritual para una revolución más grande; esto sí puede ser cierto, me parece" (*Las insulas* 418). Surrounded by water, Cardenal highlights the reflective qualities of the physical landscape as observed from Solentiname in numerous passages in his autobiography. In one example, he describes Ometepe, the lake, and the sky: "Ometepe con sus dos volcanes se veía más cerca; el lago estaba calmito, reflejando el cielo, y Solentiname y Ometepe de color de cielo, cielo contra el cielo. Y le dije a William: '¡Mi parroquia es la más bella de Nicaragua!'" (*Las insulas* 137). Upon closer examination of these intertextual relationships between landscapes, the reflective elements in the landscape of "Canto nacional" begin to assume a greater importance and deepen the reader's understanding of these references and the parallels between contemplations of nation and self.

Landscape in "Canto nacional" furthermore provides a setting for the inclusion of endemic non-human species in the poem which Cardenal uses as a vehicle to reclaim language and to reassert the legitimacy and autonomy of Nicaraguan-based knowledge. As has long been accepted by scholars since the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking study *Orientalism* (1978), colonial occupation has been carried out by Western powers not only via economic, political, and civic/social domination but also through epistemic control, that is to say via the control of knowledge. As Walter Mignolo has argued, European and later United States' forms of knowledge production have converted Western particularities into the universal yardstick by

which all civilizations are measured. According to Mignolo's analysis, Western knowledge systems have been deemed superior by the colonizers and it has been from these power centers where legitimate classifications and descriptions of the rest of the world emanate.

Contributing writers for *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (2008) define "coloniality" as "that which encompasses the transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times" (2). The authors argue that colonialism is still alive and well and that it is important to reverse the trend of excluding the history, cultures, knowledge production, and voices from the periphery by incorporating those aspects that have thus far avoided colonization. Walter Mignolo points specifically to semiotics, or non-textual representations and symbols, as one way to transcend borders and decolonize knowledge by acknowledging contributions of the periphery. In "Canto nacional," Cardenal's inclusion of Nicaragua's wildlife in the poem poetically fulfills precisely this function. The poet utilizes terminology specific to his region when describing the birds, animals, and plants as the opening verse demonstrates, cited here at length:

En las mañanas de mayo, cuando empiezan las lluvias
canta el ceniztonle
en las tardes de julio, después del aguacero
canta su canto dulce el ceniztonle
canta libre en el norte. Y el
zanate clarinero, *Cassidix nicaragüensis* (es un pájaro
nicaragüense) negroazulvioláceo vuela
en octubre o noviembre sobre los pueblos nicaragüenses
es un pájaro proletario—sin ningún adorno—anda siempre

entre pobres.

Y el pájaro-degollado (con mancha roja en el cuello)

canta en los huertos

el toledo de terciopelo negro y boina escarlata

canta TO-LE-DO TO-LE-DO en los cafetales

el pijul de plumaje de color de noche canta

PIJUL PIJUL PIJUL

(come las garrapatas del ganado)

el trespesospide canta

TRES PESOS TRES PESOS TRES PESOS

la corchita canta en los plantíos levantando la colita

el tecolote llora en cementerios y ruinas en las noches de luna

el pájaro-gritón en el río Escondido, está siempre escondido

se oye su grito y nunca se le ve

en las montañas de Curinguás hay quetzales...

En verano desovan las iguanas.

Al principio del invierno nacen las lagartijas.

En mayo el croarrrrr de las ranas con las primeras lluvias.

En junio el cenizontle hace su nido.

En julio los guajipales ponen sus huevos (fosforescentes

de noche los ojos de los guajipales)

y ponen sus huevos en la costa las tortugas paslamas

en las noches sin luna. Y después vienen los vendavales. Es

la época de los temporales. Los grandes aguaceros alegres.

Septiembre: en las cercas de alambre canta el justo-juez

JUSTO JUEZ JUSTO JUEZ JUSTO JUEZ

está cantando así todo el mes. (61-2)

Cardenal mentions specific species, and, in the case of *Cassidix nicaragiensis*, even uses its scientific name to highlight its Nicaraguan origins and thus its endemic classification. His other references to local imagery follow the vanguardist tradition of including terms that underscore phenomena particular to Nicaragua and may perhaps be obscure to readers unfamiliar with the landscape.

The inclusion of specific bird calls in this passage has several connotations, one being the rooting of language to place and the reclaiming of language that has heretofore been a tool of imperialism to sow the seeds of corruption and oppression:

De ahí pues:

el imperialismo como elemento perturbador desorganizador etc.

factor de atraso, de corrupción en Nicaragua: ha violado

tratados, constituciones, decisiones judiciales

provocado guerra civil manipulado elecciones sobornado (65).

The purposeful misinterpretation or outright manipulation of words has been the source of much of the corruption evident in Cardenal's Nicaragua as seen in the outright disregard for words as written in treaties, the constitution, and judicial decisions. Unlike the representatives of empire whose words are transplanted from abroad without an organic connection to the land, the bird calls cited above are a direct reflection of each respective bird name. The toledo bird sings "TO-LE-DO," the pijul sings "PIJUL," the trespesospide sings "TRES PESOS TRES PESOS," and

the justo-juez incessantly calls “JUSTO JUEZ JUSTO JUEZ JUSTO JUEZ” (61-2). Cardenal utilizes onomatopoeia as a poetic strategy in which the bird names accurately mimic the chirps that the birds emit. In Cardenal’s landscape, words not only spring from the land but they reflect exactly the essence of the being from which the calls emanate.³⁹ In other words, the bird calls symbolize words that accurately depict what they represent. Words that are derived from Nicaraguan reality most accurately articulate that reality. The local terms reveal a mastery of the qualities of the Nicaraguan landscape. This becomes more evident when contrasted with the inaccurate language of U.S. surrogates as seen in Cardenal’s depiction of Cornelius Vanderbilt: “Vanderbilt no sabía decir Nicaragua. Decía *Nicaraguey*” (69, emphasis added).⁴⁰ Vanderbilt misrepresents Nicaragua as seen in his erroneous pronunciation of the country’s name. Cardenal undermines the legitimacy of agents of empire by highlighting the inaccuracies of their language, thereby contesting the epistemological terrain upon which neocolonialists justify their incursions into foreign lands. Cardenal himself clearly articulates this point at the end of “Canto nacional” when he writes: “Desmentir a la AP, a la UP / ésta también es la misión del poeta” (80). Cardenal consciously seeks to undermine the news reports and propaganda emanating from the metropolis and his representation of the natural landscape is one technique that he utilizes to achieve this goal, thereby subverting Western epistemological discourse.

The inclusion of bird calls and detailed references to the endemic non-human species of Nicaragua allow Cardenal to present himself as an authoritative voice from which knowledge emanates, thereby undermining the epistemological monopoly long held by empire. The poetic

³⁹It could be argued that Cardenal employs metonymy here in which an object, in this case the birds, are named by using part for the whole. In this case, the bird call is used to refer to the bird itself.

⁴⁰ Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) was the founder of the Accessory Transit Company which provided transportation across the Central American isthmus via Nicaragua, carrying passengers along the San Juan River, across Lake Nicaragua, and across the 12-mile section of land that separated the Pacific Ocean from the closest port on Lake Nicaragua. This route was particularly popular during the gold rush of 1849 when passengers were seeking quick voyage from the east coast of the United States to California and back again.

voice also claims expertise in language and linguistics by hinting to his ability to decipher the cacophony of sounds as though the bird calls in “Canto nacional” represent some type of secret code. Richard Curry has noted the subversive character of Cardenal’s particular use of onomatopoeia, as it undermines the traditional technique often employed in bourgeois poetry by hinting to a cryptic message (“Paradigma” 38). This subversion extends beyond Curry’s analysis to include the poet’s self-appointed role as translator of symbols that dot the poetic landscape. As per Mignolo’s observation regarding semiotics as a means to decolonize knowledge, Cardenal’s bird calls symbolize an abstruse language which has avoided colonization and which only the poet is capable of deciphering.

Cardenal’s opening verses in “Canto nacional,” as cited at length on pages 110-2 above, focus on the richness of biodiversity that characterizes Nicaragua and his call to reclaim these national treasures coincides with his attempt to rescue language, culture, and knowledge which are all linked to the non-human and physical landscape. In his study of the poetry of Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Steven F. White has astutely highlighted a similar phenomenon in Cuadra’s “El Jocote”, an excerpt of which follows:

Jocote es *Xocotl* que en náhuatl significa “fruta”
—la fruta por excelencia—la fruta
de los cien sabores. Porque las hay verde-dulces y las hay amarillas
y existe el Jocote llamado Tronador y el Boca-de-perro
y el Guaturco y el Ismoyo
y el Jocote de Lapa y el de Bejuco
y el de Jobo y el de Venado
y los hay—dice Joseph de Acosta—“unos que llaman de Nicaragua

que son muy colorados y pequeños
que apenas tienes carne que comer
pero eso poco que tienen es de escogido gusto
y un agrillo tan bueno o mejor que el de la guinda.” (Cuadra 16)

About this passage, White claims that “there is the essential recovery, by means of folk knowledge, of a biodiversity that, clearly, has to be protected, since the natural cultural and linguistic richness depends on that plurality” (“Pablo Antonio Cuadra” xii). In the same vein, Cuadra’s contemporary Ernesto Cardenal utilizes landscape, more specifically the abundant and varied species of birds with their wide array of physical attributes and cacophony of song, onomatopoeia as the simulator or creator of language, to defend endemic language, culture, knowledge, as well as the biodiversity itself from U.S. encroachment and exploitation.⁴¹

Cardenal’s technique of establishing a thematic linkage in “Canto nacional” between language, knowledge, and the land via the inclusion of endemic species serves another function as well, that of strengthening the authenticity of his own verse which seems to spring organically from the same source as the songs of the birds. The poet explicitly draws a connection between himself and the land, likening himself to non-human species with similar roots: “Tierra a la que yo pertenezco, como / la paloma tigüilota y la paloma patacona” (66). In the closing pages of the poem, the lyrical narrator emphasizes the connection between himself and the birds, using the commonality between his verse and the bird songs as his point of reference: “Ésta es la tierra de mi canto. / Y canto como el guardabarranco, ronco, en los barrancos . . . Y canto como el pájaro-león o cocoroca, un pájaro solitario . . . así yo canto.” He goes on to write: “Y yo soy como el pocoyo crepuscular, el / pájaro triste que canta JODIDO,” and follows with a variety of similar

⁴¹ In “Canto nacional,” he writes: “Pero sucedió que otro país tenía necesidad de estas riquezas” (62). From the context of the poem, it is clear that this country, presented in the singular, refers to the United States.

comparisons, ending with “también así es mi canto” (79). These parallels allow the poet to imbue these passages with an air of organic authenticity that seemingly spring from the soil as naturally as do the plants and animals that occupy the landscape.⁴² This poetic linkage of verse to the soil also reflects Cardenal’s Marxist conversion in that he grounds his literary production in the material.

As he does with the patriarchal pantheon of martyrs mentioned earlier, Cardenal also uses references to the non-human inhabitants of Nicaragua to link himself and his verse to Nicaragua’s poetic heritage, represented by Rubén Darío:

Buey de nuestra niñez que Darío vio echando vaho un día.

Las chachalacas que oímos cantar cuando muchachos.

Los hijueputazos. Íbamos a pescar almejas a la bocana.

El salta-piñuelos en los cercos de piñuelas.

Urracas bulliciosas comiendo mangos y robando nidos.

Chocoyos verdes en un palo, como hojas que gritan;

y cuando vuelan, como si el palo volara!

Había un curré en un palo seco anunciando sequía.

Las 5 de la tarde y el palmear de las tortillas

y el olor de las tortillas en el comal

el olor a humo de leña. A

la hora en que las lavanderas de Nindirí volvían de la laguna.

Sobre el lago de Managua en vuelo de garzas.

⁴² The seemingly prophetic qualities of the lyrical voice emanating from the Earth in Cardenal’s “Canto nacional” bear a strong resemblance to Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general*. As Patrick Murphy has pointed out, Neruda is less nationalistic in his work and expresses concern for the whole planet, but the omnipotent poetic voice with its geological and ecological roots is strikingly similar to that of Cardenal (“Poetic Politics” 214).

Y yo traía a mi novia a esa hora de la escuela de mecanografía.

—La hora en que se encienden las primeras luces

y las últimas parejas de lapas pasan volando.

Managua. Rubén mechudo en el muelle, con su novia,

mirando las garzas blancas y morenas. (66)

The lyrical voice nostalgically remembers bucolic scenes from childhood, using specific references to the Nicaraguan landscape and drawing upon common experiences that he and his poetic forebears have had on the land. He utilizes an intertextual reference to Rubén Darío's "Allá lejos" that opens with the line, "Buey que vi en mi niñez echando vaho un día," to fortify a shared sense of place (*Cantos* 167). By using the common reference point of oxen and the utilization of the first person plural possessive adjective "our" ("nuestra") to describe his childhood, Cardenal links himself and his literary contemporaries to a lineage of writers that go back to Rubén Darío, strengthening the notion that their poems share a common origin and authenticity and that they emerge from the reality that they claim to accurately depict.⁴³ Kent C. Ryden has pointed out that "sense of place results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing a history within its confines" (38). Cardenal consciously makes reference to these familiar elements of landscape to not only strengthen this common sense of place but also to validate his poetry by emphasizing its local and organic origins.

As he does with Sandino and other male Nicaraguan revolutionary heroes, it is interesting to note Cardenal's preferential treatment of males in the creation of this paternal lineage of

⁴³As in the case of José Martí (1853-1895), the Cuban poet who became a hotly contested symbol between anti-Castro Cubans in Miami and supporters of the Cuban Revolution, the figure of Rubén Darío (1867-1916) has also been appropriated by opposing factions throughout Nicaraguan history. Ernesto Cardenal addresses this subject in depth in his memoirs in an attempt to strengthen Darío's symbolic affiliation, both historically and poetically, with the Sandinistas.

noteworthy poets in “Canto nacional.” In addition to Rubén Darío, Cardenal makes reference to twentieth century Nicaraguan poets Joaquín Pasos, José Coronel Urtecho, and Leonel Rugama. Not only are all of these literary heroes male, but his idealized representation of them, particularly of Rubén Darío, reveals his biases in favor of heterosexuality as did his depiction of Clinton Rollins and William Walker as discussed in Chapter 1. Darío is seen with his girlfriend on the wharf as is Cardenal seen with his. Cardenal presents himself as a heterosexual male hero in this verse alongside the figure of his masculinized poetic forebear, Rubén Darío. The poetic landscape in his verse helps establish a common link between the origins of the two men and their verse and ground them to the physical place of Nicaragua. In so doing, his poem conveys a tone of masculinized authority in depicting the realities that it claims to describe. In addition, such techniques are used by the poet in an attempt to legitimize not only the description and critique of the national dilemma but also his call to action to rebel and to build a new nation. Just as the poetic linkages to landscape and endemic species lend credibility to the poet and his verse, they also strengthen the validity of the poet’s blueprint for nation, the idea for which appears to spring forward organically from the material Nicaraguan reality, just as the bird songs span the Nicaraguan seasons: “Debemos hacer aquí un país (70). . . . [H]emos soñado aquí un país / por el que hemos tenido luchas, muchas / luchas” (71). Cardenal is consciously constructing a masculine project to rebuild nation and his poetic technique provides legitimacy not only to his self-appointed role as architect but also to his critique of the status quo and his call to readers to rise in rebellion.

The links that Ernesto Cardenal establishes between all living things in his representation of the Nicaraguan landscape also serve poetically to unify nation and to blur the lines of division to forge a united front of opposition. By connecting the political body of Nicaragua, the citizenry,

with the life sustaining habitat of the nation's natural body, Cardenal is able to surmount the obstacles that diversity presents to his unified vision of nation by integrating different cultures, languages, modes of production, and non-human species as one viable, thriving organism or ecological web.⁴⁴ He eliminates from his vision the possible conflicts that could arise from competing subjectivities, be they gender based, ethnic, or otherwise. As is evident from the excerpt of "Canto nacional" cited at length on pages 110-2 above, Cardenal highlights the immense diversity of the Nicaraguan landscape, focusing on the plethora of bird calls and the activities of various animals. One particular line in the poem equates bird songs, in this case the call of macaws, with language: "Las lapas siempre vuelan en parejas / y van en el cielo de la tarde charlando (o peleando) en su lenguaje de lapas" (70). The birds may speak their own language and have squabbles amongst themselves, but they are nonetheless an integral part of the ecological web that is Nicaragua. Several lines later, Cardenal makes a direct comparison between the birds of the landscape and the Miskito Indians that occupy the Caribbean coast: "Después empiezan los palenques de los miskitos, en / las riberas del Coco, como nidos de pájaros" (71). Later, he makes reference to other indigenous communities specifically in terms of language: "y hay lagunas de color de quetzal / y uno llega a los palenques de unos sumos: / un canto de amor en sumo o tal vez en miskito" (73). The poet acknowledges the different cultures and languages within Nicaragua and weaves them into his harmonious ecological tapestry. He then utilizes poetic images of the natural landscape to conjure notions of a cooperative and loving courtship and relationship between the diverse inhabitants of Nicaraguan territory. The passage pertaining to Rubén Darío and his girlfriend, quoted on pages 116-7 of this study, ends

⁴⁴In *The Magical State: Nature, Money, & Modernity in Venezuela*, Fernando Coronil explores "the appearance of the Venezuelan state as a transcendent and unifying agent of the nation." He maintains that as an oil nation, Venezuela was seen as having "two bodies, a political body made up of its citizens and a natural body made up of its rich subsoil" (4). I will argue that Cardenal aims to present Nicaraguan reality in similar fashion in "Canto nacional."

with the line “mirando las garzas blancas y morenas” (66), an allusion to the European and indigenous heritage of the Nicaraguan people. Cardenal subtly expands this reference to include a hint of mestizaje, or the mixing, of these diverse elements, again by pointing to Rubén Darío and borrowing a line from one of his poems: “Él, con su «garza morena». El primer beso” (66).⁴⁵ With these two short sentences, Cardenal converts Rubén Darío into the literary Adam of humanity in Nicaragua’s ecological web, wedding him via a “first kiss” to a woman presumably with indigenous or mestiza origins. Historian Jeffrey Gould has analyzed the correlation between racial discourse and growing anti-imperialist sentiment in Nicaragua and has highlighted the conscious construction and narrativization on the part of those challenging U.S. imperialism of an imaginary race that could be considered the binary opposite of the Anglo-Saxon race represented by Americans. With the prestige of Indian blood growing as a result of the Mexican Revolution, Gould maintains that an Indo-Hispanic race was highlighted in Sandino’s nationalism. In contrast to the Sandinistas, who continued to propagate the myth of mestizaje for strategic reasons, Gould argues that Ernesto Cardenal represents “the most significant attempt by the Sandinistas to appropriate Indianness.” Gould maintains that Cardenal “created a revolutionary aesthetic that attuned Sandinista sensibilities to the importance of the Indian and the rural poor in the forging of national identity” (230). In “Canto nacional,” the ecological web serves the function of acknowledging the diversity of the human and non-human

⁴⁵This intertextual reference on the part of Cardenal is borrowed from “Palomas blancas y garzas morenas” where Darío writes:

Las garzas blancas las encontraba más puras y más voluptuosas, con la pureza de la paloma y la voluptuosidad del cisne . . . ¡Ah, pero las otras, tenían algo de más encantador para mí! Mi Elena se me antojaba como semejante a ellas, con su color de canela y de rosa, gallarda y gentil. . . . ¡Ah, mi adorable, mi bella, mi querida garza morena! Tú tienes en los recuerdos profundos que en mi alma forman lo más alto y sublime, una luz inmortal. ¡Porque tú me revelaste el secreto de las delicias divinas, en el inefable primer instante del amor! (*Azul* 69)

elements of the landscape, but Cardenal is arguably guilty of symbolically perpetuating the myth of mestizaje to which Gould refers, as evidenced by this intertextual reference to Darío's work.

While it is true that Cardenal does not ignore ethnicity, he does go to great pains to unify nation and to bring the indigenous communities of the Atlantic coastal region of Nicaragua under the same poetic umbrella. These groups have historically resisted attempts by Managua to incorporate them under centralized governmental control. Charles Hale examines this indigenous resistance to the Nicaraguan national "project," and begins his historical analysis of the region by going back to 1680, when the British crowned a Miskito leader as "king" of the "Mosquito Kingdom" (39). From this time, Hale argues that the Miskitos began to display what he labels "Anglo affinity" in favoring the British and later the United States over the Nicaraguan state (12). Under José Santos Zelaya, the nationalist president of Nicaragua from 1893-1909, the Nicaraguan government began a project of "Reincorporation" to bridge the Atlantic coast with the central and western regions of the country. According to Hale, this term provides ample evidence that Zelaya and his compatriots were authors consciously participating in an act of myth-making as well, incorporating the word "reincorporation" to suggest that Nicaragua was once united whereas history shows otherwise. Cardenal consciously continues this tradition in his poetry by weaving the Miskitos into his harmonious ecological web and conspicuously omitting reference to Miskito dissonance and rebellion. He thus erases their agency as social actors who resist the dominant paradigm and perpetuates the myth of cultural homogeneity by blurring the lines of division that could potentially obstruct his vision of unification. The indigenous coexist culturally with other Nicaraguans and with the surroundings as do the birds and other wildlife, springing forth from a common, mythical origin and deriving sustenance from the same ground traversed by rivers, watered by the same rains, fertilized by the same dreams as

woven by erudite, national poets in the vein of Darío and Cardenal, and protected by the same heirs of Sandino.

For many Nicaraguans sympathetic to Cardenal's point of view, the aforementioned nationalistic project of José Santos Zelaya harkens back to an important and promising time in the history of Nicaragua when the president and his people held the destiny of the nation in their hands.⁴⁶ According to Stephen Kinzer, Zelaya proclaimed a revolutionary program after being sworn in as president and "set out to shake his country from its long slumber" (57). He built roads, railways, schools, government buildings, and encouraged business (57). Had he not been overthrown in what Kinzer calls "the first real American coup" in 1909 (70), "Nicaragua might have emerged long ago as a peaceful, prosperous country" (56). Instead, "it is chronically poor and unstable, a cauldron of rivalries and a stage for repeated American interventions" (56). Zelaya's promising platform was truncated by his overthrow and it was in the aftermath of this turmoil and the U.S. occupation from 1912-1933 that Augusto César Sandino led his heroic rebellion. Cardenal reminisces about this period of progress and unification and deems the state under Somoza to be the antithesis of Zelaya's promise. Unlike Zelaya, and Sandino who followed him, Somoza and other corrupted officials have failed to protect the political and natural body from U.S. incursions. In his insightful study regarding state formation in the case of Venezuela, Fernando Coronil argues that the Venezuelan state was able to reintegrate the split

⁴⁶According to Steven White, "Los miembros de la Vanguardia . . . eran de familias tradicionales que habían sido desplazadas del poder por las reformas liberales del gobierno de José Santos Zelaya (1893-1909)" ("Breve" 68). Cardenal was also born into an upper-class family with similar roots and acknowledges the Conservative element in his family on page 378 of *Vida perdida*. Many Conservatives in Nicaragua in the early twentieth century supported Sandino's campaign to oust the U.S. Marines because of their strong nationalistic and anti-American sentiment. While Cardenal does not mention Zelaya explicitly in his writings on many occasions, he does express sympathy by association via connections he draws with other heroes. Regarding Rubén Darío, he writes: "Darío apoyó la revolución liberal del presidente José Santos Zelaya . . . Éste fue también el Darío antiimperialista que denunció la intervención yanqui en Nicaragua. Ayudó a Zelaya en la redacción y edición del libro en el que denunciaba esta intervención que lo había derrocado" (*La revolución perdida* 360-61). The fact that Zelaya was overthrown by U.S. intervention was enough to garner Cardenal's sympathies. As seen in this study, Cardenal's poetry also promotes the unification and development of Nicaragua, two aspects that coincide with the platform of Zelaya's administration.

nation that it represents by promising to “safeguard” the nation’s vanishing physical body, its natural resources, on behalf of the nation’s eternal political body, its citizenry (81, 111). In the case of Nicaragua, Somoza functions as a surrogate of U.S. imperialism and has done little to protect the nation’s physical body from those that seek to invade and profit from its natural bounty. With the natural wealth of nation being pilfered and siphoned off to enrich the coffers of empire and Somoza standing idly by, Cardenal intervenes on behalf of the citizenry as protector of the natural bounty in lieu of Somoza’s failure to fulfill his responsibilities. In “Canto nacional,” the poet calls for rebellion precisely because the state is not fulfilling its role as protector of the nation’s natural resources:

El muelle de Moyogalpa estaba podrido...

No es puta la patria

pero ahora han querido ofrecerla a un espectro

recluido en un hotel:

el fantasma de Hughes.⁴⁷

.....

Tierra que nos han robado.

Banqueros, dinastía Somoza, compañías, nos la han robado

y la roban cada día.

Tierra mía y sus ríos, bellos ríos míos: ranchos con sus canoas

junto a ellos y ropa tendida a secar

.....

⁴⁷ This is a reference to Howard Hughes whom Ernesto Cardenal describes in his memoirs: “Howard Hughes [es] el excéntrico multimillonario norteamericano que vivió sus últimos años desnudo encerrado en hoteles con las ventanas clausuradas por el temor a los virus. Había llegado para poner una cadena de casinos en Nicaragua en sociedad con Somoza, pero huyó la misma noche del terremoto, cuando se vio desnudo en la acera en medio del polvazal de la ciudad en ruinas” (*La revolución perdida* 217).

En marzo el maíz está en elotes.
 La neblina sobre los cafetales y en la neblina
 el blanco olor de la flor del café (olor a azahar) con cantos
 de chichitote
 y de chiflador.
 Campesino campesino
 qué lindas tierras tenés
 pero lástima que son de los capitalistas. (69-71)

The capitalist triumvirate consisting of Somoza, U.S. bankers, and U.S. corporations have committed injustices not just by oppressing the people politically, economically, and socially, but they have seized the wealth of Nicaragua's natural body, allowing it to remain in foreign hands. In the words of the poet, Cardenal asks the reader "Capitalismo / qué otra cosa que compra-venta de gente?" (77). He uses a rhetorical question to equate capitalism with prostitution. In addition to this market in which human bodies are bought and sold, the extractive economy, the buying/selling of Nicaragua's natural body, is also a main theme that the poet emphasizes, as in his description of U.S. corporations like Magnavox, "[a]traída por el olor de las materias primas" (73). Citing Nicaraguan poet Joaquín Pasos' 1931 poem entitled "Desocupación pronta y si es necesario violenta," written in support of Sandino against U.S. intervention (White, "Breve" 68), Cardenal overtly condones a unified rebellion to oust the foreign capitalist element from Nicaragua to protect the bodies woven into the poem's ecological web. He poetically unites the landscape as one body containing one heart, or "« un-solo-corazón»" (80), a literal translation of the Miskito word for love, "*kupia-kumi*" (74). Cardenal then invokes several lines of Paso's poem whose title explicitly condones violent rebellion,

including the excerpt “*Váyanse, váyanse, váyanse / váyanse, váyanse, yankees*” (78), and concludes “Canto nacional” with a crescendo of diverse voices rising from the land, unified in their coded defiance:

PIJUL PIJUL PIJUL

PIJIL

FUI FUI

KRAK!!

BIEN TE VI

PONÉ PONÉ

JO-DI-DO

JO-DI-DO

CHE CHE

MARÍA YA ES DE DÍA / MARÍA YA ES DE DÍA (80).

The endemic species in Cardenal’s work unite in opposition and Cardenal interprets their cry to protect the homeland. This poetic unification of landscape towards an organized rebellion appears to call upon the Nicaraguan readers to join forces and advocate for change. However, Cardenal’s ecological metaphor which weaves together Nicaragua’s human and non-human inhabitants and its landscape into one unified, thriving tapestry of organisms fulfills more functions than just inciting readers to take action. A look at several prominent narratives emanating from empire during this time of deepening conflict provides evidence that Cardenal, via the poetic construction of this ecological web, is simultaneously launching a literary counteroffensive to undermine several aspects of dominant discourse prevalent in the 1970s.

First, Cardenal's grounding of rebellion in the landscape, animals, plants, birds, and poetic heritage of Nicaragua allows him to contest the claims by reactionary forces that resistance to Somoza is part of an international plot. Peter H. Smith writes:

As Anastasio Somoza, Jr., recalled, he had for years "been advising the appropriate people in Washington that my real enemy was Fidel Castro and Cuba." And as late as November 1978 he pointedly insisted to a U.S. diplomat: "The real FSLN is in Cuba. They left from Havana, and some went from Panama to Cuba." In other words, there was no genuine domestic opposition to the Somocista dynasty; it was all the result of international conspiracy. (194)

Cardenal roots language, knowledge, people, endemic species, and production to place and defies this categorization by Somoza. His poetry, and thus his call to action, springs from homegrown opposition that resists U.S. intervention and its surrogates.

Cardenal wages rebellion on another narrative front as well, in response to a common Cold War metaphor of this time period that presents the conflict in terms of invasive microbes threatening the body of the host. As Smith's study describes, right-wing forces throughout Latin America were able to earn "goodwill and material benefits" from the United States if they enlisted themselves in the "anti-communist crusade" that followed the outbreak of the Cold War (190). Somoza was one of those leaders that adopted a strong stance against communism and thereby gained favor with the U.S. On numerous occasions, Somoza "declaimed communism as a great danger to the hemisphere, a result of Soviet infiltration and 'a cancerous growth which had to be cut away'" (191).⁴⁸ Cardenal appropriates this characterization of the conflict by

⁴⁸This narrative, which equates revolutionary elements with a cancerous growth, surfaced in other Central American countries such as El Salvador during the struggle between the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) and the American-trained Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran Army, as this quote from Todd Greentree indicates:

connecting political bodies in harmonious union with their life-sustaining Nicaraguan habitat, as seen in the opening verse of “Canto nacional” as cited on pages 110-2 of the present study, a metaphor that emphasizes the invasive qualities of foreign elements that disrupt this web as if microbial pathogens were infecting the host. As in the case of Somoza, this narrative allows Cardenal to justify violence as a means to protect the health of the whole organism that he claims to represent.

In his memoirs, it is possible to trace the origins of this counter-discourse to a conversation Cardenal has with a Catholic priest in Chile:

Le pregunté cómo se justificaba la violencia (ése era un punto que yo aún no tenía claro), y él me dijo: “¡Es la violencia revolucionaria!”

Me agregó después que los que causan división en el Cuerpo de Cristo no son células sino microbios, y hay que expulsarlos. Ellos crean anticuerpos en el Cuerpo de Cristo que los expulsan. Se les puede fusilar: es la violencia revolucionaria (*Las ínsulas* 302).

In “Canto nacional,” the metaphor of foreign elements disrupting the health and harmony of the web of organisms is evident. In “Óráculo sobre Managua,” the poet’s references become more explicit: “hombres de negocios, ejecutivos más perniciosos que el tifus / señoras buenas peor que la gangrena / minoría / microbios en el cuerpo místico / —crean anticuerpos” (94). By creating this counter-discourse, Cardenal creates a poeticized united front from the fragments of nation to protect the body from those usurpers that steal from her.

“The hard-core guys there really did believe that it was a virus, an infection,” Todd Greentree said. “They’d always say ‘a cancer’—you know, ‘Communism is a cancer.’ And so if you’re a guerrilla they don’t just kill you, they kill your cousin, you know, everybody in the family, to make sure the cancer is cut out.” (Danner 49)

Greentree was a junior reporting officer in the United States Embassy at the time (39). This quote demonstrates the potential for violence that such a narrative creates.

Cardenal also uses landscape in “Canto nacional” in an attempt to wrest control of topographical symbols as well as Nicaragua’s non-human inhabitants from neocolonialist narratives past and present. The most important example is the Momotombo volcano which figures prominently in the poem alongside descriptions of Rubén Darío.

—el algodonal en flor como un campo nevado

el tractor en el algodonal

y al fondo el Momotombo.

Y el trencito dísel bordeando el lago en dirección a León.

O:

el sol poniente iluminando el Momotombo

el lago amarillo y anaranjado, color de mojarra

y un chavalo pescando en Mateare

y el pito del tren de León.

Rubén hacía el viaje de Momotombo a Managua

en unos vaporcitos. Veía garzas blancas

y garzas morenas. Hermosas mujeres. En el comedorcito de a

bordo

dice, se tomaban cocteles y coñac.

La flora le provocaba voluptuosidad y laxitud. (67)

This passage conjures serene images of landscape and trains safely passing to and fro alongside repeated references to Momotombo standing quietly on the horizon. Numerous poets have paid homage to this distinctive landmark in their verse, most notably Víctor Hugo (1802-1885) in “Les raisons du Momotombo” (“The Reasons of Momotombo”) and Rubén Darío in

“Momotombo” (1907). Darío’s poem pays honor to Momotombo as a symbol of liberty and eternity, a national emblem on the horizon that stands tall, perpetually looking over Darío’s “Nicaragua natal.” Darío masculinizes the topographical giant, addressing the volcano as “[p]adre viejo” and “[s]eñor de las alturas,” and describes the childhood memories that Momotombo evokes. Steadfast and true throughout the ages, Darío presents the volcano as “el símbolo de la Serenidad” (23). Cardenal capitalizes particularly on these images of tranquility, and more importantly, on stability in “Canto nacional,” in sharp contrast with narratives prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that depicted Momotombo with violent imagery of destabilization, myths that eventually helped precipitate the overthrow of Nicaraguan President José Santos Zelaya in 1909. Stephen Kinzer gives a detailed account of this event:

A postage stamp led the United States to overthrow the most formidable leader Nicaragua ever had. It set off a chain of events that reverberate to this day, making it probably the most influential stamp in history. Had it never been issued, Nicaragua might have emerged long ago as a peaceful, prosperous country. Instead it is chronically poor and unstable, a cauldron of rivalries and a stage for repeated American interventions. . . . When it was issued in 1900, Nicaragua was in the midst of a modernizing revolution. . . . One of [Nicaragua’s leaders], President José Santos Zelaya, took his nationalist principles so seriously that the United States felt compelled to overthrow him. . . . [At the time that a Paris-based syndicate lobbied the U.S. Congress to move the proposed interoceanic route from Nicaragua to Panama], American newspapers were full of horrifying stories about the destructive power of volcanoes, and for several months the public mind

was seized by a kind of volcano hysteria. There were volcanoes in Martinique and in St. Vincent in the Caribbean. . . . Nicaragua had [coincidentally] hired a reputable New York firm to manufacture its postage stamps. The company's designers produced stamps that showed Nicaragua's most notable geographical landmarks. Among them was a series depicting the majestic Momotombo volcano, complete with a plume of smoke spiraling from its crater. . . . Few people in Washington knew that Momotombo is nearly dormant, that it lies more than one hundred miles from the proposed canal route, and that the decision to portray it on a stamp had been made not in Nicaragua but by designers in New York. . . . [The Momotombo stamps were sent to Congress to generate fear and to sway the vote in favor of the Panamanian route.] On June 19, 1902, three days after senators received the Momotombo stamps, they voted for the Panama route by a margin of 42 to 34. Soon afterward the House reversed itself and also accepted that route. . . . The transcripts, as well as later statements by members of Congress, leave no doubt that the Momotombo stamp and the resulting fear of volcanic eruption in Nicaragua played a decisive role in the vote for Panama. (56-60)

Even more importantly to Cardenal, this episode led to the ouster of the nationalist Zelaya, who sought loans from Europe to avoid dependence on the United States, was a strong advocate of modernization, promoted a platform of national unification in Nicaragua, and dreamed of reuniting the nations of Central America that had previously been a part of a confederation from 1821 until 1838 (Kinzer 60-2). Once the proposed canal route had been moved to Panama, Zelaya fell out of favor with Washington and, thereafter, American surrogates occupied the presidency with the backing of the U.S. Marines (70). In the aftermath of this coup, General

Benjamin Zeledón, formerly associated with the overthrown Zelaya administration, took up arms against the U.S. Marines. Augusto César Sandino would later witness the body of the murdered Zeledón being dragged through the streets in 1912, inspiring him to “launch a rebellion of his own” (99).

By framing the majestic Momotombo in “Canto nacional” as an emblem of stability that overlooks these peaceful and pleasant scenes from Darío’s life, Cardenal vies for control of this national symbol, reclaiming it from the propaganda and misleading narratives that led Nicaragua away from Zelaya’s vision to a seemingly perpetual state of oppression, internal strife, and underdevelopment. In addition, Cardenal utilizes the image of the volcano to again connect his verse and his heritage to Rubén Darío, a national literary giant. The unyielding, seemingly eternal Momotombo of Darío’s verse serves as a common paternal ancestor of both men and allows Cardenal to poetically tie them and their work to place. As he reclaims the symbol of Momotombo from imperial narratives, Cardenal is simultaneously fighting for control over the symbol of Darío as well, a struggle that he acknowledges in his memoirs:

Uno de los logros más importantes del Ministerio de Cultura fue el rescate del Darío revolucionario. . . . [A] Darío lo habían convertido en una especie de poeta del clan Somoza por su íntima amistad con la familia Debayle, que después emparentó con la familia Somoza. El pueblo sencillo debe haber creído que Darío había sido somocista. Y la verdad era que no sólo no fue somocista porque murió muchos años antes del somocismo, sino porque además era sandinista, aunque también murió muchos años antes del sandinismo. Mejor dicho, la gesta de Sandino deviene de Darío; el rotundo “No” que Darío pronunció contra Roosevelt

en aquel verso de dos letras, Sandino lo expresó en la acción; y sin Darío no habría habido Sandino. (*La revolución perdida* 360)

Cardenal resuscitates the symbols of Darío and Momotombo in his image to present the impression of unity and to augment the authority of his poetic voice against imperial influence.⁴⁹

In “Canto nacional,” Cardenal does refer to another Nicaraguan volcano, Masaya, which appears in the chronicles of González Fernando de Oviedo (1478-1557), the Spanish historian to whom Cardenal also makes mention. The lengthy citation from Oviedo’s work that Cardenal provides in his poem describes “[e]l *Infierno* de Masaya” (68, emphasis in orig.) and contains a lengthy summary of a Nicaraguan legend in which an old, naked hag would rise from the pit of the volcano to predict the future to the cacique and his men. According to Oviedo’s account, the indigenous would sacrifice men, women, and children to appease this witch. Cardenal does not set out to refute this chronicle but rather uses it to show that violence committed by humankind is not inherently tied to less civilized, savage places as (neo)colonialist narratives would have it, but by corrupt elements within the population that have gone astray. He uses a parallel narrative pertaining to atrocities committed during Somoza’s regime to demonstrate the moral and ethical regression that Nicaragua is increasingly experiencing under his dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Preceding Oviedo’s account of indigenous sacrifices in the poem are various allusions to the torture and assassination of David Tejada, a Sandinista sympathizer, at the hands of Somoza’s henchmen in 1968. Tejada’s cadaver is said to have been thrown into the fiery crater of Masaya after his execution (*Las islas* 201). The supposed dangers presented by the natural

⁴⁹Cardenal emphasizes familial proximity to Darío in his memoirs as well, as this excerpt indicates: “La casa colonial de la infancia de Darío era muy parecida a la nuestra, tal como él la describe. Y también estaba muy cerca de la de nosotros” (*Vida perdida* 374). He also highlights the poetic connection between himself and Darío: “En mi juventud yo escribí un poema titulado *León*, donde recuerdo aquella casa, aquella tía, aquellos cuentos de miedo, y pongo una frase de Rubén como que fuera mía («Me contaban cuentos de ánimas en pena y aparecidos») como una manera de identificar nuestras dos infancias” (375).

environment in Cardenal's work are surpassed by the corrupt U.S. surrogates like Somoza and his assassins that carry out crimes much more insidious than any innate element present on the Nicaraguan landscape. There is a circularity in the representation of the history of Nicaragua and of the Americas in the writings of Ernesto Cardenal that coincides with the cycle of life and death, day and night, the seasons—in short, with the circularity of the natural world.

Humankind's evolution throughout history is presented as circular and, therefore, characterized by ebbs and flows in terms of achieving its full potential. Any poetic prediction which portends a return to a noble past in his writing is not a lineal return to any past per se, but rather a return to the high standards or zeniths in the circular cycle that parallel those of bygone eras. In the chapter "Mayapán" from his collection *Homenaje a los indios americanos* (1969), Cardenal describes how the Mayans had dictators that built walled cities, had body guards, sold their own as slaves, and built things in mass as imitations with poor quality. They looked at the material rather than the spiritual and brought about decay and ruin, similar to the Somoza regime in Nicaragua.

This counter-discourse constructed by Cardenal to contrast the relatively innocuous natural environment of Nicaragua with the far more egregious atrocities committed by the Somoza regime is also seen in Cardenal's representation of Nicaragua's non-human inhabitants in "Canto nacional." The poet makes multiple references to animals that have a less than savory reputation in literature due to the death, danger, and/or darkness that they symbolize. Aside from repeated mention of "tiburones," or sharks, in the text, Cardenal includes barracudas and vultures, as well. In part, these non-human species are used in correlation with the negative elements of corruption that the poet criticizes in his verse. The lyrical voice likens foreign intervention in these terms: "También igual que el tiburón cuando ha olido sangre" (64). He tells us that "[l]os

banqueros vinieron como barracudas” (62). The poet utilizes the shark as a metaphor for U.S. corporations as well: “Y en aquellos caños hay tiburones. / Ay la United Fruit / Ay la Standard Fruit / Unas compañías pasaron aquí como ciclones” (73). Cardenal includes these references not only to create a sense of danger and highlight metaphorically the capitalist exploitation of the Nicaraguan people and land as prey to predatory beings, but also uses this symbolism to play with European travel writing and (neo) colonialist narratives that tend to depict the instability of the American continent via the savagery of its untamed landscape and endemic species. For example, Alexander von Humboldt’s chronicles vividly describe the perils of the American coast by providing terrifying details of the sharks that inhabit its waters:

[S]ea-turtles of extraordinary dimensions swam around our vessel . . . Our sailors would have thrown themselves in the water to catch some of these animals; but the numerous sharks that accompany them, rendered the attempt too perilous. The sharks fixed their jaws on great iron hooks which were flung to them; these hooks were very sharp and . . . they were tied to cords . . . and we were surprised to see that those which had their mouths wounded and bleeding continued to seize the bait over and over again during several hours (200).⁵⁰

Cardenal plays with these representations by depicting the foreign capitalist invaders to be the true danger threatening Nicaragua, surpassing the perils symbolized by the demonic and bloodthirsty animals as seen in European and American accounts of the Nicaraguan landscape. Just as Cardenal flips the U.S. Momotombo stamp narrative on its head by poetically describing Darío’s tranquil and luxurious trips at the foot of the volcano, he also relocates danger from within the colonized self to the colonizer. His memoirs support this interpretation. In the

⁵⁰As seen in Chapter 1 of this study, C.W. Doubleday’s 1886 account of his participation in the Nicaraguan Filibuster War demonstrates this literary evocation of the local shark as a symbol of endemic danger as well.

following citation, Cardenal describes the attitude of the local people in Solentiname with respect to the sharks that inhabit the local waters:

Tampoco les tenían mucho miedo a los tiburones; sobre todo los chavalos no les tenían miedo y se cruzaban despreocupados de una isla a otra. En realidad, en la memoria de la gente de Solentiname nunca había habido el caso de alguien comido por un tiburón. (*Las islas* 167)

He makes a similar observation pertaining to poisonous snakes which, although not mentioned specifically in “Canto nacional,” are often used to represent evil in literature, the most common example being that of the serpent in the biblical Garden of Eden: “Curioso que en Solentiname sólo hay una culebra venenosa, que es la coral . . . [pero] hay pocos que son mordidos por coral. Doña Adelita solo recordaba un caso: una niña mordida por coral mientras cangrejeaba” (*Las islas* 167). In this account, Cardenal goes on to admit that he was initially afraid of these animals upon his arrival to Solentiname, but he later comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to fear. Interestingly, there is a twist in the following pertinent passage from his memoirs that, when analyzed in the context of Cardenal’s poetry, points back to empire: “Ahora en Solentiname ya nadie piensa en coral, ni siquiera yo. Tampoco en lagartos . . . Ni en tiburones, los que —por desgracia según los biólogos—casi no hay” (*Las islas* 168). In many of his poems, “Oráculo sobre Managua” being a strong example, Cardenal makes connections between ecological disaster and the imperial exploitation of his land and people via U.S. surrogates like Somoza. In an ironic twist, the sharks so demonized in Western narratives are deemed worthy of protection by biologists as implied in the quote above. Cardenal accomplishes two feats here as evident in this intertextual analysis of his memoirs and his poetry. Not only does he reappropriate symbols derived from the non-human elements of his landscape and environment, but he also

makes an attempt to renarrativize science by flipping neocolonial narratives upside down. In “Canto nacional” he writes, “El imperialismo dice que nos quiere hacer felices” (74), but he hints in his memoir about what he deems to be the reality behind this fiction. Sharks are disappearing and their approaching extinction is symbolic of a far worse menace, the exploitation and injustices committed at the hands of imperialists that degrade the people, the land, and the non-human inhabitants. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the judgment of biologists, scientific specialists in their field, serves as his foundation. In his poetry, he implicates imperialist ideologies in corrupting science with elements of superstition in order to maintain the hierarchy that allows exploitation: “La ciencia explotada por la superstición. / Reyes y sacerdotes a costa de agricultores y artistas. / (La magia como origen de la autoridad / la dictadura.)” (“Oráculo” 88). Cardenal pokes holes in the supposed scientific superiority of neocolonial powers by highlighting the contradictions in the prevailing narrative. It is not progress that abounds in the Nicaragua controlled by U.S. interests, but rather, oppression, injustice, and environmental degradation. The savagery symbolized by the shark pales in comparison to the insidious exploits of U.S. intervention whose influence is so detrimental so as to ironically threaten with extinction the shark species inhabiting Nicaraguan waters.

In “Canto nacional” and his poetry in general, Cardenal is not only in dialogue with literary representations written and propagandized by empire as seen in the analysis above, but he is also informed by and responding to narratives that imperial extractive resource activities and exploitation have physically “written” over the land as well. Steven White has pointed to Kent C. Ryden’s idea that “the land, carved by ancient beings and dreamings ‘is already a narrative—an artifact of intelligence’” (“Pablo Antonio Cuadra” xxii).⁵¹ This theory is most aptly applied to the sense of community formed among the historic inhabitants of a particular

⁵¹White quotes Ryden’s *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* (1993) here.

space, as in the case of Cardenal who links himself to a paternal lineage of national poets and heroes by grounding them to a shared landscape. But this idea of narrative “writing” directly upon the land is also relevant in terms of exploitative practices such as mining, the timber industry, banana plantations, and the mere exportation of these parts of the national body via the nation’s streets and waterways. The byproducts of resource extraction and the capitalist market economy themselves, such as pollution and garbage disposal also litter the land and “write” a narrative over the physical topography to which the poet responds. In “Canto nacional,” the lyrical voice makes numerous references to the river Prinzapolka, a waterway in Nicaragua that has been heavily used throughout history in the transportation of natural resources. The Prinzapolka region has been important in the mining and extraction of gold, bananas, mahogany, and rubber, and the waterway of the same name has served as the fluvial route by which the natural wealth of the nation’s body has been shipped abroad (United States, *Trade Directory* 65-6). Cardenal writes: “Me entristezco pensando en Prinzapolka. / La bahía azul y un barco (bananero) anclado en la bahía. / Plantíos de banano a lo largo del río / . . . Veo el viaje del oro desde un afluente del Prinzapolka hasta el sótano de un Banco en Wall Street” (73). This imagery shares an uncanny resemblance to the title of Eduardo Galeano’s book, *Open Veins of Latin America* (1971), in which the author expounds upon dependency theory and the enrichment of the metropolis at the expense of the bleeding periphery.⁵² Cardenal’s Prinzapolka River is the bleeding vein from which gold is extracted from the nation’s natural body. U.S. companies have “written” a narrative via their extraction of these resources and the people have witnessed or “read” this discourse throughout history as portions of the national body have been exported away to enrich those in faraway lands.

⁵²The book’s thesis is that “[u]nderdevelopment isn’t a stage of development, but its consequence” (285).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau has examined the physical movements and trajectories of people across the urban terrain of cities as a form of individual resistance and appropriation of mass culture. Most interesting here is his assertion that “The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered” (97). This argument can be taken out of this context in which de Certeau describes everyday acts of resistance to power and applied to the assertion here that action and motion itself function as acts of speech with which others can react and interact to create dialogue. The physical “writing” of extractive activities over the natural body of Nicaragua inspires a written act of resistance on the part of the poet who assumes the role of interpreter and translates the response of the land, this time in the form of a bird that resides in the region: “Es contra Wall Street que canta en Prinzapolka el ave-sol” (73). In an inversion of de Certeau’s scenario, agents of empire move across and thus write on the landscape in an expression of power. The writer resists by entering into dialogue with these physical, imperial utterances and making the land itself talk back to centers of power.

Just as empire etches narratives on the nation’s natural body via motion, extraction, and resource depletion, it also “writes” on the bodies of the citizenry in “Canto nacional.” Cardenal writes:

En las minas de oro de mister Spencer examinan
a los mineros con rayos X cada 6 meses
para ver si están tuberculosos.
Si hay alguna sombra, el hombre es inmediatamente
despedido. Cuando al tiempo escupe sangre
y quiere demandar a la mina, la mina lo despidió sano

la enfermedad la contrajo después, la mina
no es responsable. Y muere en una acera de Managua.
(Si es indio sumo o miskito va a su aldea
a contagiarla. Aldeas enteras han quedado despobladas.)
Y compañías que pasaron por la Costa como chapulín:
sólo quedaron los tocones de lo que fueron pinares.
Nada vuelve a crecer por donde pasaron.
.....
Hermano que andás descalzo y tenés tugsteno (sic).
Analfabeta en tu mina de antimonio.

La International Telephone and Telegraph

por allí anda suelta, como el tigre. (73-4)

In addition to the writing carried out on the natural body via resource extraction by capitalists, these U.S. entities also write upon the bodies of the citizenry, as in the case of the miners' lungs in the excerpt above, clouding the workers' lungs like "[u]n vuelo de aviones de propulsión a chorro [que] mancha el azul celeste" (75). They have not the tools to resist this exploitative narrative that is written on the nation's natural and political bodies, to use Fernando Coronil's terminology, as they are poor and illiterate, and incapable of writing a counternarrative in the same terms. Cardenal is their self-appointed spokesperson who advocates for the protection of both bodies, that of the natural world and that of the citizenry, in his verse.

"Oráculo sobre Managua"

Another poem penned by Cardenal during this time period that reiterates many of the aforementioned themes is "Oráculo sobre Managua," written in the aftermath of the December

1972 earthquake that rocked Nicaragua. In “Oráculo,” Cardenal assimilates two poems into one, describing the martyred poet Leonel Rugama and making reference to his most well-known poem “La tierra es un satélite de la luna” on the one hand, and relating the seismic destruction of Managua on the other. He utilizes references that Rugama makes to the famous “huellas de Acahualinca,” footprints left in volcanic ash by inhabitants of the region over 2,100 years ago as they fled an erupting volcano. Cardenal returns to the Acahualinca of the twentieth century and describes the poverty of this section of Managua by focusing on the ecological devastation wrought by injustice and inequality inherent in the capitalist system. In his memoirs, Cardenal recalls this section of the poem:

En mi poema describo ese lugar junto al lago, de casas de cartón y latas, donde desembocaban las cloacas sin acabar de llegar al lago; el lago con algodones, papel de inodoro, algún condón; las chozas donde descargan (o descargaban) la basura de Managua; una llanura de latas, papeles, plástico, vidrio, esqueletos de autos; la luna rielando sobre la mierda... (*Las ínsulas* 322)

These references of ecological contamination juxtaposed with the petrified footprints masterfully draws upon this idea of landscape as a scroll upon which competing subjectivities carve or write their narratives. The prevailing system under Tachito’s dictatorial rule relegates entire sectors of society to a life characterized by poverty, oppression, and environmental pollution. Cardenal utilizes this image of poverty in Acahualinca to capture the widespread devastation in Managua as a result of the earthquake: “Digo que Managua sin luz, sin comida, sin agua, fue toda ella una gran Acahualinca” (*Las ínsulas* 322). As in the case of his rebuttal of the Momotombo stamp narrative and travel writing symbolism in “Canto nacional,” Cardenal cleverly mounts a counternarrative in “Oráculo,” albeit this time in geologic terms. The narrative of seismic

instability, upon which the Momotombo stamp controversy was based, rears its head in reality on December 23, 1972, when the massive earthquake destroys Managua. As in Cardenal's re-appropriation of the symbol of the shark, however, the poet insinuates that imperialism poses a far graver threat than any earthquake. At the whim of U.S. control under Somoza, Cardenal claims that Nicaraguans are "[d]amnificados de un sismo permanente" ("Oráculo" 82). The real seismic earthquake to hit Managua, in fact, has positive effects, in Cardenal's view, in that it temporarily serves as a great equalizer, toppling the mansions of the rich so that they live in the same ruins as the poor. He expands upon this topic in his memoirs:

Este año en Acahualinca no tienen nada, pero los ricos tampoco tienen. A todos igualó el dolor. Por primera vez ricos y pobres compartieron el dolor, que antes tenían sólo los pobres. Y eso era muy hermoso: que el dolor había hecho a todos iguales. (321)

This passage reveals a shift in Cardenal's viewpoint regarding violence as a means to right the wrongs perpetrated by the wealthy oppressors. In "Oráculo," he emphasizes this theme explicitly: "la muerte nace con el cuerpo y *muere* con él / la muerte es la del individuo / «un matiz» de dolor / para resucitar hay que morir (103, emphasis in orig.). Cardenal's glorification of Leonel Rugama's martyrdom in his verse should be seen as a stamp of approval for violence as a means to accomplish revolutionary change.

In addition to the ecological web and the human/non-human species that derive sustenance from the Nicaraguan soil as seen in "Canto nacional," Cardenal similarly emphasizes the geological body of nation as its foundation in "Oráculo sobre Managua." He connects the Managua of today with the strata of volcanic rock over which those Nicaraguan footprints of Acahualinca were recorded 2,100 years ago: "piedras de los estratos volcánicos de aquellas

huellas / de Acahualinca con que se construyó Managua” (103). The footprints carved into the landscape are a narrative petrified in volcanic ash and demonstrate the longevity and durability of the Nicaraguan people and fortify their historic ties to place. The fragility of capitalist propaganda which springs, not from Nicaraguan reality, but from those that sow the seeds of destruction in order to profit from that destruction, can be seen in the poetic contrast between capitalism’s false promises and the juxtaposed reality of devastation which extends over the Nicaraguan landscape: “sobre escombros de un nightclub un resto de rótulo / LA DIVERSION--- / un gran anuncio de televisor sobre las ruinas / Aquí estuvieron las vitrinas llenas de juguetes / ...un olor como a ratón muerto... / Aquí fue Sears” (99, ellipsis in orig.). The gap between imperialist propaganda and reality is adroitly poeticized via this juxtaposition of false advertising slogans sitting atop the rubble of devastation. The historic footprints of Acahualinca are a symbol that Cardenal utilizes to legitimize Nicaraguans’ shared sense of history rooted to a common place. The footprints as symbols of national autonomy have stood the test of time, unlike imperialist propaganda which has revealed its emptiness and weakness as it crumbles to the ground.

Cardenal also foreshadows revolutionary upheaval in his verse by utilizing the seismic imagery that the earthquake inspires in him. Just as the bedrock upon which much of the city was built has been overturned by seismic tremors, so too will the exploitative economy and projects constructed on the backs of the poor be destroyed should the people agitate for change. They are “la base / si se sacuden caen los rascacielos” (104). Cardenal poetically utilizes the rebuilding of Managua in the wake of seismic destruction as a metaphor for the reconstruction of nation in the aftermath of the capitalist cyclone that has plagued the country throughout the twentieth century.

Cardenal also uses this seismic occurrence to further establish the paternal lineage of national poets so evident in “Canto nacional.” Just as Rubén Darío, Joaquín Pasos, José Coronel Urtecho, and Pablo Antonio Cuadra are literary father figures or contemporaries of Cardenal with whom the latter fortifies links via a communal grounding to place in his verse, Cardenal expands upon this motif by introducing a national, poetic son in the form of Leonel Rugama in “Oráculo.” He tacitly draws parallels between himself and Rugama by highlighting similarities between the two men: “Por eso vos Leonel Rugama poeta de 20 años / te metiste a la guerrilla urbana. / Ex-seminarista, marxista, decías / en la Cafetería la India que la revolución / es la comunión con la especie” (85). Some scholars, such as Eduardo Urdanivia Bertarelli, have pointed to the autobiographical parallels between the two men, saying that “la historia de Rugama es la historia del propio Cardenal” (Urdanivia 142). Cardenal poetically constructs the Nicaraguan New Man in his own image, utilizing the figure of Rugama as the idealized son of a long line of national heroes who resist imperialism in an attempt to protect the feminized natural body from neocolonial usurpers. As in Cardenal’s poetic representation of sympathetic males ranging from Clinton Rollins, Augusto César Sandino, Rubén Darío, and Ernesto Cardenal himself, his heterosexist identification is evident in his poetic rendering of the masculinized Leonel Rugama and Julio Buitrago in “Oráculo” as well.⁵³ Like a father looking towards his son in approval, Cardenal describes Buitrago’s heterosexual tendencies: “te agachabas para verle los calzones a la maestra” (94). These masculinized figures are juxtaposed with the ridiculous portrayal of Somoza “gordo lleno de condecoraciones como un árbol de Navidad” whose underlings commit torture against brave rebels in passages that suggest homosexual tendencies

⁵³Julio Buitrago was another Sandinista urban guerrilla who was killed in an assault on July 15, 1969, when confronting Somoza’s National Guard. The firefight which resulted in his death was televised live throughout Nicaragua and became an important symbol for the revolutionaries leading up to their triumph over Somoza’s forces in 1979. This shootout is immortalized on the pages of “Oráculo sobre Managua.” Like Cardenal, Buitrago also penned poems during his life. For more information, see page 323 of Cardenal’s *Las insulas extrañas*.

on the part of the oppressors (84). As one captured revolutionary testifies in the poem, ““Me apretó los testículos el Mayor Morales”” (84).⁵⁴ Cardenal condones the bravery and heterosexuality of these new young men whom he appoints as the new guard responsible for the protection of the national territory. Making reference to Rugama, he writes, “Anunciad que el Reino de Dios está cerca. / Como una célula seminal masculina penetra en el óvulo femenino” (85), framing in gendered terms the role of the New Man to actively foment revolution by rising to protect the passive female body from invaders as a heterosexual man should safeguard his female companion.⁵⁵ The duty of this New Man in Cardenal’s view is to distribute equally the natural wealth or body of nation: “En suma: repartimos la naturaleza / el hombre Nuevo al cual ya amamos” (88). It is the unequal access to this body which causes the current injustices and oppression inherent under Somoza’s regime. Cardenal nominates the masculinized heterosexual Christian/Marxist male poet in his image to topple tyranny.

As Darío had educated Cardenal via his verse, Cardenal passes on his influence and knowledge to the next generation of New Men as exemplified by the figure of Leonel Rugama to carry the revolutionary torch. The martyred Rugama fulfills an important function for Cardenal in that he allows the poet to establish a link between poetry and action. Cardenal describes Rugama’s poetic influences in his memoirs and offers his critique as well:

Por Cabestrero he sabido que Rugama un tiempo estuvo queriendo ir a Solentiname. Le anduvo dando vueltas a eso. “Quiero viajar a Solentiname”, decía. Un amigo dice que le influí. Y que leía a Merton. Cabestrero reproduce una

⁵⁴Cardenal describes el mayor Morales (Moralitos), Óscar Morales Sotomayor, as “un militar cercano a Somoza” who was implicated in the torture and death of David Tejada, a revolutionary whose cadaver was disposed in the cone of the Masaya volcano (*Las islas* 201).

⁵⁵Fernando Coronil describes how Karl Marx also was not able to free himself from nineteenth century capitalist culture and its “heterosexist identification of activity with masculinity, passivity with femininity, and productivity with fertility” in his critique of political economy’s categorical system (*The Magical State* 56).

página de una de sus libretas en la que hay tres títulos de poemas míos y junto a ellos puso esto que es divertido:

= Poesía %

. . . [C]uando leí las primeras veces a Rugama en el periódico antes que lo mataran, sin saber aún nada de él, pensé que ese muchacho exageraba el exteriorismo, que lo habríamos influido pero que ya como que se pasaba de la raya. Pero mientras más lo leía me iba gustando más y más; ahora 30 años después, todavía me gusta cada vez que lo leo. Pienso que es el más exteriorista de todos nosotros. . . .

Es más, me parece que Rugama es de los mayores genios que hemos tenido. En la tierra de Darío y Sandino, es de lo más grande que Nicaragua ha producido, aunque vivió sólo hasta los 20 años. Sí, porque es de nuestros poetas nacionales y eso que sólo pudo escribir como por dos años (su poesía anterior es primeriza), estando esos dos años atareado en los trabajos de la clandestinidad, incluso asaltando bancos.

Pero la mayor innovación literaria de Rugama –y en esto habrá tenido pocos seguidores– fue de que la poesía no sólo debía ser comprometida (eso lo hemos dicho muchos) sino que el compromiso debía llevarlo a uno a la acción, y hasta la muerte. (*Las ínsulas* 325, 328-9)

In this passage, Cardenal is able to connect the heroic protagonists of earlier poems, including himself, with this exemplary member of the new generation who has been martyred fighting under the banner of Cardenal's proclaimed cause. Rugama's supposed interest in Cardenal's mini-revolution in Solentiname allows Cardenal to achieve in this excerpt what he set out to do

in “Canto nacional,” that is, to unify the fragmented nation in rebellion against the oppressors. Rugama and Buitrago are two Sandinista revolutionaries who participated in the urban guerrilla movement of the late sixties and early seventies. Cardenal incorporates these martyred individuals into his movement in support of his cause. In “Oráculo sobre Managua,” he proclaims that “todas las revoluciones son una sola gran revolución” (90), and by utilizing the written word on two literary fronts, he unites the urban movement with that of Solentiname. He heavily incorporates Rugama’s writing into the poem “Oráculo sobre Managua” itself, and also goes to great lengths in his memoirs, as previously indicated, to identify the strong influence of his own brand of poetry in Rugama’s writing style.

Cardenal aims to unify nation by consciously embarking on a poetic project to create a common language. He wages war on the literary front and quotes Mao Tse-tung to make his point: “La literatura, tan eficaz como los fusiles —dijo Mao. / Son avances en el idioma común, el idioma de liberación” (94).⁵⁶ By language, Cardenal is not commenting on world languages such as Spanish, English, or German in this verse, but is instead referring to ideological unity, a common understanding of revolutionary cooperation that springs organically from Nicaraguan reality by those that live that reality. As the various species in the ecological web of “Canto nacional” each emit a unique war cry, the language traversing the landscape is woven together with a common goal of resisting the oppressive system which suppresses the nation’s inhabitants. Cardenal is advocating cooperation among his compatriots and his reference to a “common language” should be interpreted as a forging of alliances which rise above the fragmentation of

⁵⁶Urdanivia argues that this mention of Mao in “Oráculo” is not by accident. Mao was the most radical in his interpretation of a complete sweep of Marxist reforms. In this view, even literature should be exposed to this revolutionary change. (139)

competing subjectivities in order to unify class in Marxist terms. In evolutionary terms, he writes:

La evolución enseñó lecciones a las especies
para sobrevivir. Unión: fue de las más importantes.

La división de clases la guerra
no fueron lecciones de la evolución.

Sembrar no se inventó sin cooperación, sin
unión de unos hombres

ni hablar inventaron sin cooperación
o los rebaños... (89, ellipsis in orig.)

The very act of speech was invented through cooperation and Cardenal attempts to unify the fragmented subaltern, characterized by plurality, by uniting nation under the umbrella of his cause. He establishes linkages in his verse via a poetic dialogue between himself and a pantheon of paternal national heroes as well as with the heirs of his legacy, the sons of this ancestry, those that represent the generation that he urges to rebel. He fortifies this notion of national poetic heritage by establishing ties between the poets, their respective works, and place, by fighting to reclaim symbols that bond Nicaraguans to their land and that are threatened by narratives that emanate from empire.

The footprints of Acahualinca carved across the landscape serve an indispensable poetic function in “Oráculo” by unifying themes of Nicaraguan history and place with the imperial menace that undermines local sovereignty. The footprints serve as a signature of sorts scrawled across the foundation of nation identifying the heirs of the nation’s natural body as the contemporary Nicaraguan people. This durable scroll of bedrock upon which elders of the

Nicaraguan populace staked their claim to place has been replaced by the polluted, unsavory, and unsustainable foundation forced upon the people by imperial usurpers who steal the national wealth and leave disaster and devastation in their wake: “Lentamente la corriente en dirección al lago / la corriente de mierda de Managua / y en ella huellas de pies desnudos / como los de aquellos que por allí fueron huyendo” (83). Cardenal poetically extends the ancestral narrative “written” upon the original scroll by implying that the journey forward from the hardships continues: “Otra vez hay otras huellas: no ha terminado la peregrinación” (104). Like the original footprints, the people will push forward in their endeavors and will reconstruct nation. Cardenal reconstructs the blueprint for nation by reclaiming these symbols from contaminating narratives written across the land.

The image of footprints also allows the poet to symbolically connect another historical moment of this time period with his overarching condemnation of imperial exploits: the Apollo 11 mission that carried the first humans to the surface of the moon on July 20, 1969. The purposeful juxtaposition of both sets of human footprints is evident in the following passage: “Una luna sobre Acahualinca / con astronautas cantando en ella canciones de Frank Sinatra” (83). In addition to serving as an intertextual link between “Oráculo sobre Managua” and Leonel Rugama’s “La tierra es un satélite de la luna,” Cardenal’s frequent mention of the moon also highlights his attempt to symbolically reclaim the only light that shines over the figurative night of Somoza’s reign of terror and the literal night of Nicaragua’s natural environment and landscape. Both the lunar landscape and that of Nicaragua have been marked by the footprints of American empire and Cardenal appropriates the symbol of the moon to reassert the autonomy of the Nicaraguan earth and sky. Repeating a stanza from Rugama’s poem, “«Bienaventurados los pobres porque de ellos será la luna»” (83), Cardenal attempts to reclaim ownership over the

symbol of light and hope in name of the downtrodden. He simultaneously protests the physical exploitation of landscape by imperialists who scour not only the earthly environs but also the night sky in search of riches and wealth at the expense of large sectors of humanity who suffer as wealth is funneled to other frivolous projects.⁵⁷

In his poem “Ofensiva final,” written later in the 1970s when the Somoza regime was in its final throes, Cardenal rewrites the narrative of the U.S. lunar mission, likening the final Sandinista offensive to the Apollo spaceflight to the moon in terms of the complexity, precision, and cooperation required to carry out such a project. Most notably, the lunar body in this appropriated narrative is a metaphor for the Nicaraguan natural body, both landscapes having been objects of imperial desire. Cardenal again stresses the need for national unity and coordination so that empire relinquishes control over the natural body of Nicaragua:

Fue como un viaje a la luna. Y sin ningún error.

Muchísimos trabajando coordinados en el gran proyecto.

La luna era la tierra. El pedazo nuestro de la tierra.

Y llegamos.

Ya empieza, Rugama, a ser de los pobres; la tierra ésta

(con su luna). (*Vuelos 2*)

As this excerpt indicates, Cardenal continues to utilize intertextual references to Leonel

Rugama’s “La tierra es una satélite de la luna” as he roots Nicaraguan literary tradition to the ground and reclaims symbols of the nighttime sky.

⁵⁷The central theme of Rugama’s poem is the plight of the poor who go hungry in Acahualinca as the United States undertakes numerous expensive missions to the moon. From the perspective of dependency theory, it is the robbing of resources from extractive economies that provides the wealth for such endeavors at the expense of those that are perpetually mired in the underdevelopment of the periphery. Cardenal appears to be making a humorous jab here at the superficiality and shallowness of mass-produced capitalistic art by juxtaposing Frank Sinatra songs with the more insightful writing of fellow Sandinista and martyr Leonel Rugama whose verse reflects the reality from which it originates.

“Viaje a Nueva York”

In the wake of the Managua earthquake of 1972, Cardenal pens another poem, entitled “Viaje a Nueva York,” which, in its entirety, counters the dominant capitalist discourse of progress in what could be deemed the poetic antithesis of the harmonious ecological landscape depicted in “Canto nacional.” Cardenal describes the inspiration for this poem in his memoirs, cited here at length:

Después del terremoto me invitaron de Nueva York con motivo de una colecta para los damnificados de Managua que querían entregarme personalmente. . . .

Con el terremoto la ayuda mundial se había volcado sobre Nicaragua, y el mundo entero había sabido que la mayor parte se la había robado Somoza. Él había dado orden que todo lo que llegara debía ser canalizado por él. Hasta una donación personal de 10000 dólares que el papa envió al arzobispo la cogió Somoza. Por eso querían que yo recibiera la colecta personalmente. Sería ilegal que fuera a recibirla, pero no me importó, y fui.

Habiendo estado aislado todos esos años en Solentiname, la visita a Nueva York me impresionó mucho, y a mi regreso iba a escribir un reportaje sobre ella, pero después preferí hacer un poema en forma de reportaje. Escribí entonces ese extenso poema que se titula “Viaje a Nueva York”. En él comienzo diciendo que todavía me parecía estar esa tarde en mi isla de Solentiname, cuando estaba asomando a una ventanilla sobre la bahía de Nueva York: los barcos abajo moviéndose apenas, y el avión también lento, girando como una hora alrededor de Nueva York porque el aeropuerto Kennedy estaba muy congestionado. Y pensé

que era un milagro el que yo estuviera ese atardecer sobre los rascacielos
coloreados de arreboles. (*Las islas* 336-7)

As this passage indicates, Cardenal again relies on imagery of flight in this poem as he peers out of an airplane window once again looking down on the land below. But the landscape that he describes is quite distinct from the ecological paradise of “Canto nacional.” He sees “fábricas, trenes, casitas suburbanas iguales, autos de juguete” (“Viaje” 241). Instead of Nicaraguan rivers, Cardenal observes “ríos de carros . . . más ríos de carros trenes camiones, las supercarreteras se cruzan” (242). The urban landscape is contaminated with corporate propaganda, smog, exhaust fumes, and endless streams of cars:

[E]n la carretera levantan mensajes gasolineras drive-ins moteles

.....

el cielo smog y anuncios

moles rectangulares entre el humo

.....

Las filas de semáforos rojos y verdes

y las luces de los taxis y los buses

.....

Cruzo la calle con mucho miedo: WALK — DON’T WALK (en rojo)

.....

El cielo sucio. Sirenas de policía.

.....

Llueve afuera una lluvia sin olor

.....

susurro de llantas sobre calles llovidas
reflejos de neón en espejeante asfalto mojado

.....

la silueta de los rascacielos en un cielo de humo de automóviles
ácidos y monóxido de carbono. (242-3, 250, 252, 263)

The landscape is fraught with danger and harmful pollution in sharp contrast with the harmonious web of life that characterizes the Nicaraguan landscape in “Canto nacional.” Rather than mountains and volcanoes, the topography is marked by artificial structures and Cardenal capitalizes on this unnatural façade to identify the heart of the false propaganda machine that reaches his nation’s shores:

[E]l hondo cañon, el profundo desfiladero de edificios
donde se esconden detrás de sus vidrios *the hidden persuaders*
venden automóviles de Felicidad, Consuelo en lata (a 30 cts)

The Coca Cola Company

atavesamos el cañón de vidrios y Billones de Dólares. (243, emphasis in orig.)

The falseness of the myth-makers words stems from the artificial landscape, a detachment from reality, and an estrangement from the natural world. This scene conjures imagery antithetical to the poetic landscape that Cardenal paints in “Canto nacional” and draws sharp lines of contrast between the supposed truthfulness of the Nicaraguan word that metaphorically springs from the lush and verdant landscape and the propaganda emitted from an asphalt jungle marred by contamination, cars, and fake edifices.

The estrangement of New Yorkers from the natural environment breeds an atomized society, a landscape of dysfunctional individuals guided by a dissonant mishmash of translated ideologies and fads woven together haphazardly.

[Gerard] es católico me dice y también zen

.....

Napoleón y Jacquie hacen yoga. Muchos días ayunan
totalmente, otros cocinan muy bien, comida
china, turca, nicaragüense.

.....

Estudian el misticismo de diversas religiones
también de los pieles-rojas.

.....

Contemplativos y radicales, pacifistas . . .
cristianos anarquistas y cristianos budistas

.....

Esta abundancia de libros sobre indios, dice [Kenneth]
es de hace un año o dos. Se ha puesto de moda lo indio. (242, 244, 246, 248, 252)

The individual people portrayed on these lines manifest a certain incongruity in their belief systems, borrowed from realities outside of their own environment and lacking a healthy consistency. Cardenal depicts these individuals with affection in this poem as they stand for social justice, albeit many as ardent pacifists. Notwithstanding his sympathetic representation of them, these figures are poetically woven into the dysfunctional and artificial landscape around them and appear to drift aimlessly as the narratives to which they subscribe are not anchored to

place. To highlight this theme, he hints that this alienation from the natural environment and the extreme individualism that characterizes this capitalist metropolis are the root causes of illness and despair that he witnesses around him. He writes, “Volví a ver otra vez las gentes en las calles hablando solas. ‘The Lonely Crowd’” (245). Later, he reiterates this theme, “Las viejas hablando solas” (250). The narratives composed by the people are isolated monologues, suggesting confusion, alienation, and illness on the one hand, and on the other, a lack of political efficacy. An atomized consciousness is damned to perpetually float adrift, an indirect endorsement of the unity that he advocates among the Nicaraguans in his poems “Canto nacional” and “Oráculo sobre Managua.”

Finally, as in earlier poems, his heterosexist prejudices reveal themselves again in “Viaje a Nueva York” in which the artificial, and thus infertile, landscape seems to elicit a dysfunctional sexuality among its inhabitants. In contrast to the “garza morena” on Rubén Darío’s arm as depicted in “Canto nacional” (66), New York women are described as “[m]ujeres como de plástico” (250), lacking attractiveness and charm like the asphalt environment in which they live. Like the homosexual William Walker of Cardenal’s “Con Walker en Nicaragua” who was unable to appreciate the feminized body of the Nicaraguan landscape or the beautiful women of that country, the inhabitants of New York who live in this concrete heart of empire also demonstrate sexual tendencies which deviate from Cardenal’s idealized norms: “Grupo de lesbianas gritando. Más allá GAY LIBERATION con bandera . . . Cruzando la calle / dos maricones con sus dos lenguas lamen a una / un mismo cono” (254-5). For Cardenal, empire represents destruction and infertility and this destructive discourse has been written, not only on the heartland of this capitalist center now completely devoid of verdant life, but also on the

bodies and interactions of its inhabitants.⁵⁸ In the polluted air of the city, even the body of the moon that Cardenal struggles to reclaim in previously penned poems, looks dull, warped, and deformed in the urban sky: “Nuestro satélite pálido sobre el cielo de Brooklyn / achatado como balón de rugby” (263). The contamination of the air clouding the silhouette of empire’s emblematic skyscrapers is the last image that Cardenal leaves with readers as he closes his poem thus: “la silueta de los rascacielos en un cielo de humo de automóviles / ácidos y monóxido de carbono” (263). In “Viaje a Nueva York,” the poet paints a world antithetical to the landscape depicted in “Canto nacional.” The concrete environment cannot support the complex ecosystems and biodiversity as in Nicaragua from which Cardenal’s rich linguistic and cultural heritage springs.

Conclusion

This analysis has centered upon landscape representation in three of Ernesto Cardenal’s most important poems, “Canto nacional,” “Oráculo sobre Managua,” and “Viaje a Nueva York,” all written during the seventies. In addition to possible biblical interpretations, it has become evident that specific historical and autobiographical moments also manifest themselves in the poet’s imagery of landscape. Political strife exacerbated by Tachito Somoza’s increasingly repressive regime, Cardenal’s relocation to the Solentiname islands and subsequent creation of an intentional community there, and Thomas Merton’s death have all contributed to Cardenal’s invigorated contemplation of self and place as the struggle for self-realization and self-preservation become increasingly intertwined with his brand of nationalism. Landscape

⁵⁸Cardenal insinuates that if empire could control weather patterns it would deprive others of rain for its own gain:
 2 rascacielos gemelos más altos que el Empire
 de la mitad para arriba iluminados
 patente en el cielo tras los cristales el Imperialismo
 Hello queríamos más sequía
 ¿Quién es ese otro monstruo que se levanta en la noche?
 El Chase Manhattan Bank jodiendo a media humanidad. (262)

representation in his verse fulfills different functions as Cardenal struggles to regain authority over place on genealogical, epistemological, and linguistic grounds. His work is informed by narratives emanating from empire as well as those etched across the Nicaraguan landscape itself via resource extraction and exportation as well as imperial expansion and exploration as in the case of the Apollo 11 lunar expedition. It is possible to detect a greater acceptance of violence as a means to achieve autonomy as the celebration of the seismic destruction of Managua and the glorification of Leonel Rugama's martyrdom indicate.

A study of landscape in Cardenal's poetry has also highlighted the poet's increasing adherence to Marxist philosophy. His representation of evolution in Darwinian terms parallels the Marxist teleological evolution of man that Cardenal applies to the microcosm of Solentiname's revolution and envisions its expansion to the national level and eventually beyond national borders. Cardenal envisions and advocates for the unification of society in classist terms, largely overlooking potentially competing subjectivities, tendencies typical of the Old Left. His bias in favor of heterosexuality, so evident in the first stage of his writing career from 1950 to 1970, continues to be a theme of his poetry penned during the seventies. However, his landscape representation in "Canto nacional" and the harmonious tapestry of non-human endemic species seem to indicate a more favorable disposition on the part of the poet in acknowledging and challenging injustices perpetrated on the level of race within the nation's borders. His writing manifests a struggle between this willingness to recognize these indigenous elements and the discourse of mestizaje that extends back to the Zelaya Administration (1893-1909) and its policy of "Reincorporation." Cardenal's poetry of the 1970s reveals a tension between the tendencies of the so-called Old Left and the New Left, the latter term referring to leftist political movements that expanded their focus beyond labor and class struggle to advocate solidarity among a wider

spectrum of subjectivities all fighting for social justice. While Cardenal does not seem to endorse gender or sexual orientation equality, he does seem to recognize the diversity of cultures within Nicaragua in racial terms, as the metaphor of ecological harmony in “Canto nacional” indicates.

Cardenal seems to appreciate indigenous civilizations precisely because of their knowledge and wisdom regarding the natural world and their deep understanding of the animal and plant species that are endemic to the region. His representation of the natural world includes numerous metaphors to Sumo and Miskito communities that are woven into the ecological web presented in the poem. Cardenal realizes that language and knowledge are inextricably linked to the biodiversity of landscape and that any struggle to regain linguistic and epistemological control must have ecological foundations. It is likely that Cardenal’s shift away from traditional Old Left values towards an acceptance of racial diversity, particularly honoring the indigenous elements of society, is due in part to his recognition of their ancestral wisdom regarding the natural world and his activism to reclaim dominion on this front. Steven F. White has made interesting observations pertaining to the similarities between racism, sexism and discrimination against species:

Como forma de pensamiento, el especismo es análogo del racismo y el sexismo, e implica un antropocentrismo moral: los seres humanos tenemos un valor que sobrepasa a los otros seres vivos, relegándolos todos a un estatus inferior y creando jerarquías dentro de los reinos animal y vegetal. Toda la creación, por ende, se convierte en “propiedad” que se puede comprar, vender, consumir, y, claro, robar y desperdiciar. (*Arando* 30)

Cardenal’s efforts to stymie empire’s buying, selling, and stealing of the natural body of nation have inspired him to poetically dismantle the hierarchies which allow for the ecological

devastation of landscape and to elevate all inhabitants of Nicaragua, non-human and human alike, to an equal plane. In doing so, he liberates ancestral knowledge and narratives rooted to the Earth and strengthens the persuasiveness of his own work by imbuing it with an organic authority that seems to naturally spring from the reality that it claims to represent.

CHAPTER 3: EXILE & UTOPIA—REFORMULATING PLACE & LEGACY IN THE LAND AND STARSCAPES OF ERNESTO CARDENAL (1977-1990)

La utopía es un constructo que no se termina y que encuentra su vitalidad en la realidad, en la urgencia de cambiar ciertas terribles situaciones de la realidad.

--Gioconda Belli (*Voces hispanas siglo XXI*)

During the years 1977-1990, Nicaragua faced a gamut of political, social, economic, and military dilemmas and experienced numerous revolutionary triumphs and defeats. After the initial euphoria surrounding the revolutionary victory in July of 1979 in which the insurrectionary forces were able to oust Anastasio Somoza Debayle from power, Ernesto Cardenal was forced to observe his nation endure many hardships. Ronald Reagan was elected president in the United States in 1981 and his administration quickly proved to be extremely hawkish in relation to Nicaragua and Central America. Shortly after Reagan's election, former members of Somoza's defunct National Guard were assembled to organize a counterrevolutionary guerrilla group known as the "Contras," (from the Spanish word *contrarevolucionarios*). In 1982, the Sandinista government forced the Miskito community of the Atlantic coast to relocate in order to offset the influence of Contra guerrillas occupying military camps along the Honduran border.⁵⁹ In 1983, Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua and, in addition to being openly hostile towards the revolution, he publicly admonished Cardenal (an ordained Catholic priest) for occupying a governmental post in defiance of the Vatican's policy. CIA operatives attacked the port of Corinto and destroyed oil reserves in 1983 as part of the plot to wreak economic and social havoc. During the years 1984-1985, counterrevolutionary forces mined Nicaraguan harbors, the US closed its Nicaraguan consulates, and the US government

⁵⁹This relocation served as fodder for counterrevolutionary propaganda, particularly that emphasized by the Reagan administration, who pointed to the incident as evidence of the totalitarian nature of the Sandinista government. Many former Sandinista leaders, including Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramírez, concede that the Miskito displacement was one of the grave errors committed by the leadership during the 1980s.

established a crushing trade embargo against Nicaragua. Between 1980 and 1987, 50,000 Nicaraguans were reportedly killed, wounded, or abducted and 250,000 were displaced as a result of the conflict with the Contras (Livingstone 261). The counterrevolutionaries, actively recruited and directly supported by the CIA, caused approximately US \$5 billion of damage in the span of eight years. This is an astounding figure given that Nicaragua's GNP did not even surpass US \$800 million in any year between 1980 and 1990 (Saldaña-Portillo 114). During the war, large numbers of the peasantry became more politically polarized and began to switch allegiances in support of the Contra effort. Internal divisions, resignations, and defections increasingly affected both the revolutionary government and Nicaraguan society at large as disillusionment, skepticism, and war weariness spread alongside deepening economic, social, and political crises. Despite the Sandinista military victory over the Contras, the FSLN suffered a humiliating electoral defeat in 1990 to the U.S. supported National Opposition Union (Unión Nacional Opositora, or UNO) led by presidential candidate Violeta Chamorro. These events had a profound impact on Ernesto Cardenal's work from 1977 to 1990 and an examination of his verse from this time period reveals the influence that these historical and autobiographical moments had on his poetry.

The year 1977 marks an important turning point in Nicaraguan history and in Ernesto Cardenal's life and writing career. It was in this year that several members of Cardenal's Solentiname community decided to join the *Tercerista* FSLN squads in what was known as the October Offensive in order to attack the National Guard barracks in San Carlos (Livingstone 252).⁶⁰ In response, Solentiname was ransacked and destroyed by Somoza's forces. In his

⁶⁰In 1975, the FSLN had split into three tendencies, the GPP (Guerra Popular Prolongada), the TP (Tendencia Proletaria), and the Tendencia Insurreccional or *Tercerista*. Cardenal was, by default, a member of this third tendency.

memoirs, Cardenal relates the complete destruction of his beloved commune and the difficulty that it caused him:

Fue una puñalada la que sentí en casa de Miguel Otero cuando un periodista que había estado en San Carlos me dijo (apenado de tener que decírmelo) que Solentiname había sido destruido. . . . En Costa Rica supimos que la destrucción de nuestra comunidad había sido total. La Guardia le pegó fuego a todo. (*La revolución perdida* 29, 39)

Marc Zimmerman provides additional details:

By October 1977 the Solentiname commune had turned Sandinista. And on 12 October the young people joined in an armed attack on National Guard military installations in the town of San Carlos on the border with Costa Rica. The guard was defeated, and the San Carlos port fell into the hands of insurgents. But shortly thereafter, the guard, using its airplanes, launched a counterattack that placed the civilian population in danger. The Sandinistas decided to retreat to avoid a massacre. In this sequence of events some of the Solentiname young people died, others were sent to prison, and others sought refuge in Costa Rica. Cardenal's community was liquidated; all the communal buildings were destroyed except for the church, which was converted into a guard barracks. (xviii-xix)

This occurrence marks the beginning of a new period in Cardenal's life and in his poetic production. This chapter thus uses the year 1977 as a starting point for this stage of chronological analysis.⁶¹ The attack by the National Guard led to Cardenal's exile not only from Solentiname, where he has never again returned to live, but also from Nicaragua to which he was able to return,

⁶¹The present study considers Cardenal's poetry chronologically based on when each verse was written. By doing so, I am better able to trace certain trends in his work over time as they relate to the autobiographical and historical contexts in which the poet wrote each poem.

albeit in a different capacity after reluctantly accepting his appointment as Nicaragua's Minister of Culture in 1979. As a result of his physical separation from his commune starting in 1977, exile becomes an increasingly dominant theme in his work and later expands to encompass not only physical separation but also ideological exclusion and political and social alienation as well, a point that will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

Despite the trying times that have followed the annihilation of Solentiname in 1977, Cardenal has remained persistent in offering poetic constructions of utopia, but it is clear that his representation of place and the perspective from which he constructs and describes place undergo transformations related to the historical and autobiographical context in which he pens his verse. In other words, Cardenal's poetic utopia is not static but is a dynamic entity that changes along with the political, social, and economic environment in which it is transcribed. Cardenal writes in *Cántico cósmico*, "Las personas son palabras. / Y así uno no es si no es diálogo. / Y así pues todo uno es dos / o no es. / . . . Las personas son diálogo, digo" (23). If it is true that people are dialogue, then it must follow that the places they construct are also built in dialogue with others. As the schematic representation in the introduction indicates, "place" is defined as the conjoining of "meaning" and the physical "space" upon which that meaning is projected. As "meaning" in this formula is transformed in dialogue with other meanings, the contours of place are also changed.⁶²

Cardenal's production during the years 1977-1990 consists mainly of two volumes of work, *Vuelos de victoria* (1985) and *Cántico cósmico* (1989), and in this chapter I analyze landscape representation and the construction of place in these two collections in relation to the

⁶²Meaning and space are not mutually exclusive categories. Physical alterations of space can also influence meaning in dialogic fashion.

historical events and narratives prevalent at the time.⁶³ In reference to his own work following the Sandinista victory, Cardenal acknowledges a slight change in his political poetry in that it is “plainer and simpler” than that written before (Cohen, *From Nicaragua* 2). From the perspective of the representation of landscape and construction of place, Cardenal’s own observation is certainly valid, particularly in the case of *Vuelos de victoria*. The first section of this chapter will demonstrate how the euphoria of victory in *Vuelos de victoria* manifests itself in a more simplistic poetic landscape. In a majority of poems in this collection, nature triumphs, harmony between the human and non-human world is restored, competing human subjectivities are blurred and conjoined with landscape, and the peasantry, that social class deemed to be most engaged and in tune with the Earth, are liberated along with the land that they work. Cardenal’s poetic depiction of a unified, homogeneous peasantry overlooks the diversity of the *campesinos* as a social class which, as María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo demonstrates, is in fact a “broad, heterogeneous, diffuse, and influx population” in Nicaragua (114). To speak of the Nicaraguan peasantry is to speak of private peasant producers with varying land holdings, landless peasants, itinerant laborers, and permanent proletariat (with permanent labor positions) (115), and Cardenal’s poetry unifies this diversity. *Vuelos de victoria* is, by and large, devoid of the tensions that largely characterized his earlier verse. In triumphant jubilation, the poet tends to gloss over the more complex realities in wake of Somoza’s downfall and the harmony of landscape symbolizes this elation.

⁶³Some of the poems in these collections appear in other volumes such as *Tocar el cielo* (1981) and an edition of English translations *From Nicaragua with Love: Poems, 1979-1986* (1986). In addition, it should be noted that the poems included in *Vuelos de victoria* also appear within the various *cantigas* that make up *Cántico cósmico*. These have undergone some modification in comparison to their original publication, due not only to additions and/or removal of some sections but also those changes resulting from the insertion of these poems into a different literary context. Cardenal did work on Indian poems during the 1980s as well, adding to a series of Mexican songs first appearing in *Homenaje a los indios americanos* (1969) as well as penning poems about Machu Picchu and the Guaraní of Paraguay. These appear in his collection *Los ovnis de oro* (1992) which is not analyzed in this present study (Salmon xxiv).

Some poems in *Vuelos de victoria*, however, do reveal a subtle shift in perspective towards a partially exilic positionality on the part of the lyrical voice in relation to the Nicaraguan landscape, a transition which foreshadows fundamental changes that will begin to become more prevalent in Cardenal's verse. Later, in *Cántico cósmico*, this poetic translocation continues and exile becomes a much more predominant theme. In the second half of this chapter, I will argue that as Ernesto Cardenal is exiled, either voluntarily or forcibly, by the historic turn of events during the time frame in question, the lyrical voice in his poetry simultaneously assumes an exilic stance. He shifts towards what Edward Said has called a "third nature," in the case of *Cántico cósmico*, an uncolonized cosmos. It is in this space that Cardenal's verse enters into competitive dialogue both with narratives emanating from U.S. empire as well as with the autobiographical and historical events such as the Contra war and the internal struggles and divisions that challenge the poet to reframe his nationalist vision. Cardenal's exile, be it physical, ideological, social, religious, artistic, or sexual, is akin to emasculation and he utilizes his exilic vantage point in reformulating place, both to vie for control over a nation increasingly detached from his ideological moorings as well as to restore his wounded masculinity.

Vuelos de victoria

In numerous poems found within the collection *Vuelos de victoria*, the lyrical voice merely ascertains the revolutionary triumph of the Nicaraguan nation, the human and non-human inhabitants and the natural body of which it is comprised, as predicted in earlier stages of Cardenal's career. The poems in *Vuelos de victoria* are divided into four sections: 1) "Vuelos de insurrección," written prior to the 1979 triumph, 2) "Vuelos de victoria y celebración," 3) "Vuelos de reconstrucción," 4) "Vuelos de memoria y visión." These poems reflect the euphoria of victory but lack the urgency and tension that so characterized Cardenal's verse as analyzed in

Chapter 2 of this study.⁶⁴ As foreshadowed in “Canto nacional” (1972) and “Oráculo sobre Managua” (1973) for example, the triumphant lyrical voice in *Vuelos de victoria* poetically cures the natural body of the Nicaraguan nation previously undermined by the destructive “writing” carelessly scribbled over the land by empire and its surrogates, namely Somoza and his minions. In “Ecología,” quoted here at length, he writes:

Los somocistas también destruían los lagos, ríos, y montañas.
Desviaban el curso de los ríos para sus fincas.
.....
El Sinecapa secado por el despale de los latifundistas.
.....
Dos represas pusieron al Ochomogo,
y los desechos químicos capitalistas
caían en el Ochomogo y los pescados andaban como borrachos.
El río de Boaco con aguas negras.
.....
. . . Un coronel somocista
robó las tierras de los campesinos, y construyó una represa. . . .
.....
Despalaron y represaron.
Pocos garrobos al sol, pocos cusucos.

⁶⁴Some critics have noted a diminished poetic quality in some of Cardenal’s work that dates to this period. Paul W. Borgeson, Jr., for example, writes, “Debo admitir que algunos poemas, especialmente en *Tocar el cielo*, no me convencen del todo; corren el peligro de pasar de la sencillez al simplismo, y muestran algunas señales de un estilo que aún busca nueva adecuación a la nueva realidad; cosa que nos recuerda una vez más que literatura y realidad vivida no son separables, que no existe ‘poesía pura’ aunque sí existe pura poesía” (“La poesía pos-revolucionaria” 428).

La tortuga verde del Caribe la vendía Somoza.
 En camiones exportaban los huevos de paslama y las iguanas.
 Acabándose la tortuga caguama.
 El pez-sierra del Gran Lago acabándolo José Somoza.
 En peligro de extinción el tigrillo de la selva,
 su suave piel color de selva,
 y el puma, el danto en las montañas
 (como los campesinos en las montañas).
 ¡Y pobre el Río Chiquito! Su desgracia,
 la de todo el país. Reflejado en sus aguas el somocismo.
 El Río Chiquito de León, alimentado de manantiales
 de cloacas, desechos de fábricas de jabón y curtiembres,
 agua blanca de fábricas de jabón, roja la de las curtiembres;
 plásticos en el lecho, vacinillas, hierros sarrosos. Eso
 nos dejó el somocismo.

 Y al lago de Managua todas las aguas negras de Managua
 y los desechos químicos.
 Y allá por Solentiname, en la isla La Zanata:
 un gran cerro blanco y hediondo de esqueletos de pez-sierra. (70-2)

The lyrical voice reminds the reader of the ecological injustices perpetrated against the natural body of nation prior to the Sandinista victory. It is important to note here the parallel between this environmental devastation and the crimes committed against the peasantry, those that work

the natural body of the nation. The exploitation of the *campesinos* is likened to that of the waterways, the land, the animals, and the fish of Nicaragua in this verse, resulting in a convergence of social justice with environmental justice.⁶⁵ Drawing upon Steven F. White's insight, as noted in Chapter 2 of this study regarding the similarities between racism, sexism, and discrimination against species (*Arando* 30), such an analogy can be expanded to include classism as well, as the above passage from "Ecología" highlights.

With the triumph of the revolution, the above problems have been (or will be) resolved, according to the lyrical voice in the poem "Ecología":

En septiembre por San Ubaldo se vieron más coyotes.

Más cuajipales, a poco del triunfo,

en los ríos, allá por San Ubaldo.

En la carretera más conejos, culumucos . . .

La población de pájaros se ha triplicado, nos dicen,

en especial la de los piches.

Los bulliciosos piches bajan a nadar adonde ven el agua brillar.

.....

Pero ya respiraron los pez-sierra y el tiburón de agua dulce.

Tisma está llena otra vez de garzas reales

reflejadas en sus espejos

⁶⁵Ecocritics Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt argue that it is the term "justice" that "provides a space for theoretical work bridging ecocriticism and postcolonialism." They maintain that "[e]nvironmental justice criticism, as distinguished from ecocriticism that tends to value conservation/preservation discourse . . . recognizes that subtexts of class and race inhere in notions of nature or wilderness, that when put into practice, environmentalism often inadvertently results in racist or classist policy. . . . [E]nvironmental justice has moved ecocriticism to consider how disenfranchised or impoverished populations the world over face particular environmental problems" (3). This insight, published in 2010, demonstrates the astuteness of Cardenal's observation tying ecological degradation to social injustice three decades earlier in the case of the poetry analyzed here, wisdom that is certainly derived from his physical proximity to imperial "writing," as I have argued, over both the bodies of Nicaragua's human inhabitants as well as the natural body of nation and the non-human species that reside in that space as well.

Tiene muchos zanatillos, piches guises, zarcetas.

La flora también se ha beneficiado.

Los cusucos andan muy contentos con este gobierno.

Recuperaremos los bosques, ríos, lagunas

Vamos a descontaminar el lago de Managua.

La liberación no sólo la ansiaban los humanos.

Toda la ecología gemía. La revolución

es también de lagos, ríos, árboles, animales. (71-72)

This passage reestablishes the ecological harmony between humans, non-humans, and the waterways defining the Nicaraguan landscape. Without the element of imminent conflict here, this poem exemplifies Cardenal's verse that dates to this period. The poet relies on verb tense to magnify the tension between past, present, and future. Having reiterated the legacy of *somocismo* using the past tense, the lyrical voice highlights the nation's newfound ecological harmony imbuing it with tension by alternating between the present and the future. The lyrical voice does not simply transcribe reality but rather writes his version of revolution over the landscape along with those elements that this subjective revolution promises: "*Recuperaremos los bosques, ríos, lagunas. / Vamos a descontaminar el lago de Managua*" (72, emphasis added). The conflict will now take place, not between the insurrection and Somoza, who so dominated Cardenal's verse previously, but rather among the various revolutionary imaginations themselves, as the passage above from the poem "Ecología," implies. Amidst the euphoria of victory, tension now surfaces due to the uncertainties regarding the path that the revolution will ultimately take. The ecological organism of nation as seen clamoring for justice and liberation in "Canto nacional" has now acquired its freedom or perhaps this freedom is imminent, although the road is unclear. Cardenal

reiterates this point in “En Managua a media noche,” in which he writes: “Acostado en mi cama en Managua / iba a dormirme / y de pronto me pregunto: / ¿Para dónde vamos? / . . . dondequiera que vayamos, vamos bien. / Y también / va bien la Revolución” (92). Aside from the metaphysical questions that this contemplation implies, the lyrical voice clearly harbors anxieties about the fate of the revolution and seems to console himself, as in “Ecología,” by having faith that his expectations will be realized at some future moment, as of yet unknown.

Tension between the present and the future of revolutionary potential in ecological terms is evident in other poems in *Vuelos de victoria*, namely in “Amanecer,” written just prior to the insurrection’s victory. The imminent revolutionary triumph is likened to daybreak after a long night. Cardenal writes: “Vamos a ver el agua muy azul: ahorita no la vemos. —Y / esta tierra con sus frutales, que tampoco vemos. / Levántate Pancho Nicaragua, cogé el machete / hay mucha yerba mala que cortar” (4). Here the lyrical voice stirs the peasantry to engage in the future promise of the revolution by implying that their emancipation is inherently tied to the liberation of the land. The Nicaraguan landscape is poetically unified with the peasants that work the land, the fate of one determining that of the other. By freeing the land from the imperial exploitation inherent in a resource extractive economy, the Nicaraguan people will be able to enjoy the fruits of the earth that sustains them. The land will be free when the peasants are liberated to clear it of weeds, that is to say, to use it and live harmoniously while deriving sustenance from its abundance that was previously exported to foreign consumers.

The phrase “yerba mala” in this verse from “Amanecer” can also be interpreted to metaphorically refer to the ideological vestiges of the Somoza era that still cloud the vision of those *campesinos* poised to reclaim their nation’s natural body. The sustainability of the insurgency and of the liberation of the national territory depends upon the revolutionary

consciousness of the peasants that work that land. As Leon Trotsky once maintained, “politically, the civil war is the struggle between the proletariat in opposition to the counterrevolutionaries for the conquest of the peasantry,” hence Cardenal’s repeated references to the *campesinos* in his work (Saldaña-Portillo 139). Cardenal is on the frontlines of this vanguard that works to educate the peasants and to raise their revolutionary consciousness. The establishment of his community in Solentiname is a case in point. Many of the residents about whom he writes in his memoirs and glorifies as martyrs in numerous verses are local peasants. His book *El Evangelio de Solentiname* (1975) is a transcription of the commentaries voiced by the *campesinos* of Solentiname under Cardenal’s guidance regarding the biblical Gospels. In his memoirs, he simultaneously defends the autonomy of the peasants’ observations while also acknowledging his own hand in their creation:

Lógicamente di una elaboración a aquellos diálogos. No son transcripciones literales como las del antropólogo Oscar Lewis, porque no me interesaba un documento científico, sino una obra literaria y que fuera amena y leíble. Suprimí las cosas que no eran interesantes o estaban repetidas, agregué otras que se me ocurrieron posteriormente al redactar, en el espíritu de lo que se había dicho. Pero la mayor parte es lo que los campesinos dijeron, y como ellos lo dijeron. Ellos fueron los verdaderos autores de este libro. (*Las ínsulas* 431-2)

Although Cardenal downplays his authorship of these interpretations, he clearly had a hand in guiding them ideologically towards readings of the Gospels more to his liking within a Marxist framework as is evident in the text. Cardenal’s role in educating the “solentinameños” also included efforts to heighten their appreciation for the beauty and the bounties of the natural landscape as apparent in this excerpt from his memoirs:

Y dice la Olivia que ella sentía más en una cárcel que en una isla. Solentiname para ella era un nombre que sólo significaba tristeza. . . . Y dice que Solentiname es bonito, pero entonces nadie se percataba de que era tan bonito. . . . El verdor de Solentiname, dice la Olivia que le producía mucha angustia. Esa vegetación la oprimía porque lo que para el visitante parece bello, para ella había sido una vida de miseria. Ahora ya había salido de esa miseria de antes, y ya podía apreciar los árboles, el lago, las nubes. (Mucho más lo apreció después cuando fue pintora de esos paisajes.) (*Las insulas* 165)

As an advocate for primitivist painting in his community and later throughout Nicaragua as the Minister of Culture, Cardenal takes credit here for opening the peasants' eyes to the beauty of their landscape. The implication here is that Cardenal has corrected the *campesinos'* misconceived notions of the natural world. Looking at the poems in *Vuelos de victoria* mentioned earlier, the peasants have learned (are learning or are willing to learn, in keeping with the poetic tension between past, present, and future) under his tutelage that the land, rather than being a prison, is their liberation. In citing a line from *Cántico cósmico*, the peasants are "absorbed in the scenery and part of the scenery" ("absortos en el paisaje y parte del paisaje"), and Cardenal's role is to help them see that their destinies and that of the land are intertwined (117), to cut away this "yerba mala" which obscures their vision and hinders them from becoming full-fledged revolutionary subjects.⁶⁶

⁶⁶One of the major successes celebrated during the early years of the Sandinista regime was that of the *Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización* (CNA) implemented March 3rd-August 3rd, 1980. In addition to promoting literacy, one of the key goals of this campaign was to transform the nation politically by promoting a revolutionary consciousness on the part of occupants of all regions and sectors of society. Cardenal addresses this point in a quote from Sergio Ramírez: "La alfabetización es no sólo para enseñar a leer y escribir, sino para cambiar" (*La revolución perdida* 286). Cardenal describes the effort as leading to "un descubrimiento que Nicaragua tuvo de sí misma" (285). Quoting a participant in the literacy brigade, "Los compañeros campesinos se comprometían a cambiar, transformar su realidad, porque les explicábamos que no éramos nosotros los que la íbamos a cambiar, sino que tenían que hacerlo ellos todos juntos" (281). This was not only an educative campaign directed towards the *campesinos*, who

Paul W. Borgeson, Jr. has noted the following change in the lyrical voice from this period in comparison to Cardenal's earlier writing:

[L]a voz del profeta se modifica: se acerca aún más que antes a la voz del pueblo, se “acampesina” o populariza más que antes. . . . En *Vuelos de victoria*, ya vemos una voz nueva . . . “La mañanita” . . . y “Amanacer” . . . son poemas escritos en un lenguaje más sencillo del acostumbrado por Cardenal, y el que será, me parece, propio de un joven campesino nicaragüense. . . . Esta voz—y puede debatirse si es en verdad infantil o juvenil, o simplemente campesina en su candor y concreción—me parece nueva en Cardenal [y] se sostiene en la totalidad de estos poemas. (“La poesía pos-revolucionaria” 424-7)

The lyrical voice speaks with the voice of the peasantry to articulate their reality in terms that they themselves can understand. Through the simplified poetic language, Cardenal speaks to the *campesinos* to vie for their attention and to raise their revolutionary consciousness.

Just as the peasants' labor frees the land to reach its full potential as in the clearing of the “yerba mala,” the martyrs of the revolution in *Vuelos de victoria*, many linked with a celebrated peasant ancestry, fertilize the soil of nation by sacrificing themselves for its cause, thus freeing it from imperial conquest that has exploited the resources of Nicaragua since the arrival of the conquistadores. As Cardenal writes in the poem “Aterrizaje con epitafio,” Nicaragua has been converted into “una gran tumba de mártires . . . todos hechos esta tierra, haciendo más sagrada

were taught about FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca and Augusto César Sandino (277), but it also served to enlighten the volunteers about farming and the natural bounty of the Nicaraguan landscape and its non-human inhabitants, as the following passages indicate: “Un muchacho recuerda lo duro de aquella vida tan distinta de la de la ciudad. ‘[A]llá es pura montaña, sólo monte. Uno ve grandes palos, y por dondequiera puede encontrar culebras, monos, y toda clase de animales.’ Y otro dice: ‘Pero ya después nos fuimos acostumbrando, y parecía que éramos de allí’ (274). [. . .] ‘Una parte de nosotros se quedó allí. Una parte de nuestra vida quedó enraizada en esas tierras escabrosas que parecían hostiles al inicio, y que después se transformaron en nuestro patio’ (279). [. . .] Los muchachos aprendieron también a ordeñar, y a manejar el hacha, el machete, a aporrear el maíz, los frijoles y el trigo. Aprendieron a sembrar esas plantas y a cultivarlas. Comieron los frijoles y el maíz sembrados por sus manos” (275).

esta tierra” (*Vuelos de victoria* 38). The heroism implicit in the self-sacrifice of these masculine martyrs is poetically coupled with the feminine womb of the earth in a fertile embrace that results in the dawn of a new era. Cardenal advocates sacrifice for the benefit of the whole nation.

In several verses found in *Vuelos de victoria*, Cardenal utilizes references to landscapes metaphorically to root the Nicaraguan people to place and to eliminate possible division of the revolutionary project by blurring the lines of potentially competing subjectivities, namely those of gender and race. In the poem “La mano,” Cardenal portrays the unification of his countrymen when he describes a competition of revolutionary floats:

[V]iendo
pasar las carrozas, y el río de gente
la mayoría saludando, las manos levantadas,
las palmas agitadas,
o bien puños cerrados:
de pronto vi
una mano.
Borrado todo lo demás vi sólo esa mano levantada
.....

No pude saber si era mano de hombre o mujer. (*Vuelos de victoria* 44)

A river of people traverse the landscape before his eyes, devoid of any marks of differentiation, be it gender, class, or racial difference. Cardenal here establishes a common, overarching umbrella for the “river” of people that he observes. Fragmentation and difference are erased as all are united by a common political cause. Revolution for Cardenal, as suggested here, is defined by the erasure of class divisions which is prioritized over other potentially divisive

subjectivities, namely gender and race. The revolution has freed Nicaraguans to take root again in the land from which they have been displaced by a capitalist economy that commodifies the earth and alienates the worker or peasant from the product of his labor. Cardenal expands upon this theme in *Cántico cósmico* as well, as I shall expand upon later. It is important to note here, however, that Cantiga 14 of *Cántico cósmico*, also entitled “La mano,” is a modified version of that appearing in *Vuelos de victoria*. In the latter version, he writes, “La mano hizo el trabajo, como el trabajo la mano. / Y por el trabajo y la mano la evolución de la mente / y por ende el aumento del cerebro humano. / La mano pensante” (*Cántico cósmico* 98).⁶⁷ The reunification of peasant with land is the merging of worker with the fruits of his labor which, in turn, leads to an evolution of consciousness.

In the poem “Waslala,” Cardenal writes, “Estas tierras para el maíz eran mudos cementerios. . . . / Ya Pancho está con el machete desyerbando el maizal” (66), reinforcing the notion of the peasantry/land convergence indicated earlier in “Amanecer.” Now in Waslala, according to the lyrical voice, both the human and non-human inhabitants of this biodiverse region exult in their newly found freedom:

Qué bella está esta mañana la montaña,
la montaña donde anduvieron entre los monos tantos guerrilleros.
Frente al comando los niños corren como colibríes.
Frente al CDS las mujeres charlan entre flores como tucanes.
Las banderas roji-negras parecen pájaros.
Qué bello el verde de los campos y el verde de los compas

⁶⁷This is a good example of Cardenal’s tendency to use metonymy in his poetry. The hand is used to represent humanity. Humankind is defined by labor and this is particularly important in Cardenal’s representation of the peasantry. They work directly with the land with their hands, thus metabolizing the natural bounties for the benefit of society.

Qué lindo resbala ahora el río Waslala.

De pronto vino el día.

El café será bueno este año.

Qué alegre está Waslala. (*Vuelos de victoria* 68)

The animals, plants, birds, and human occupants of Waslala live in harmony and the *campesinos* are able to grow corn in the fields as they were intended to do. The green uniforms of the victorious insurgents meld inextricably with the lush green of the surroundings. This verse poetically establishes a harmonious bond between the revolutionary government and the Waslala peasantry as if this link arises as a natural phenomenon from the landscape itself in contrast with the former disharmonious “landscape” of war.

Waslala, located in the north central region of Nicaragua approximately 160 miles northeast of Managua, was historically the site of much strife and violence during the insurrection of the 1970s and also throughout the Contra war during the 1980s where the opposing factions vied for the allegiance of the peasantry. Sandinista strategy during the 1970s, strongly supported by FSLN leader Carlos Fonseca, centered upon Che Guevara’s “foco” theory of revolution in which small contingents of insurgents would stir up resistance to the governing regime in the countryside by instigating prolonged conflict. Waslala was one region where this theory was put into practice and is the subject of Sandinista revolutionary Omar Cabezas’ guerrilla memoir *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* (1982) where he describes the hardships of life in the area and recalls his experience on clandestine reconnaissance missions at the location of Somoza’s National Guard garrison located in Waslala (Sweet). Waves of repression at the hands of Somoza against *campesinos* suspected in aiding the insurgents became increasingly brutal as the dictatorship teetered on the brink of collapse during

the late 1970s. During the 1980s, many of the peasants of Waslala were successfully recruited to fight with the Contras due to their ties with the ex-National Guardsman, their impoverished livelihood, as a reaction to the fervor of the Sandinistas (Sweet), or, as María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo convincingly argues, due to the Sandinista government's agricultural policy itself. She maintains that the FSLN failed to recognize the diversity of those Nicaraguans who identified themselves as *campesinos*. They took for granted that the peasantry had "already undergone a 'revolutionary enlightenment'" and implemented a cooperativization program that in fact made many *campesinos* sympathetic to the Contra cause (Saldaña-Portillo 135). The Sandinistas neglected to observe the heterogeneity of the peasantry and at times the "contradictory nationalist visions" between their own progressive brand of bourgeois nationalism and the "conservative mass-based nationalism" of the *campesinos* (144).⁶⁸

The rosy assessment of Waslala made in Cardenal's poem indicates that he, too, is (1) either committing the same error of misinterpreting peasant values or (2) glossing over reality by establishing a hopeful poetic harmony between these diverse peasant sectors and the Sandinista government. CIA operatives and the counterrevolutionary elites in the 1980s were able to appeal to the conservative elements of peasant consciousness "with its emphasis on the church, respect for private property, and, most importantly, autonomy for the producers" (Saldaña-Portillo 144). This allowed these operatives to instigate conflict, bringing to fruition the overall purpose of U.S. policy in Central America "to disarticulate the political and social forces that had developed to counter decades of poverty and injustice" (Gold 51). It is likely that Cardenal's poetic insistence

⁶⁸Saldaña-Portillo relies on the work of Partha Chatterjee to formulate these "prominent strands of Third World nationalisms." "*Progressive* bourgeois nationalism" is characterized by the eagerness to "displace foreign economic interests but is committed to the project of modernization and asserts the country's ability to 'achieve' development in Western terms." "*Conservative* mass-based nationalism," on the other hand, "is eager to displace exploitative imperialist elements and their internal allies but resists modernization and rejects Western development models to greater or lesser degrees" (144).

on ecological and social harmony in Waslala is a conscious attempt to artistically offer an alternative vision, one which harmoniously includes these contested *campesinos* within his revolutionary articulations. The region and its inhabitants were not yet reliably Sandinista subjects, hence Cardenal's concerted effort to poetically encourage their inclusion into the national imaginary. His inclusion of the CDS (Comités de Defensa Sandinista) in the verse from "Waslala," cited above, provides further evidence that Waslala and other regions with high concentrations of peasants were battle grounds for the minds and support of these *campesinos* and that Cardenal is very cognizant of this fact. As David Sweet points out, the disruption of the planting season to Central American farmers causes deep psychological trauma beyond mere economic hardship. He reports, "Their entire way of life is rooted in the cycle of the corn plant. To miss a year of planting the milpa is like missing a year of one's life" (Sweet).⁶⁹ Cardenal taps into this sentiment by referencing the "maizal" and poetically defending its autonomy in "Waslala."

In "Las loras," another poem found in *Vuelos de victoria*, Cardenal likens the Revolution to the release by Sandinista soldiers of a contraband shipment of parrots set for export to the United States. The soldiers, defined only by their green uniforms, the color in this verse that establishes a connection between the people, the parrots, and their land, free the birds that were taken captive for the sake of US capitalism, thus reclaiming the national body from its consumption by foreign usurpers: "Los compas verdes como loras dieron a las loras sus montañas verdes" (88). Likening this liberation to the Sandinista revolution, the lyrical voice posits, "Eso mismo hizo la Revolución con nosotros, pienso yo: / nos sacó de las jaulas / en las que nos llevaban a hablar inglés. / Nos devolvió la patria de la que nos habían arrancado" (88).

⁶⁹ According to a note at the foot of Sweet's text, this observation is "[b]ased on testimonies gathered by Witness for Peace and by staff from the Centro Antonio Valdivieso and the Central American Historical Institute with the help of the parish missionary team in Waslala, and an article in *Barricada* 3/19/84.

Just as the Solentiname peasant, Olivia, once viewed the islands and the landscape as a prison, but was liberated ideologically and materially to enjoy the scenery while reaping the benefits that a harmonious relationship with the land can provide, so too are the other *campesinos* emancipated like the parrots in “Las loras.” However, a sacrifice is required to free the whole: “Eran 186 loras, y ya habían muerto 47 en sus jaulas” (88). Like the parrots that perish fighting the confines of their cage walls, the lyrical voice advocates altruism amongst individuals for the sake of the entire community, even if this sacrifice means individual death. By being able to return to their homeland from which they had been uprooted, the populace avoids subjugation by outsiders, physically as well as culturally, as symbolized by the intended imposition of English on the parrots by the imperialists in “Las loras.” Culture, represented by Cardenal’s poetry, appears to emanate naturally from the Nicaraguan landscape and is free to flourish and take root in the soil and the imaginations of those that are an inseparable part of the scenery that the lyrical voice describes.

As the title *Vuelos de victoria* implies, many of the poems contained within this collection make reference to flight and describe the view of the Nicaraguan landscape as seen from a higher vantage point.⁷⁰ This perspective or angle of view is occasionally coupled in verse with brief references to landing, the wheels of the plane touching the tarmac, a return to the ground, arrival and/or disembarkation. Some examples are seen in the following verses, taken from “Luces,” “Aterrizaje con epitafio,” and “Otra llegada,” respectively:

Y las luces del aeropuerto. / Estamos en tierra.

[.]

Las ruedas ya a pocos metros de la tierra

⁷⁰*Vuelos de victoria* is divided into four sections entitled “Vuelos de insurrección,” “Vuelos de victoria y celebración,” “Vuelos de reconstrucción,” y “Vuelos de memoria y visión,” respectively.

[.....]

. . . Las ruedas ya acaban de tocar, señores pasajeros,
una gran tumba de mártires.

[.....]

Ya la emoción de oír sobre el lago rosicler
que vamos a aterrizar en el aeropuerto “Augusto César Sandino”.

[.....]

Y ahora el bajarse sin temor

[.....]

y llegar a Migración, y llegar a Aduana . . . (*Vuelos de victoria* 34, 38, 40, 3rd
ellipsis in orig.)

The three poems cited above, all found in the second section of the collection, entitled “Vuelos de victoria y celebración,” contrast notably with another poem, “Vuelo sobre la patria sin escala,” which appears in the first section. In this latter verse describing his flight over Nicaragua without a stopover there, the lyrical voice laments the destruction of Solentiname, the exile from his homeland, and the airplane window that separates him and prevents his reunion with the geography that he sees below the flight’s trajectory:

Primero fue el lago, calmo.

Y en él

mi lugar, lo que fue mi hogar, Solentiname.

.....

La punta donde estuvo la comunidad. Todo arrasado.

La biblioteca quemada. Aquella hamaca bajo un techo de palma

con el lago enfrente.

.....

[El whisky] lo bebo pegada la mirada al vidrio que me separa.

Nadie en el avión sospecha esta tragedia.

El exilado mirando la patria.

Allí tras el vidrio.

Pero entre yo y mi tierra hay un abismo.

.....

La amada geografía para mí negada. (20)

Autobiographically speaking, this contrast between the poems and the inability to reunite with his homeland can be explained by the razing of Solentiname and the physical separation of Cardenal from Nicaragua starting in 1977 until the Sandinista victory of 1979, after which the poet was again able to leave and reenter the country without difficulty. On a metaphoric level, however, the repatriation of the poetic voice as symbolized by the touchdown on the Nicaraguan soil after victory represents Cardenal's ideas once again coming into contact with his nation's material realities. His exiled imagination has once again come closer to finding a home in the Nicaraguan landscape, where, amidst the euphoria of the Sandinista victory, his nationalist vision can plausibly take root. Exile returns to become a predominant theme in his work as will become evident in this study and this exilic positionality on the part of the lyrical voice can be linked to historical and autobiographical events that continue to challenge Cardenal's revolutionary imagination and compel a reformulation. It is in the context of these threats to his vision and in dialogue with them that he modifies place.

“Luces” is arguably the most important poem in *Vuelos de victoria* in that it marks the beginning of a new era in Cardenal’s work and a transition towards a more pronounced exilic poetic voice. The imagery still conjures reflective characteristics of the landscape as seen in his earlier writing, namely “Canto nacional.” But here the lyrical voice undergoes a change of perspective and a positional shift where he begins to occupy an interim point of contemplation, a state of limbo between two spheres, looking downward toward his homeland from above but simultaneously entering a new space by pondering the night sky and the constellations from below. In the excerpt that follows, the lyrical voice surveys the landscape of Nicaragua from a plane during a night flight while drawing comparisons with the stars and Milky Way above him:

El cielo lleno, llenísimo de estrellas. La Vía Láctea
clarísima tras el grueso vidrio de la ventanilla,
masa blancuzca y rutilante en la noche negra
con sus millones de procesos de evoluciones y revoluciones.
.....
Primero las luces de Rivas, tomada y retomada por los Sandinistas
ahora a medias en poder de los Sandinistas.
Después otras luces: Granada, en poder de la guardia
(sería atacada esa noche).
Masaya, totalmente liberada. Tantos cayeron allí
Más allá un resplandor: Managua. Lugar de tantos combates.
.....
... Tanto heroísmo
relumbra en esas luces. ...

.....
La Vía Láctea arriba, y las luces de la revolución de Nicaragua.

Me parece mirar más lejos, en el norte, la fogata de Sandino

(“Aquella luz es Sandino”).

Las estrellas sobre nosotros, y la pequeñez de esta tierra

pero también la importancia de ella, de estas

pequeñitas luces de los hombres. Pienso: todo es luz.

El planeta viene del sol. Es luz hecha sólida.

La electricidad de este avión es luz. El metal es luz. El calor

de la vida viene del sol.

“Hágase la luz.”

También están las tinieblas.

Hay extraños reflejos—no sé de donde vienen—en

la superficie transparente de la ventanilla.

Una luminosidad roja: las luces de la cola del avión.

Y reflejos en el mar tranquilo: serán las estrellas.

Miro la lucecita de mi cigarrillo—también viene del sol,

de una estrella. (32-4)

Historically, the content here parallels the events occurring on the ground of a nation in the throes of revolution, in metamorphosis between various states of being, as the varying levels of insurrectionary advancement from city to city indicate. The nation, like the metaphorically interim position of the lyrical voice, is in a transitional phase between dictatorship and renewal.

Autobiographically, the position of the lyrical voice in relation to the war and the national territory mimics that of Cardenal himself, who is not directly involved in the fighting on the ground, but rather in exile following the destruction of Solentiname, where he serves as an important spokesperson internationally in support of the Sandinista cause and is responsible for raising funds for the insurrectionary forces. During this time period, the poet occupies an intermediary position, gazing at the conflict in his homeland from afar, imagining the possibilities and potential for national transformation and revival in line with his own hopes and ambitions.

Metaphorically, the lyrical voice shifts his gaze towards another dimension as a space for contemplation, the distant stars and galaxies in the night sky. He is caught between the material and the ideal, perhaps echoing Cardenal's own hybrid and seemingly incompatible fusion of Christian and Marxist philosophies. He identifies with both worlds but is trapped between them being a part of neither, the light on the tail of his plane and the butt of his cigarette glimmer like the lights cast by humans below and the perceivable stars that twinkle unceasingly in the darkness, forever tantalizing the imagination but eternally out of reach. Cardenal first moved poetically into a contemplation of the Nicaraguan night sky and the moon in "Oráculo sobre Managua" after the Apollo 11 lunar mission of 1969, an event that came to symbolize the perpetual expansion of imperial conquest. Arguably, his increasing fascination with the cosmos which culminates in *Cántico cósmico* is also a response to imperialism and its unwavering attacks on Nicaraguan attempts to formulate its own sovereign and independent blueprint for a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous future. Aside from the few metaphoric descents and flights that touchdown on earth in *Vuelos de victoria*, the lyrical voice rarely exits this state of exilic limbo. This mirrors Cardenal's own autobiography and the history of his life and times, both

leading up to the insurrectionary triumph of 1979 but also in the years that follow in which the revolutionary project begins to unravel and the poet's own vision becomes an increasingly isolated dream that fails to take root. The state of euphoric exile in "Luces" as victory seems imminent transforms into an exilic lament in *Cántico cósmico* as the lyrical voice exploring the cosmos mirrors Cardenal's autobiographical state of limbo and the poet's response to events that stray from his nationalist imaginings. It is in the unexplored night sky and "starscapes" of Nicaragua to which Cardenal turns to seek consolation, fight emasculation, and to wrestle with empire and the other autobiographical and historical events that do not mesh well with his own revolutionary blueprint(s).

Cántico cósmico

While it has been noted that the writing in *Vuelos de victoria* is simpler, more accessible, and plainer than Cardenal's earlier work, as the poet himself has claimed, *Cántico cósmico* takes his brand of *exteriorismo* towards a new, complex, and interdisciplinary direction.⁷¹ About this epic poem, Cardenal has commented, "I am now writing poetry of a cosmic character, which has elements of mysticism and politics, as well as deeply personal feelings about my life, but it is framed especially in cosmologic language about the problems posed by time and space, matter, the atom, the stars and human evolution" (Cohen, *From Nicaragua 2*). The collection is comprised of forty-three autonomous but nonetheless interconnected *cantigas* that, in their totality make up a lengthy book of four hundred and ten pages, quite a contrast even in relation

⁷¹It might appear unusual to describe poetry as "interdisciplinary," but here I borrow from Iván Carrasco's "*Cántico cósmico* de Cardenal: un texto interdisciplinario" in which he writes:

Cántico cósmico [es un] extenso poema que entre sus diversas figuras le concede predominio a la *mutación disciplinaria*, que consiste en la alteración y sustitución de los discursos típicos de la poesía mediante el uso y superposición de discursos de disciplinas no literarias. En este trabajo se destaca la incorporación del discurso de la física cuántica, del cristianismo y del testimonio histórico. (Abstract 129, emphasis in orig.)

to his lengthier epic poems penned earlier.⁷² From the first *cantiga*, “El Big Bang,” Cardenal touches upon a wide range of themes, including the origins of the universe, evolution, love, heat, fire, movement, the stars, the Catholic Church, capitalism, communism, imperialism, materialism, idealism, Reagan, the Contras, Solentiname, Sandino, science, resurrection, death, ecology, revolution, Darwin, the Miskito and Sumo communities of the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast, U.S and Nicaraguan history, Hitler and the Nazis, Marxism, and early Christian communities. The poet draws inspiration from a myriad of literary masterpieces, including “Cántico espiritual” by San Juan de la Cruz, *Canto general* by Pablo Neruda, Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and *Cantos de vida y esperanza* by Rubén Darío, among others (García González 104). In typical *exteriorista* fashion, Cardenal utilizes direct quotes from a variety of sources, be they philosophic, scientific, religious, historic, or literary documents or excerpts from media publications. He incorporates, almost in their entirety, poems found within *Vuelos de victoria*, modifying their length and content, and more importantly, altering their meaning by inserting them within a different and much more complex literary context.

Cántico cósmico is a continuation of Cardenal’s literary reworkings of biblical texts, as seen earlier in his *Salmos* (1967), which contains a series of poems echoing David’s Old Testament *Psalms*, and *El Evangelio de Solentiname* (1975), this latter text being a transcription of interpretations made within the Solentiname commune of the biblical Gospels of the New Testament. In *Cántico cósmico*, the poet rewrites the biblical story of creation and interweaves elements of the *Song of Songs of Solomon* (also known as *Canticles*), incorporating himself and

⁷²Ruth A. Kauffmann maintains that “the selection of the heading ‘Cantiga’ provides a literary backdrop for the work, bringing to mind the *Cantigas de Santa María* of the thirteenth century Castilian king, Alfonso X. Cardenal thus suggests a literary identification with Alfonso X, the politician/king who was also historian, lawyer, astronomist and poet,” providing yet another interesting observation regarding the vast intertextual character of Cardenal’s opus (3).

Nicaraguan history within the larger context of world history, and the overall history and evolution of the universe. He employs scientific theories, such as the Big Bang theory, which had become increasingly accepted throughout the twentieth century by physicists and astronomers, and weaves them throughout his verse, giving his moral argument and metaphysical contemplations a seemingly concrete, objective foundation.⁷³ The Big Bang theory and quantum physics figure predominantly in the metaphysical musings of *Cántico cósmico*. The former posits a measurable beginning to the universe, an assumption that provides an intersection between science and religious notions of a divine creator, while the latter adds an intrinsic unknown value to the universe, the immeasurable possibility that multiple realities exist simultaneously and that not all phenomena in the universe are governed by consistent, measurable laws. He also contemplates the presence of dark matter in the universe, the existence of which heightens the notion that not all of reality is as it first appears.

The lyrical voice in *Cántico cósmico* acknowledges the difficulty of the canticle: “Como el cortador de diamantes / estudia antes muy bien su diamante. / Así yo también con *este cántico difícil* del cosmos” (288-9, emphasis added). However, he maintains that he contemplates the universe, not for the astronomers, but for the common man:

...Hasta convertirse en nuestro presente universo.

‘La elegante simplicidad de la cosmología del Big Bang.’

⁷³In 1964, researchers Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were able to identify the so-called “red shift” in solar radiation, indicating that the universe is expanding and thus provided the strongest evidence to date that verified the Big Bang theory (“Timeline”). Astronomers by the late 1970s began considering the Big Bang theory the “standard model,” and in 1978, both men were awarded the Nobel Prize in physics for their discovery (“People and Discoveries”). The first concrete observations of dark matter were made by American astronomer Vera Rubin during the 1970s and such observations continued throughout the 1980s (Johnson). Quantum theory was also developing throughout the twentieth century, based on a series of observations that matter exhibited both particle and wave qualities (Norton). In simple terms, quantum theory differs from deterministic physical theories in that it accepts probabilistic nature, that is, two or more possible parallel outcomes that might occur simultaneously when observing the physical phenomena of matter and energy (Schombert). Cardenal incorporates references and allusions to the Big Bang, dark matter, and quantum physics throughout *Cántico cósmico*.

¿Nació el espacio-tiempo para colapsar sin ningún plan objetivo
en el caos? Pregunto no a los cosmólogos
sino al hombre de la calle. (287, ellipsis in orig.)

Despite the thematic complexity of *Cántico cósmico*, Cardenal still writes in a style that is accessible to most readers and from this verse it is clear that the lyrical voice does not wish to enter the fray of astrophysical debates, but rather that his meditations regarding the universe have other intentions to convince large numbers of people of his conjectures.

The intertextual parallels between Cardenal's *Cántico cósmico* and the *Song of Songs of Solomon*, or *Canticle of Canticles*, of the *Old Testament* go beyond their similar titles to include literary content as well. Some scholars have interpreted this biblical anthology of poems allegorically, considering the male and female protagonists in *Song of Songs* who go through the rites of courtship in order to consummate their love as a parable to the relationship between God and Israel, or Christ and the human soul, in their respective roles of husband and wife (Neil 246). Cardenal describes his own conversion to Christianity and the love that exists between himself and God as being similar to courtship and matrimony:

En este mundo, mi amor a la mujer ha quedado insaciado para siempre. Tendrás que saciarlo Vos cuando sea nuestra boda. Vos tendrás que llenar este corazón vacío. . . . Yo había deseado tanto casarme. Pero no es que no tuviera nupcias, sino que tendría mejores nupcias, y mi alma suspiraba por ese día. Con el creador del sexo son esas bodas. . . . La intimidad con el Infinito, ¿cómo explicar cómo es? Es una unión dentro de uno, y sin sentirlo con los sentidos . . . Acostumbrado a una presencia que para los sentidos es nada, pero contento con esa nada porque en realidad no es una nada, sino que esa nada eres Tú. En esos momentos el alma

está desnuda. La siento sin ropa, como la esposa delante de su marido. (*Las insulas* 28-30)

It is in *Cántico cósmico* that the lyrical voice dually celebrates and laments his voluntary exile from female human companions in order to dedicate himself fully to God and to the creation of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Without the ability to consummate his love with a woman, his sexual energies and desires as a heterosexual man are instead funneled towards a literary conjugal union formed between himself and the feminized landscape and populace of Nicaragua in the wedding of revolution with the hopes of giving birth to a new man and a new society. In reference to this revolutionary marriage, the lyrical voice expresses his desire to nuptially unite with his land and his people: “Aquel día me desposé con mi pueblo (*Cántico cósmico* 390), no había revelado antes / mi obsesión por los lagos. / ¡Fijación! / Lo que a mí me costó renunciar a mi trópico / y más aún a mi lago. / ¿Lo revelaré ahora? / Lago como fijación” (109). Without the ability to bond in marriage with a woman, the lyrical voice seeks to wed himself to his people and land in revolution to give birth to a new society in harmony with the natural world. All living organisms, he maintains, seek unity with another to complete themselves, in a struggle towards self-realization to achieve perfect union: “Cada uno en busca de la otra mitad de uno mismo. / De la unidad perdida” (365). In borrowing from the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Cardenal finds unity in difference and seeks this dialectical fusion in revolution: “Unir lo diverso. / . . . Sexo dialéctico. / Diferenciación de la unión. / . . . Con la mayor diferenciación / la mayor unión” (248).⁷⁴ In much the same way that Cardenal fuses Marxist and Christian ideologies, Teilhard de Chardin applied evolutionary theory to Christianity and maintained that “[l]ove is unity in difference, where difference means a power to give to another that which the other does not

⁷⁴Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was a French philosopher, Jesuit priest, paleontologist, and geologist who had an immense philosophical influence on Ernesto Cardenal.

possess, and thus to draw the other to deeper union” (Sheets 459). Cardenal’s conception of Marxism is one of evolutionary cultural advancement; the Chardinian philosophy of unity in difference is well suited to Cardenal’s version of revolution/evolution within a diverse Nicaragua where he offers the masses that which they lack, both the capacity to achieve a revolutionary consciousness on their own and the ability to formulate and articulate their nationalist sentiments. In the previous discussion of the poems contained within *Vuelos de victoria* and the poet’s memoirs, it is evident that Cardenal is consciously engaged in efforts to deepen the consciousness of the peasantry and to inspire within them an appreciation for the beauty of their landscape and to encourage self-sacrifice for its liberation and protection.

The preceding paragraphs in this study highlight some of the important intertextual aspects of Cardenal’s *Cántico cósmico* and some of the more predominant themes that are woven into his lyrical contemplations, but the poet sheds little light in his memoirs regarding the choice of the word “cósmico” in his title, save a couple of comments found in *Vida perdida*. In describing his spiritual enlightenment and his inspiration to commit himself to God, he utilizes the term once: “Al hacer esa entrega sentí en mí un vacío que no tengo otra manera de calificarlo sino como «cósmico». La pobreza total dentro de mí. Estaba ya sin nada” (89). He returns to this theme of impoverishment in *Las insulas extrañas* as he expands upon the description of his religious conversion:

Pero en lo sexual soy pobre, un mendigo bajo un puente. Soy alguien a quien también se le aplica: ‘Bienaventurados los pobres.’ Un poeta obsesionado por el amor: sin una mirada, un beso, un pecho de mujer donde reclinar la cabeza. (31)

Thus, “cosmic” for Cardenal could be seen as the emptiness or void, the yearning that one feels to love and to be loved in a transcendent sense of the term, a thematic interpretation which melds

well with the content matter of *Cántico cósmico* and its intertextual relationship with the *Song of Songs*. About these biblical poems, Carl W. Ernst has written the following observation:

[T]he *Song of Songs* tells us in powerfully seductive images of the passionate longing of young lovers . . . [y]et in the Middle Ages, the love poetry of the text held a deep fascination for monks and nuns. This erotic masterpiece has always carried with it something more than merely a sensual attraction. Christian mystics used its language to express their longing for God. (Ernst)

For Ernst, the *Song of Songs* taps into the paradox and controversies over the relationship between physical and spiritual love. He poses several key questions surrounding this paradox that have inspired philosophers, mystics, and writers for years:

The problem of love is as old as humanity. Those who don't have it want it, and those who have it complain about it. Is love just a function of sexual desire? Is it something spiritual that transcends the body? Or is it somehow caught in between body and soul? . . . Plato in his *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* created powerful visions of the origin of love, as something that exists on both earthly and heavenly planes. In his view, true eros begins in love of the body, but it ends in a philosophical attraction to the transcendent essence. (Ernst)

The use of Cardenal's term "cósmico" then could be considered a reference to this place between sensual love of the body (material) and divine love of the soul (spirit, idea, heaven).⁷⁵ In his euphoric fascination of insurrectionary advances viewed from an airplane in "Luces," as seen earlier, this interstellar space between Nicaragua and the stars symbolizes the poet's position

⁷⁵Cardenal himself makes this direct connection between the "cosmic" and the *Song of Songs* in his memoirs when describing the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani: "[Y]o lo que podía escribir serían meditaciones místicas, comentarios sobre *El cantar de los cantares*, o alguna obra de carácter cósmico" (*Vida perdida* 179).

“caught between body and soul” to use Ernst’s words. This motif of interim space is certainly very prevalent on the pages of *Cántico cósmico*, as the following examples illustrate:

El cuerpo humano exactamente en mitad del microcosmos y el cosmos. . . .

.....

La raíz [del maíz] atraída por la tierra

el tallo atraído por el cielo. . . .

.....

La atracción de la tierra hunde a las raíces

y la atracción del sol levanta los tallos.

Y nosotros también como plantas, entre la tierra y la luz. (43, 71, 246).

Cardenal, too, is attracted to sensual material pleasures and is tempted to seek Earthly love, but has denied himself this route, opting instead to seek the transcendence of God’s love. “Cosmic” describes this space in between the attractions, the gap the poet seeks to bridge with his verse.

The term “cósmico” and Cardenal’s description of feeling “un vacío,” or emptiness, during his experience of enlightenment also establishes a connection between the title and content matter of *Cántico cósmico* and Thomas Merton’s influence over the poet, in particular, his melding of Christianity with Zen Buddhism.⁷⁶ The concept of “emptiness” is an important tenet in all Buddhist teachings and often misunderstood in the West to mean complete nothingness. Lewis Richmond clarifies this point as follows:

⁷⁶Describing his experience studying under Merton at Gethsemani, Cardenal writes:

Al final resultó que me enseñó a ser como él, en quien la vida espiritual no estaba separada de ningún otro interés humano. Lo que Merton me enseñó, y que no hubiera podido de la mística clásica, es que mi vida era la única «vida espiritual» que yo podía tener y no otra. [. . .]

Me parece también que esto era una enseñanza zen. Por ese tiempo Merton estaba descubriendo el zen. Empezaba a leer unos libros de zen que había pedido prestados a algunas bibliotecas. Me habló a mí algo de zen, pero poco. Si él me daba una enseñanza zen conscientemente o inconscientemente, no lo sé. Pero era zen. El enseñarme la vida espiritual sin hablarme de la vida espiritual, era zen. (*Vida perdida* 174-5)

The “Heart Sutra” says, “all phenomena in their own-being are empty.” It doesn’t say “all phenomena are empty.” This distinction is vital. “Own-being” means separate independent existence. The passage means that nothing we see or hear (or are) stands alone; everything is a tentative expression of one seamless, ever-changing landscape. So though no individual person or thing has any permanent, fixed identity, everything taken together is what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “interbeing.” This term embraces the positive aspect of emptiness as it is lived and acted by a person of wisdom -- with its sense of connection, compassion and love.

This interpretation adds complexity to the nuances of the term “cósmico” as Ernesto Cardenal uses it to title his epic poem and is also accurate with respect to the thematic content of the verse in describing the unity of all things: “Todos los seres somos de la misma esencia, / compuestos de las mismas partículas elementales” (41). Where the ecological harmony of Nicaragua was the principal focus of his earlier works, such as “Canto nacional,” the poet focuses in *Cántico cósmico* on the entire Earth, described as one organism, of which Nicaragua is but one part, where nothing grows without the other: “Tierra que es sencillamente la mayor criatura viviente de la Tierra. / Siendo todos los seres vivos solamente / parte de la vasta entidad, del total organismo” (80). With the Big Bang as its origin, this unity in diversity expands to include the entire universe: “Macrocosmo y microcosmo son unidades inseparables. / El todo sostiene a las partes que a su vez son el todo. Lo cósmico y lo atómico son lo mismo. / Existe una unidad en el universo más allá de su uniformidad, / la unidad de que sin todo no puede existir nada” (184). Cardenal holistically views the interconnectedness of the universe and simultaneously searches,

as Ruth A. Kauffmann points out, for God and for his people. In analyzing a verse taken from “Cantiga 42” (“Un no sé qué que quedan”), she makes the following observation:

To possess God is to possess the “GRAN NADA”: “Ser poseído y poseerte mi GRAN NADA/ GRAN NADA amada” . . . Granada, the fruit of fecundity, is metonymically split to incorporate both the Great Nothing, the God as spirit without material substance, and the people of Granada, Cardenal’s place of birth, and here symbolic for all the people of Nicaragua. GRAN NADA is simultaneously the desire for God and the desire for community. (10)

Emptiness, as per the previous Buddhist interpretation pertaining to the connection of all things, and the love and desire to seek communion with this whole, come together in Kauffmann’s astute reading of this passage. I would argue, however, that this wordplay between GRAN NADA / Granada not only symbolically refers to the people of Nicaragua, but the material and ecological natural body of nation. In foregoing passions of the flesh, Cardenal has sought to figuratively inseminate the superimposed, fertile, and synergetic dyad *campesino* / *tierra* with his ideas using his verse as a medium for this intercourse. “Cosmos” can be seen as the communion between the poet and the GRAN NADA/Granada in these terms.

Sociologist Douglas Porpora offers another perspective which is useful for this analysis of other possible interpretations of the term “cósmico”. For him, to view the universe as “cosmos” is to create order and meaning from chaos, to fight alienation and to imbue the trials and tribulations of our daily lives with a greater purpose. Referring to the work of comparative religion scholar Mircea Eliade, Porpora writes:

[T]he cosmos must be understood in relation to its correlative concept, chaos. To cosmologize the world, Eliade (1987) writes, is to consecrate it, to endow it with

sacred or ultimate meaning. To speak of cosmos then is to speak of the universe as a meaningful place in which each of us has our own meaningful place.⁷⁷ (244)

In a metaphysical, spiritual, or religious context, this reading of the term “cosmos” fits well thematically with Cardenal’s verse. Religious narratives in general can be seen as humanity’s attempt to organize and find meaning in an otherwise incomprehensible universe. Cardenal’s Roman Catholic leanings make his poetry particularly open to mystical interpretations. He certainly does augment the tension between order and chaos in *Cántico cósmico*, juxtaposing such contradictory phenomena as entropy and biological evolution to emphasize the unknowable and unpredictable qualities of the universe, thus highlighting the impossibility of completely comprehending the essence of God. The lyrical voice in *Cántico cósmico* depicts his cantos as a phenomenon that emanates naturally from this highly complex and contradictory universe:

Así los cuantos:

como no hay orden en estos cantos.

.....

Si el poema es poco congruente

su tema el cosmos es menos congruente.

.....

(como de un caos de notas del Dios de los primitivos,

apuntes, papelitos chiquititos,

puede salir este canto). (240, 398-9, 409)

⁷⁷See Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.

Much in the same way that the lyrical voice surges from the harmonious Nicaraguan ecological web of life in “Canto nacional,” *Cántico cósmico* emerges naturally from the very landscape/starscape that it describes.

While the religious connotations of “cosmos” as per Porpora’s definition (giving meaning to an otherwise meaningless universe) may seem obvious, analysis of the term in autobiographical, political, or historical contexts seem less common among critics of Cardenal’s writing. Kauffmann has pointed to Cardenal’s poetic inclusion of “fundamentally contradictory” elements of the universe and argues that “[b]ecause of these inherent contradictions that often move beyond the grasp of human reasoning, it is impossible to provide simplistic solutions to the need to envision new paths for the future” (4). Although she does not explicitly define “future” as that which is to follow the imminent demise of the Sandinista revolution in historic terms, it is important to make that distinction here. The poet seems particularly anxious about the fate and legacy of his verse given the political, social, and historic uncertainties of the moment in which he writes. He constructs his poem with the same contradictory and cyclical premises that he witnesses in the universe, thus evading potentially simplistic analyses and critiques of his work.

El problema de este poema es que como el universo

se expanda indefinidamente

o colapse sobre si (sic) mismo.

.....

Dos curvaturas, dice Chardin,

la redondez de la tierra y la convergencia de las mentes

en esta tierra. Dentro de la gran curvatura, el universo.

El Cántico no tiene fin.

Es decir, el tema del poema no termina. (291, 408)

Within the framework of Darwinian evolution in which strength is found in diversity, and the Chardinian concept of unity in difference, Cardenal aims to construct *Cántico cósmico* as a complex and multi-faceted poem that is viable and enduring in a variety of different contexts and readings. Here the lyrical voice expresses concern, not only about the inconclusive nature of the topic matter expressed within but also the longevity and legacy of the poem itself. As Kauffmann points out in her quote, he is indeed preoccupied with the future, not only that of mankind, Nicaragua, or the earth on a grander scale, but with his own self-preservation. When he recounts the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in his memoirs, he explicitly describes his worried reaction to events in decidedly frank language:

Cómo era posible que el pueblo se hubiera volteado contra nosotros, que hubieran rechazado la revolución. Sentía también que mi poesía se venía abajo. Por años me había dedicado a cantar la revolución; primero anunciándola, antes que aconteciera; después celebrando su triunfo en mi libro *Vuelos de victoria*. ¿En qué quedaba ahora toda esa poesía? (*La revolución perdida* 448)

In the wake of the Sandinista downfall, Cardenal's individual meaning and purpose after years of dedication and sacrifice for the revolutionary cause suddenly fades. As per Porpora's definition, the "cósmico" of Cardenal's *Cántico cósmico* is the poet's rewriting of his universe to reinstate the meaning and purpose of his life in the face of uncertainty. He resolves his concern for the fate of his poetry, particularly his book *Vuelos de victoria*, by inserting the collection within the different and more complex literary context of *Cántico cósmico*. If this resolution is analogous to the poet's own struggle for self-preservation, it can be said that he likewise inserts himself within a different context or place to rework the meaning and purpose of himself and his own existence.

In the passage above cited from his memoirs, note how the poet equates the first person plural pronoun “nosotros” with “la revolución” and “mi poesía.” In *Cántico cósmico*, he effectively retools the meaning of the revolution and his poetry within a revised history of the universe in an attempt to preserve his own legacy.

Some critics have noted Cardenal’s optimistic worldview and his ability to funnel his energies into the “creation of a new vision for a utopian society” (Kauffmann 14). Even the reviews on the book cover for the English translation by John Lyons, such as this one from Raul Niño of ALA *Booklist*, highlight the positive tone of the poem contained within:

[Ernesto Cardenal’s] *Cosmic Canticle* arrives like songs from the darkness, questioning who we are and where we came from and keeping the tradition of the long poem alive. From its first cantiga, “Big Bang,” . . . to the here-and-now of later cantigas, he sees signs of hope . . . This is, then, a book of faith—faith in humanity and in a creator. As the work of an ordained priest, this comes as no surprise, although Cardenal’s continuing impulse to write such stunning poetry is ever a wonderful surprise.

The Nicaraguan poet does celebrate the unity of all things in this epic poem, as demonstrated when he writes, “[l]a unidad de la humanidad y la unión / con lo que la rodea” (212). But ultimately, this hopeful unity is offset by a melancholy that pervades the text. The lyrical voice openly confesses his despair and acknowledges that his words are conceived to console: “El propósito de mi Cántico es dar consuelo. / También para mí mismo este consuelo. / Tal vez más” (388). These sentiments coincide with Cardenal’s purported apprehension about his own meaning and purpose as a result of personal and historical events. Throughout *Cántico cósmico*, he emphasizes unity in the face of social and political disjuncture and increasing personal

alienation precisely to mitigate fears of his own potential irrelevance. Why is the poet so preoccupied with his legacy and the fate of his poetry? As the Sandinista revolution gradually unravels throughout the 1980s, Cardenal finds himself increasingly estranged ideologically, socially, politically, and artistically. A panoramic scan of Cardenal's life and times reveals a history marked more prominently by division than by union, a trend exacerbated during the decade of Sandinista rule that ultimately leads to their electoral defeat in 1990. By this time, the poet has added to his clerical vow of celibacy (1) a divorce from traditional social class norms, (2) familial separation, and (3) vocational frustrations, as well as (4) estrangement from the Catholic Church, (5) from government leaders, and most importantly, (6) from the people and the land with which he has sought to establish a meaningful bond in lieu of his abstention from sexual intimacy. It is essential to briefly document here these schisms and sources of alienation in Cardenal's life.

First, regarding his career, the poet harbors hope of resuscitating his community at Solentiname and expresses his desire to return to his island after the revolutionary triumph in 1979, but reluctantly accepts a government post as Minister of Culture, an event that he recalls in his memoirs:

Por tercera vez me preguntó, diciéndome que dijera sí o no, y me vi obligado a decir: "Sí acepto". Yo había pensado que al triunfar la revolución volvería a mi retiro de Solentiname. ¿Qué otra cosa podría hacer? . . . Pero cuando fui propuesto pensé que podría iniciar cosas interesantes como ministro de Cultura, y estar sólo seis meses, o tal vez un año, y después renunciar. Muy equivocado estaba, y me tuve que quedar todo el tiempo mientras hubo revolución. (*La revolución perdida* 206)

His lack of enthusiasm is evident from this recollection. Internal squabbles within the government, particularly between Cardenal and the wife of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega, Rosario Murillo exacerbate the difficulties that the poet faces in fulfilling the duties of his governmental post and also alienates him further. According to his memoirs, Rosario Murillo has a hand in eliminating the Minister of Culture and appropriating the Museum of Art and the Museum of Sandino. She is a vociferous critique of Cardenal's pet project, the poetry workshops, and eventually succeeds in doing away with them. Cardenal attributes Murillo's virulent attacks on him and his ministry to her jealousy of his post, but maintains that he had to tolerate such behavior for the good of the revolution: "Yo tuve que aguantar estas cosas por la revolución, que era tan bella" (374). Her opposition to Cardenal's efforts is analogous to public emasculation, a topic that I will discuss in the pages that follow.

Regarding his vocation as poet, his decision to accept the position as Minister of Culture following the destruction of Solentiname in 1977 and the poet's subsequent exile, ensures his permanent physical separation from his beloved island refuge as well as increasing alienation from the art of writing. He finds himself unable to write as freely as he would like, a topic which surfaces in his verse.⁷⁸ The eventual elimination of the Ministry of Culture instigated by Rosario

⁷⁸This can be seen in his poem, "Reflexiones de un ministro," in which he writes:

Quisiera quedarme aquí
para observar mejor este gato,
.....
Dice Davenport de Marianne Moore: "el poeta
está más interesado en la avestruz
que el ornitólogo
que escribió *Avestruz*
en la *Enciclopedia Británica*."
Yo voy pensando en el gato y Marianne Moore.
No more:
ya he entrado a la embajada iluminada
y saludo al Señor Embajador. (*Vuelos de victoria* 62)

Due to obligations that he must carry out as minister, the poet is not able to take time to ponder and gaze curiously at the world around him and must forego daily opportunities that present themselves, symbolized here by a cat.

Murillo later frees him to continue writing, albeit with a diminished sense of purpose and an aftertaste of resentment:

Cuando se perdieron las elecciones ya no había Ministerio de Cultura porque la Rosario Murillo había acabado con él. Ella siempre había querido ser ministra de Cultura, pero siendo su marido presidente, era bastante feo. . . . En realidad se creó para mí otro cargo en el que supuestamente yo seguía rectoreando la cultura de Nicaragua, y ese cargo fue el de presidente de Consejo Nacional de Cultura, pero fue más que todo honorífico. Yo lo acepté sin molestia porque me liberaban de ese cargo burocrático, y ya entonces pude dedicar casi todo mi tiempo a terminar el *Cántico cósmico*. (*La revolución perdida* 330)

This correlation between the writing of Cardenal's epic poem and the historical and autobiographical context in which he produces his verse are very important to the assumption made here that these events had a profound influence on the representation of place in the final draft of his work.

On another front, Cardenal briefly notes further disunity in autobiographical terms, this time in regards to familial ties. In *Vida perdida*, he acknowledges genealogical ties with the Somozas, expressing shame for this lineage connecting him to the dictators while voicing admiration for Bernabé Somoza, his great-great-grandfather who allegedly fought valiantly for the poor and downtrodden. In categorizing this genealogy, the poet writes, "Les diré que para mí es infamante el tener parentesco con los tiranos Somoza, pero no lo es el tenerlo con don Bernabé Somoza" (425). In his version of events, he openly communicates a sense of humiliation due to his ties to tyranny while he simultaneously glorifies his familial lineage to more heroic

and praiseworthy relatives, genealogically rooting communism and class struggle to his autobiographical past.

Ernesto Cardenal is also increasingly estranged from the Catholic Church as the relationship between the Sandinista leadership and Nicaraguan Cardinal (now Archbishop) Miguel Obando y Bravo becomes strained and the poet is ostracized for occupying a government post despite Vatican policy. In 1983, Cardenal is publicly admonished by Pope John Paul II during the latter's official visit to Nicaragua. Cardenal vividly describes this humiliating moment in his memoirs:

De las primeras cosas del Papa cuando pisó suelo nicaragüense fue la humillación pública que me hizo en el aeropuerto enfrente de todas las cámaras de televisión. . . . [C]uando se acercó donde mí yo hice lo que en ese caso había previsto hacer, . . . y fue quitarme reverentemente la boina y doblar la rodilla para besarle el anillo. No permitió él que se lo besara y blandiendo el dedo como si fuera un bastón me dijo en tono de reproche: “Usted debe regularizar su situación”. Como no contesté nada, volvió a repetir la brusca admonición.

Mientras enfocaban todas las cámaras del mundo. (*La revolución perdida* 289)

Even though Cardenal denies having been traumatized by these sanctions on the part of the Vatican, his public humiliation, the Pope's open contempt for the Sandinista revolution, and the papal homily countering Cardenal's own vision of Church unity was clearly devastating to him and akin to a publicized emasculation.⁷⁹

⁷⁹In his memoirs, he describes the papal homily in depth and the entire scandal surrounding the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1983. In regards to the topic of unity, he writes:

El tema de la homilía papal fue el de la unidad de la Iglesia, lo que quería decir un ataque a la llamada “Iglesia popular”, o también “Iglesia paralela”: los cristianos revolucionarios a los que se acusaba de querer destruir esa unidad. (293)

Most importantly, however, is the imperial meddling in the internal affairs of Nicaragua at the hands of the Reagan administration, the CIA, and US-backed Contras, made up predominantly of Nicaraguan peasants, which undermines any semblance of national unity and this reactionary presence alarmingly weakens Cardenal's poeticized narrative of Nicaraguan solidarity and ecological harmony. The poet's response to this infringement upon the integrity of his revolutionary vision in *Cántico cósmico* is grounded in geographical terms as he searches for new terrain to reformulate his blueprint. Edward Said has elaborated on the importance of geography in the anti-imperialist imaginary and his observations are very relevant to this analysis of Cardenal's work:

Now if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism it is the primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. . . . [I]mperialism . . . achieves the domination, classification, and universal commodification of all space, under the aegis of the metropolitan center. . . . To the imagination of anti-imperialism, our space at home in the peripheries has been usurped and put to use by outsiders for their purpose. It is therefore necessary to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover, a third nature, which is not pristine and prehistorical . . . but one that derives historically and abductively from the deprivations of the present. This impulse then is what we might call cartographic . . . ("Yeats" 77-9)

The application of Said's argument to *Cántico cósmico* opens another possible avenue of interpretation pertaining to Cardenal's poetic allusions to the cosmos and helps to explain the tendency of the lyrical voice to work "like a camera lens, zooming [in] and panning out" beyond Nicaraguan territory and the earth to encompass the entire universe (Murphy, "Poetic Politics" 214). First nudged into this realm by the Apollo 11 mission as seen in "Oráculo sobre Managua" (1973), the lyrical voice assumes an exilic stance amongst the stars by rooting himself in this third nature, a higher ground in both moral and geographic terms from which he is better able to project his voice. Via this poetic exile, Cardenal redefines his identity as he vies to retain or gain political influence in a changing climate. Martha Giménez has offered several astute observations regarding exile that are applicable here:

Exile is . . . always . . . a political construction and, as such, an expression of political power. . . . [It] is the effect of conscious decisions, by those who expel their enemies, those who are expelled, or those who leave even if the authorities let them be. Whether imposed or voluntarily chosen, exile in this sense is a condition, a real location in the political, social and geographical space. . . . Those who find themselves thus situated know and embrace exile as their status and their role, as their place in history, because it is their fate, who they are, and they know it.

Cardenal forges his identity by capitalizing on this exilic positionality and his poetic journey through the cosmos can be seen as being metaphorically akin to expulsion or withdrawal from a space once again occupied by empire and its surrogates and a political establishment increasingly infected by corruption.⁸⁰ As such, he avoids complicity with the downward trajectory of the

⁸⁰ In his memoirs, Cardenal emphasizes this point regarding corruption of the Sandinista leadership:

Sandinista project that he once prophesized to be the construction of the Kingdom of God on earth. In *Cántico cósmico*, he portrays communism as being one step closer towards, albeit not the attainment of, “the ultimate fulfillment of God’s kingdom” (Kauffmann 4).

Giménez also notes the important connection between exile and place in the construction of identity, a crucial point in this analysis of Cardenal’s poetry:

Exile highlights the significance of place in the formation of everyone’s identities . . . Exile is both a particular phenomenon, referring to the effects upon individuals and collectivities of political struggles, and a universal phenomena (sic) that captures, in a powerful metaphor, the psychological and emotional effects of loss of that which anchors individuals in space, both literally and figuratively. Exile is also about the loss of roots, the loss of place, the loss of one’s bearings in the world. Edward Said writes that it is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.”

This observation coincides remarkably with the lament and consolation encountered in *Cántico cósmico*, as noted earlier, as well as the poet’s attempt to reestablish order in an increasingly chaotic place. Salman Rushdie has noted the efforts made by emigrants to salvage that from which s/he has been deprived, including bygone days, and the anguish that such a separation causes: “. . . [E]xiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back . . . [I]t may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all

Muchos llegamos a la conclusión de que fue mejor que hubiéramos perdido unas elecciones y entregado el poder honrosamente, en vez de ser derrocados por el pueblo en forma vergonzosa; porque la crisis económica que teníamos el Frente Sandinista no la iba a poder resolver, dado que no cesaría el hostigamiento de los Estados Unidos. Una razón más hemos tenido también después para alegrarnos de la pérdida de las elecciones, y fue al ver la corrupción en que cayeron los principales dirigentes. (*La revolución perdida* 448)

emigrated” (10, 12). He goes on to describe the role of literature in finding new ways to bridge the gap separating an exiled individual from his/her homeland and allowing him/her to return to this place via a new door of entry: “If literature is in part the business of finding new angles to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles” (15). This observation on the part of Rushdie resonates within Cardenal’s universe of *Cántico cósmico* where going far means returning: “[i]r lejos es volver” (167). Cardenal’s exilic position, whether forced upon him or self-imposed, grants the poet the opportunity to reformulate place usurped both by imperial narratives and its physical forays into Nicaraguan space. In other words, by capitalizing on his exilic vantage point, the poet is able to vie for space increasingly denied him.

Cardenal’s exile begins voluntarily as he foregoes sexual intimacy and matrimony with female human companions, and divorces himself from social class. He addresses this latter estrangement in his memoirs, making the connection between classist exile and revolution: “Les cuento que [el Club Social de Granada] había sido mi club cuando yo era burgués. Nunca lo fui a gusto, y traicioné a mi clase, como muchos, muchos otros, lo hicieron en la revolución” (*La revolución perdida* 232). In *Vida perdida*, he explicitly makes the connection between revolution, class, and celibacy, maintaining that had he not taken a vow of abstinence, he would never have become a revolutionary militant:

[S]in este error de escoger el celibato yo no hubiera sido tampoco revolucionario. Habría sido burgués. Ése era el rumbo que llevaba mi vida. Ante la Revolución Sandinista habría sido a lo sumo un intelectual simpatizante del sandinismo, no un militante revolucionario. Y como aquellos santos que han dicho que de no ser

religiosos habrían estado en peligro de ir al infierno, yo digo lo mismo
adecuándolo a nuestra mentalidad actual: que habría sido burgués. (77)

If one returns to the premise that Cardenal voluntarily goes into “exile” and abstains from the pleasures of the flesh in order to, in exchange, inculcate the *campesino* / *tierra* dyad with his revolutionary vision via his literary revelations, then the subsequent constraints placed upon the consummation of this relationship at the hands of Reagan and the Contras are akin to castration and emasculation, a state which the poet seeks to remedy. In *Cántico cósmico*, he undermines the fertility of the U.S. landscape and implicates the impotence of capitalism with his own inability to flourish, symbolized by a dwarf and unproductive banana tree, uprooted from place and transplanted to the United States:

En la trapa yanki no había lagos
sólo estanques artificiales
llamados *lakes*.

Y un banana enano, requeneto, incapaz
de dar banano en su exilio
(igual que yo: pensaba yo). (109)

.....

—no conviene que el hombre esté solo—
con soledad obligatoria. O si se quiere voluntaria.
Como aquel banana desmirriado del monasterio
junto al refectorio.

Con los lagos artificiales. Llamados “lagos”.

Parece que fue banano la fruta de los primeros padres

y no manzana. Los primates son del trópico. (109, 111)

The comparison here is, of course, with the more fertile and “authentic” natural paradise of Solentiname and its surrounding lakes, legitimate bodies of water which are oft repeated landmarks in the poet’s verse. Evolution and productivity emanate from the abundant and fruitful tropics, but in exile, such potential is obstructed. The original exile to which the poet refers is his stay at the Trappist monastery in Kentucky during the 1950s. After being banished in 1977 from Solentiname following its destruction at the hands of the National Guard, he again finds himself faced with ideological exile as Reagan maneuvers to overthrow the Sandinista government and threatens to uproot ideas from place or to prevent these ideas from taking root at all. Cardenal seeks to emasculate the U.S. president, again using landscape and satirizing the latter’s unproductive connection to it:

El presidente de la Corporación los weekends corta leña

.....

Reagan estaba cortando árboles en el Rancho del Cielo.

Y tuvo una inspiración.

Recordando la película *Star Wars* dirigida por George Lucas.

Había estado preocupado por el pleito entre obispos y misiles.

Los avances del movimiento por la paz.

.....

La Guerra de las Galaxias es para la paz dijo Reagan. (183, 267)

The fruitless and comedic futility of the president’s favorite pastime, cutting brush, is a metaphor for both his disconnect from the natural environment and his dearth of ideas. Inspiration for Reagan comes from the superficiality of Hollywood cinema, not the stars in the sky from which

Cardenal derives his poetic genius. U.S. policy is mapped in windowless and starless corridors and is thus sterile, directionless, and responsible for devastation, rather than creation, as exemplified by Reagan's chopping of trees.

En un sótano sin ventanas del ala occidental de la Casa Blanca

todo lleno de rótulos: Top Secret

Top Secret

TOP SECRET

cada noche están los expertos

sótano sin estrellas

armando un cuadro del globo terráqueo en las últimas 24 horas

con fragmentos de información de todas sus fuentes

satélites que miraron China

espías en Polonia

diplomáticos en la Plaza Roja

asesores de la contra en la frontera de Honduras

juntando todo en un folder negro para el presidente

que lo hallará en su escritorio después del desayuno al día siguiente

los destinos del globo cada día dependientes

de lo armado en el sótano sin ventanas noche a noche

y puesto cada noche en la mesa de Reagan

en el folder negro. (222)

The entire globe is influenced by Reagan and his team of advisors who fail to contemplate the night sky and the natural world and thus display an utter lack of knowledge, understanding, and judgment in regards to the world around them. In hatching plans devoid of real contact with the universe, Reagan, with his "cowboy-film politics," and his cronies fail to comprehend the

essence of Nicaragua, as evidenced by the CIA director's faulty pronunciation, leading to misguided policies such as those sending Contra advisors to the Honduran border: "Atacar Nic-a-wha-wha" dijo el director de la CIA / no pudiendo pronunciar Nicaragua como usted y yo" (276).⁸¹ These impotent men contrast with Cardenal who gazes at the stars from his bed at night and is inspired to conceive fertile poetry that reflects the beauty of creation.⁸²

Reagan's superficial and unproductive connection with the natural world, as humorously symbolized by his chopping of wood, is indicative of his lack of ideas: "Reagan que es casi como un loro / que repite lo que le dicen. / Digo casi como un loro / porque no es un loro propiamente, tiene unas ideas, / pero unas pocas ideas fijas, pequeñas" (330). He is not wedded to God's creation, the natural world, and thus is incapable of producing an "offspring" of ideas, like an emasculated male unable to conceive a child with a fertile woman: "su Jerusalén Celestial de celuloide / con el coro de las cajas registradoras, / a quien tuvo, según se dijo, 1.000 vírgenes en Hollywood / y ningún hijo" (229). The poet reasserts his masculinity by undercutting that of the U.S. president. He, unlike Reagan, has conceived a wealth of ideas and profound realizations of which the very existence of *Cántico cósmico* serves as a testament. The repeated references to

⁸¹Notice the similarity here with Vanderbilt's faulty pronunciation in "Canto nacional," as noted in Chapter 2 of this analysis: "Vanderbilt no sabía decir Nicaragua. Decía *Nicaraguey*" (69, emphasis added).

⁸²The sailor captured by the Contras and thrown into the sea in *Cántico cósmico* is in conversation with the ocean with which he has forged a close working relationship and thus a mutual understanding. He contrasts with the Contra guerrillas who follow a policy guided by men who are disconnected from the earth and therefore blindly sow destruction unbeknownst to them:

El marinero lanzado de noche al agua por los contras
 --sabiendo él que a 38 brazadas de profundidad—
 se quedó escondido en la oscuridad con su tabla. Ahora
 se sumerge en sus recuerdos:
 "A las 3 me orienté con el lucero que le dicen el Haragán.
 Al salir el sol, flotaba perdido tras nadar y nadar.
 Vi tumbos en el mar de la altura de un cocotero.
 Le hablé al mar: ¿Por qué me maltratas? Déjame dormir
 que eso es lo que quiero. Y al instante se calmó.
 Cuando uno vive en el mar se trata de tú a tú con el océano.
 Dormí como media hora. Volvieron los tumbos y el oleaje
 como para despertarme, como para recibir el aviso del mar,
 para decirme: allí están los barcos." (82)

the stars and the natural landscape highlight his source of inspiration and evolution, differentiating himself from Reagan and the starless, artificial, and disconnected corridors in which the power mongers of the Washington establishment dwell.

It is important to note that Cardenal also views Pope John Paul II as being one of the Nicaraguan revolution's two main adversaries, the first being Ronald Reagan, as indicated here in a quote from Cardenal's memoirs and attributed to José Coronel Urtecho with whom the poet voices his agreement: “Lo que más hace resaltar la importancia mundial de la revolución de Nicaragua es que sus dos principales adversarios sean Reagan y el Papa” (*La revolución perdida* 306). Cardenal makes significant efforts in *Cántico cósmico* to criticize the Vatican represented by Pope John Paul II in much the same way that he negatively portrays Reagan, because, as he writes in his memoirs, “la política del Vaticano hacia Nicaragua coincidía con la del presidente Reagan” (*La revolución perdida* 309). In addition to describing the Roman Catholic hierarchy as “viejas loras en sus púlpitos” (*Cántico cósmico* 345), he frames their reactionary politics in counterevolutionary terms, suggesting that they are incapable of producing anything new:

Lo Nuevo expulsa a lo viejo,
lo nuevo emerge de lo viejo (Mao).
Pero en el Vaticano, vino viejo en odres viejos,
en odres tan viejos como la palabra odres.
Nos acusan por nuestros augurios triunfalistas.
¿Pero alguna vez ha habido un profeta conservador
o reaccionario? (*Cántico cósmico* 155)

Like Reagan and his dearth of ideas, the Pope and his Vatican are also stagnant and unable to fulfill the role of prophet like Cardenal whose poetic production revolutionizes language. The

lyrical voice in *Cántico cósmico* implies that the outdated words of the reactionary church are indicative of their antiquated ideas. Perhaps the poet seeks to redeem himself after the very public humiliation to which he was subjected at the hands of Pope John Paul II during the pontiff's visit to Nicaragua in 1983. It is more likely, however, that Cardenal is vying for control over the Pope as a symbol which has been used by reactionary forces as a divisive wedge to sway the allegiances of the Nicaraguan peasantry in the Contra war. Propaganda spread throughout the countryside in the 1980s included a mix of Protestantism and disinformation regarding the Pope's visit to Nicaragua in which the Sandinista crowd's reaction to Pope John Paul II's attacks against the revolution was classified as "un ultraje contra el sumo pontífice; . . . sacrilegio y . . . profanación de la misa papal" (*La revolución perdida* 295). Betsy Cohns and Patricia Hynds have noted that "the White House and the religious Right in the United States worked systematically to discredit the Sandinistas and to play up the divisions within the churches and between the churches and the government" (107), and Cardenal recognizes this theological character of the struggle.⁸³ He enters the fray to reframe symbols which threaten to fracture peasant support for the revolution: "La contra al irse / dejó regada propaganda de Cristo . . . A Mario lo agarraron como 30 contras / y lo fueron despacio, despacio, degollando, / la sangre cayendo sobre la propaganda de Cristo" (*Cántico cósmico* 281-2). Cardenal seeks to simultaneously emasculate Reagan and the Pope by demonstrating their mutual propensity towards destruction as he attempts to fend off his own imminent emasculation resulting from his exile from the Nicaraguan *campo* / *campesinos*.

In exile from Solentiname since 1977, the place in which many star-gazing references in *Cántico cósmico* are situated, and with revolutionary Nicaragua under siege during the 1980s,

⁸³"La guerra contra la revolución de Nicaragua fue también una guerra de carácter teológico" (*La revolución perdida* 307).

Cardenal takes to the stars, Said's "third nature," to construct a counter-discourse to several prevailing imperial narratives emanating from the United States at the time. The isolated islands of Solentiname once offered the Nicaraguan writer a clean slate to poeticize revolution without the encumbrances and inconveniences that would have presented themselves had he used a more historicized and politicized backdrop for his verse. In his memoirs, he describes Solentiname in terms that focus precisely on these aspects of the islands: "Solentiname estaba fuera de las rutas del progreso y fuera de las rutas del transporte y fuera de la historia, y hubiera estado fuera de la geografía si esto hubiera sido posible" (*Las islas* 91). Solentiname, of course, has a past, but was of little interest to explorers, conquistadores, and (neo)colonial powers. In exile, Cardenal finds a similar place in the galaxies from which to write, a frontier with an astrological history, but one not yet politicized or conquered by expanding imperial exploits. The irony of Reagan's "Star Wars" entering the lexicon of Cardenal's work lies precisely in the rhetorical war that the poet wages at the level of the stars against neocolonial discourse.⁸⁴ Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the poet enters this dimension as U.S. military initiatives, scientific discoveries, and popular culture, as evident by the success of Steven Spielberg's *Star Wars* trilogy, begin to increasingly occupy the imagination of a large segment of the world's population, similar to the Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969. The poet takes refuge in the universe which has largely escaped politicization, much like the islands of Solentiname on the margins of history, and utilizes science to speak from this realm with authority regarding the history of the origins of creation. From this vantage point, he offers poetic references of landscape that challenge the assertions emerging from U.S. intelligentsia.

⁸⁴ President Ronald Reagan proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative, or S.D.I., on March 23, 1983, during a televised address pertaining to national security. According to his plan, technology was to be developed to shield the United States from nuclear missile attack. Critics began to call this outlandish proposal "Star Wars," a name which gradually became a mainstream moniker for the initiative. ("The Learning Network")

In 1981, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Ronald Reagan's foreign policy advisor, and later, the first U.S. female ambassador to the United Nations, published an essay entitled, "The Hobbes Problem," in which she analyzes the situation explicitly in El Salvador but implicitly makes observations regarding all Central American nations, including Nicaragua. She is a fervent opponent of communism and is in favor of U.S. support for anti-communist governments in the region, even authoritarian regimes ("Jeane Kirkpatrick. biography"). In "The Hobbes Problem," Kirkpatrick notes the similarity between countries on the isthmus, claiming that the "Central American countries also share a good many social and economic characteristics" (511). Using El Salvador as an example, she makes assertions regarding human nature and the culture that has evolved to ensure "survival and success" (506), a generalization that includes Nicaragua by association. Most importantly, Kirkpatrick makes general pronouncements pertaining to the nature of man and roots her justification for U.S. intervention in the tenets of what appear to be a statement of scientific truth. She draws upon the writings of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) to make her case: "Hobbes argues that the war of each against all, which characterizes a society with no sovereign, *grows finally out of the competition for power rooted in the nature of man*" (508, emphasis added). In this worldview, man is competitive by nature, not cooperative, a trait which requires effective subjugation on the part of an authoritarian ruler. Collective governing lacking a central ruling figure, the "sovereign" in Kirkpatrick's words, runs counter to the "nature of man," and, as such, is unsustainable and unstable, justifying a leader who is "willing to wield violence" to achieve control and stability (Grandin, *Empire's Workshop* 76). Greg Grandin quotes Kirkpatrick both to summarize her argument and to highlight the logic that girds her assertions: "Washington need[s] to think 'more realistically' about the course of action it pursue[s] in Latin America . . . 'Theories cut loose from experience are usually blinding

optimistic. They begin not from how things are but how they ought to be . . .” (77). This standard of “how things are” is anchored in Kirkpatrick’s authoritative assertion pertaining to the “nature of man,” a seemingly scientific and thus objective premise from which she launches her narrative. As Nancy Stepan reminds us, “science is always a social product and tends to reflect in general terms the political and social values of its times,” an observation that I employ here to expose the subjectivity of Kirkpatrick’s claims (73). Reagan’s advisor is, in fact, guilty of the same faulty reasoning used to justify colonial rule for centuries, which tend to turn political and ethical rights into biological arguments (65). Long utilized by colonizers to validate their intervention in foreign lands, science has served in the construction of races and genders to present them as “natural, biologically grounded entities, entities which render their members lesser or even non-individuals” (64). Even though Kirkpatrick is a political, not a biological scientist, she couches her argument in such terms, thus obscuring the ideology from which her presumptions originate. Her essay assumes a greater objective authority, because, as Stepan maintains, “statements about the nature of human beings made by scientists, acquire political weight precisely because of their supposed non-political nature” (68). By grounding her assertions in “nature,” Kirkpatrick gives the appearance that her statements are factual and based upon indisputable truths. Her argument also assumes that nature is static and unchanging, a belief that things are as they have always been and will continue being as they are today.

Cardenal’s entire epic can be seen as a repudiation of this viewpoint. He finds evidence in the stars that all matter has a cooperative, as opposed to a competitive, nature. He stresses unity, not division, as being the law of the universe. Cardenal asserts an alternative universalism here, one that counters the universals as espoused by Kirkpatrick.

En el universo todo es estructura

es decir, sociedad.

El átomo es sociedad,

la molécula es sociedad,

la célula es sociedad

el organismo es sociedad.

El hombre es sociedad.

La soledad que sufrimos es por ser sólo individuos.

La felicidad es los otros.

A las hienas les conviene más cazar en grupo

que cada una sola egoístamente.

La amiba separada

trata inmediatamente de acercarse al grupo.

Lo mismo las fuerzas eléctricas, o el tropismo o el amor.

Y del pensamiento, hacia el amor.

Adán solitario era infeliz

¡en el Paraíso! (154)

Unity encompasses all matter and beings of which the universe is comprised, from the atom, to the molecule, living cells, amoebas, hyenas, to man, and society. Without unity there is no survival, without union there is no freedom: “Temor a la union. Perdemos individualmente. / Pero no hay liberación humana sin la naturaleza” (328). Throughout *Cántico cósmico*, he utilizes atomic theory, astrophysics, science and “nature,” much as Kirkpatrick does, to paint the world in seemingly objective language. He acknowledges this necessity to couch his descriptions in scientific terms: “El conocimiento científico de la realidad es necesario al profeta” (191). At the

same time, he is also careful to depict this “reality” as dynamic, rejecting the notion of a static universe as does Kirkpatrick. For Cardenal, everything is a process, a constant state of change: “Después de todo, la vida es un proceso. / Todo es un proceso, / después de todo” (17). Reality is not, as Kirkpatrick suggests, unchanging, because nothing ever really “is” due to the constant motion observed in the universe. All matter is in flux; therefore existence is a process rather than being of a fixed, stationary, and stable nature:

En la material todo es movimiento, cambio,
“desde los cambios de lugar hasta el pensamiento”,
Desde el desplazamiento de partículas hasta los cambios sociales.
No hay cuerpo inmóvil.
La materia existe sólo en movimiento. O mejor:
el movimiento es la existencia de la materia.
Y no hay movimiento sino en el espacio y el tiempo. (157)

Without this movement or change, life would not exist:

Si los átomos fueran inmutables, tan sólo habría
un universo muerto.
Nada es ni no es, todo en proceso de ser. (170)

Humankind and all of the earth’s beings are objects of evolution’s advancements but also authors of this process:

La mano del hombre
lo hizo hombre. Como decir moldeándolo.
La parte del cuerpo humano que más lejos alcanza.
Perfeccionándose en las ramas de los árboles

haciéndose más y más hábil hasta poder

trabajar, transformar (transformar

nos transforma)

.....

Llamados a ser apasionados del cambio

de una Evolución irreversible . . .

La mano hizo el trabajo, como el trabajo la mano

.....

Producto del trabajo del hombre fue el hombre.

El primer producto del trabajo fue la mano

y el hombre es hecho por la mano del hombre.

Y el trabajo hizo al hombre sociedad de hombre

y haciéndolo sociedad lo hizo hablar. (97-8)

This verse contradicts Kirkpatrick's idea that one must base him/herself in a static reality and make decisions based on the immutable quality that characterizes man's "nature." Evolutionary advancement in *Cántico cósmico* occurs precisely because matter and beings in the universe strive for what "ought to be" to use Kirkpatrick's own words. It is obvious to the poet, especially given the scientific findings to date, that the universe does not merely consist of motionless objects in some stagnant realm. In addition, change and evolution are not just chemical and biological phenomena in Cardenal's universe, but cultural as well. With the ability to think, the capability to learn has also evolved and mankind has become able to grasp and, perhaps more importantly, dream of new ideas and concepts: "El hombre, animal que aprende / . . . Aprender, pasó a ser la evolución (92) / . . . La Razón resultó ser no solo razón, sino también / mito, sueño,

imaginación” (292). If human activity is both a result and author of human evolution and our main activity is political, as when the lyrical voice maintains, “Humanidad cuya actividad es política / como la de la tierra producir plantas,” then the political sphere is one where humankind strives to progress, to take steps forward, and to evolve from these advancements, like the hand does work and work, in turn, molds the hand (93). Politics is a question of language, thus *Cántico cósmico* is itself a product of evolution and a purveyor of progress on the cutting edge of the expanding human mind and imagination.⁸⁵ The poem is the universe expressing itself :

La estrella no podía ver su belleza

sino por nosotros.

Somos la estrella que se ve; que a ella misma

se ve.

Nacidos en el fuego de ella

y enfriados para poder pensar y ver.

Protones, neutrones y electrones

son el cuerpo humano, el planeta y las estrellas.

La conciencia salió de lo inconsciente.

En nosotros el planeta pues ama, sueña.

Es la Tierra quien canta en mí este *Cántico cósmico*. (171)

Cántico cósmico both describes and propels evolution. As Salman Rushdie has written,

“description is itself a political act . . . a war over the nature of reality. . . . So it is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it” (12-3). The lyrical voice in Cardenal’s epic speaks with authority about all of creation, using science to buttress his assertions. From his vantage point located between the macrocosm and the microcosm of all

⁸⁵“Pues la política es cuestión de lenguaje” (*Cántico cósmico* 220).

matter, the poet resists his own emasculation by creating a description that runs counter to that emanating from imperial centers of power. Cardenal uses this very terminology within his verse to describe Nicaraguan poetry: “[E]n Nicaragua ahora un poema sin política / sería un poema capón” (217). The word “capón,” or castrated, aptly describes the poet’s state as he is hindered by Reagan’s interference in Nicaragua’s internal affairs from forming a fruitful bond with his land and people. His poem is a political tool to fight this emasculation.

Reagan, capitalism, and imperialism contradict the trends of “nature” witnessed by the poet in the universe, and thus are, in comparison, recessive and examples of “counter-evolutionary” elements that exist and thwart the steady progress that would otherwise move the universe more quickly towards an improved state of existence. The lyrical voice employs wordplay to include not only Somoza, whom he mentions explicitly, but those associated with the Contras as well, including Reagan himself: “Los enemigos de la evolución (Somoza etc.) / Contra-evolucionarios” (*Cántico cósmico* 68). He later tells the reader, in a harsh indictment of the U.S. president, “la evolución de los presidentes de los Estados Unidos / contradice la teoría de Darwin. / (Actualmente en la Casa Blanca un Neandertal...)” (221, ellipsis in orig.). The trends that run counter to evolution on the part of empire include a tendency towards division and violence, as opposed to unity and harmony, a failure to learn, to contemplate, and to imagine new possibilities. Several excerpts from *Cántico cósmico*, included below, demonstrate these critiques of Reagan, capitalism, and empire, from an evolutionary perspective:

La agresividad es anacrónica.

.....

Mickey Mouse, Pato Donald, Arquetipos.

Los libros de Eisenhower de cow boys y policíacos.

Y Reagan ningún libro.

.....

¡Que en la Casa Blanca, el Pentágono, aprendieran!

.....

pero que el hombre deje de ser egoísta

o sociedad sin clases

ni lo piensan.

.....

Sólo es real para ellos lo que es suyo,

sólo existe lo que poseen

y lo poseen para destruirlo.

Prefiriendo la producción al amor.

Lo mecánico a lo vivo.

Sin ojos para mirar el paisaje.

.....

La historia de la evolución es de creación, y de invención.

.....

¿Un camino evolutivo premeditado? En realidad no.

Pero después rectificando.

Rectificando por ejemplo un error de vejiga natatoria.

Como también *reversibilidades* de la evolución. Aun

en la sociedad humana. Aun en la revolución.

También fósiles vivientes en las profundidades del mar,

caso de los crosopterigios, o en la Casa Blanca.

.....

Pasará el Capitalismo. Ya no veréis la Bolsa de Valores.

—Tan seguro como la primavera sigue al invierno...

.....

La competencia impide la cooperación.

Hay separación entre hombre y hombre.

Una humanidad rota.

El primer pez

murió asfixiado. El primer pez que saltó a tierra

fue como el Che.

Pero otros siguieron después. (58-9, 68, 91-2, 155, 217, 230, 269,

emphasis and penultimate ellipsis in orig.)

The poet assures us that capitalism, imperialism, and their agents will pass and be left behind by inevitable progress. Perhaps more importantly, evolution makes mistakes along the way and advances by trial and error. The first fish to venture onto dry ground may have perished like Che Guevara in Bolivia but was still the first step emulated by others to follow that eventually succeeded in their efforts. Such an interpretation of “nature” when applied to the Sandinista revolution and Ernesto Cardenal themselves assures their legacy as an important part of history. Any subsequent (r)evolutionary breakthroughs that move humankind towards cooperation and harmony as per Cardenal’s definition of unity can now be traced to the historical events in Nicaragua via the literary linkage that the poet labors to establish. Communism and the Sandinista revolution may not be the culmination of evolution as Cardenal previously maintained

and he does not pretend to predict the details of the future, as when he writes, “La pregunta de qué vendrá después del comunismo” (353). However, these processes will all prove to be contributions toward a greater good and the realization of the utopia that Cardenal has prophesized and that the irrefutable laws governing the universe mandate. In so poetically constructing the universe, Cardenal presents a counternarrative to Kirkpatrick’s “old-fashioned conservative insistence on the dark side of human nature” (Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop* 75), by precisely depicting it as exactly that, an old-fashioned vestige of rudimentary thought in Darwinian terms that will be selected against in Cardenal’s teleological epic.

Cardenal’s poetic rendering of the universe and Nicaragua’s place within history as seen from a position of exile also highlights the tension between Jeane Kirkpatrick’s early insistence of Central America’s status as “the most important place in the world for the United States” (Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop* 71), and the region’s insignificance that paradoxically allowed Reagan to carry out such a “calamitous policy” in the first place, one that, during his time as president, was responsible for “kill[ing] over 300,000 people, tortur[ing] hundreds of thousands, and [driving] millions [of Central Americans] into exile” (71).⁸⁶ As world attention focused on Nicaragua at the height of the insurrection and revolutionary triumph of 1979, the role of the Nicaraguan leadership, including that of Ernesto Cardenal, was validated and celebrated internationally, particularly among progressives. The United States chose the occasion and the location to intervene and “‘salvage’ a foreign policy wrecked in Vietnam,” because the U.S. could easily win with little resistance from the impoverished and historically marginalized

⁸⁶ In his memoirs, Cardenal himself refers to this quote by the U.S. ambassador to the U.N.:

La señora Kirkpatrick, embajadora de los Estados Unidos en la ONU, había dicho: “Centroamérica es el lugar más importante del globo para los Estados Unidos.” Y el presidente Reagan nos había dado una categoría todavía mayor, cuando dijo que la lucha en Nicaragua no era de la derecha contra la izquierda sino del bien contra el mal. (*La revolución perdida* 415)

Central American nations (71-2). Cardenal's poetic "panning out," a shift away from the close-up and Nicaragua-centric euphoria of *Vuelos de victoria* towards the larger-scale, galactic epic of *Cántico cósmico* captures this tension albeit from an inverted perspective. On an earthly scale, Nicaragua is indeed small and seemingly insignificant, but on a planet that is infinitely small in an expanding universe, the physical (un)importance of all inhabitants is equally distributed around the miniscule rock called Earth:

Minúsculo planeta de estrella insignificante de pequeña galaxia
empeñado en comprender la totalidad del cosmos.

Una roca redonda dando vueltas a una estrella
con una vida compuesta de los átomos más comunes

¿qué otra cosa somos sino algo muy corriente en el cosmos? (223)

The lyrical voice zooms out, describing the different levels of identity and citizenship based on geography along the way: "[u]n compañero, en una ciudad, en un país, en un planeta, en un sistema estelar, en una galaxia..." (327, ellipsis in orig.). In doing so, he attempts to equal the playing field relative to military, political, and economic might. The corresponding autobiographical levels of citizenship and sense of belonging as they pertain to the poet's life, that is, *Cardenal / Solentiname (or Managua) / Nicaragua / Earth / Solar System / Milky Way / Universe*, that can be deduced from the verse above, raises the poet's significance, by 1) paradoxically highlighting the relative insignificance of all earth dwellers, and 2) by emphasizing, not only the poet's ability, but also his willingness, to contemplate the totality of the universe, unlike Reagan and his advisors who dwell within windowless and starless corridors of power and thus overestimate their own importance, threatening the world with a commodified destruction based on ego, self-centeredness, and futile attempts to satiate individual desires. The poet is able

to go beyond defining himself merely in national terms as a Nicaraguan, or in contrast to what he is not, as a non-citizen of the United States, for example, and effectively side-steps the assertion made by the Santa Fe Committee that “[n]ations exist only in relation to each other” by inserting himself into the grander scheme of the universe (Larkin 14). As Patrick Murphy has maintained, the poet seeks to “undercut national identity by means of a universal human identity” (“Poetic Politics” 214). The internal divisions and competing subjectivities exposed within his nation in conflict as well as internationally seem miniscule in comparison to the vastness of empty space of the universe, thus underscoring one of the poem’s main themes, the Chardinian notion of unity in diversity.⁸⁷ The poet is able to blur the many schisms that increasingly fracture Nicaraguan

⁸⁷ In terms of emptiness, the lyrical voice says, “Y mirar ese arriba que es todo vacío” (178). The diversity that Cardenal underscores in his poem prioritizes heterosexual gender differences. The lyrical voice repeatedly emphasizes the law of the attraction of opposites, uniting difference in the creation of a new being. He observes this relationship at the atomic level, among celestial bodies, and amongst living things:

Dos cargas de electricidad negativa se repelen,
dos cargas de electricidad positiva se repelen,
pero la negativa y la positiva se atraen.
.....
El átomo de hidrógeno fue el primero,
el más simple de todos:
un sólo electrón negativo alrededor de un núcleo positivo.
Adán y Eva que engendraron los demás átomos. (103)

In Cantiga 1, he maintains, “...Al principio creó dos sexos y los juntó...” (14, ellipses in orig.), demonstrating a heterosexist bias that is visible in earlier stages of his writing career as mentioned in the preceding chapters of this dissertation. The following stanzas reveal these inclinations even more explicitly:

La mujer abriéndose y entrando el hombre
es el simbolismo natural
de una comunicación más misteriosa:
dos en uno
y
uno en dos
(siendo más cada uno mientras más unidos).
Y así el acto sexual es inteligible.

La vida es la duplicación del don recibido.
La vida tiene sólo una función:
nueva vida. (238)

The poet experiences this union vicariously through his contact with his “people,” connecting to them through his verse:

Almas enlazadas en el enlace de cuerpos.
Y uno con el alma desolada como la luna.
Ah, mi pueblo para quien yo canto.
Muchacha pensando en muchacho.

unity and divide humanity on a global scale by depicting the earth as a small island floating in the immense ocean of space and its inhabitants sharing more in common than immediately evident. By poetically zooming out and diminishing the importance of the earth and its inhabitants in terms of scale, *Cántico cósmico* is also able to depict the feats of the Sandinistas, just like those of Che Guevara before them, in evolutionary terms, as small seemingly negligible steps within the diminutive space that Nicaragua occupies on the tiny rock called Earth, that are nonetheless responsible for guiding life to a higher consciousness and towards a new more promising path. By being the first to blaze the revolutionary trail in their own unique way, they augment their influence and value: “En nuestro pequeño rincón, la revolución planetaria / una humanidad sin clases / aquello / por lo que gira el planeta alrededor del sol” (128). Cardenal’s memoirs are chock full of recollections focusing on the many “firsts” of the revolution, the breakthroughs that the Sandinistas were able to achieve, despite their eventual downfall. A few excerpts can be seen below:

[E]ra la primera vez en la historia que había sacerdotes en una revolución Solentiname [fue] el lugar del primer taller [de poesía]. . . . Creo que Sandino [es] el único héroe en la historia del mundo al que el pueblo reconoce por su sola silueta. . . . Se puede decir que nunca hubo en la historia de Nicaragua un gobierno tan fuerte y con tanto apoyo popular. Y nunca hubo tanta unidad del pueblo. Ni nunca antes hubo un pueblo con una conciencia tan clara. Nunca antes estuvo el pueblo tan organizado. Nunca Nicaragua fue tan respetada y tan admirada en el mundo. Y nunca fue tan visitada. . . . [L]a revolución de

o un muchacho en una muchacha.
 La diferencia en su igualdad.
 La igualdad en su diferencia. (237)

“Two in one and one in two” is a common refrain that appears in various forms throughout *Cántico cósmico*.

Nicaragua representó, en muchos sentidos, la expresión más avanzada de experimento social que había habido hasta entonces. . . . Un caso único en la historia fue el que un país pequeño como Nicaragua pusiera en el banquillo de los acusados al imperio norteamericano, y logró que lo condenaran. . . . [E]l Frente Sandinista tuvo un apoyo del campesinado que no ha tenido ningún otro movimiento latinoamericano. . . . El gobierno sandinista fue el más honesto que había tenido Nicaragua en toda su historia. (*La revolución perdida* 310, 374, 383, 413, 451, 453)

Despite the abundant references to Fidel, el Che, and the Cuban revolution in *Cántico cósmico*, Cardenal presents Nicaragua's evolutionary stage, not as an imitation of the island nation, but rather as a subsequent step that reaches new, as of yet unattained heights. Che may have been similar to the first fish that perished in its attempts to crawl onto dry land, but Nicaragua fulfills the next phase of evolution by being at the center of so many breakthroughs as enumerated in the list above. Cardenal emphasizes this point in his memoirs: "La revolución de Nicaragua fue diferente de la cubana. Prudencia y moderación fueron las características de esta nueva revolución, y su política se guiaba por lo que era práctico y posible" (*La revolución perdida* 244). As noted above, Cardenal presents Nicaragua as if it were a new and improved revolution, occupying a place in history apart from Cuba and more advanced in evolutionary terms as per its depiction in poetic form in *Cántico cósmico*.⁸⁸ Cardenal couples his very real experience of exile

⁸⁸Interestingly, some scholars, such as Matilde Zimmermann, point to the Sandinista departure from the Cuban experiment as a primary cause for the downfall of the Nicaraguan revolution. Zimmermann writes:

Part of the explanation [for the FSLN's electoral loss in Feb 1990] can be found in the FSLN's leadership's gradual distancing itself from the ideas and example of Carlos Fonseca. . . . By the end of the decade, the FSLN had changed [and] was no longer in philosophy or practice the party of Carlos Fonseca. . . . Sandino and Sandinismo were increasingly counterposed to Che and Marxism. In other words, the sum of the policies coming out of the contra war represented a rightward shift, away from the workers and peasants, away from the example of Cuba. The

in his verse with a poetic zooming out from Nicaragua into the vastness of space and amongst the stars. It is within this new offshoot of place that the poet is able to continue to voice his hopes for revolution. The immense size of the universe and his exilic vantage point from beyond the national borders of nation allow him to poetically recalibrate the scale for understanding place. Scale is crucial to this reformulated place. By withdrawing figuratively to the starscapes, Cardenal is able to break from the confines of place within which the promises of the Sandinista revolution failed to materialize and enter the larger, overlapping place of the universe to reframe his vision and re-present the revolutionary achievements according to a new scale of measurement.

In addition to Nicaragua's many breakthroughs in which Cardenal depicts himself to have played a major role, the poet also claims to be one of the first to recognize and to renounce the corruption of the Sandinista leadership which inhibited the revolution from making further advances:

Fui de los primeros en renunciar al Frente Sandinista, casi el primero, con una declaración de prensa en la que dije: "Éste no es el Frente Sandinista al que entramos". Aclarando que aunque salía del partido continuaba siendo sandinista y revolucionario. Casi todo lo mejor del FSLN renunció también al partido, que con el liderazgo de Daniel Ortega traicionó la revolución (454).

This quote highlights Cardenal's attempt to disassociate himself from corruption and to maintain his legacy intact. Furthermore, it provides additional evidence of the increasingly alienated and exilic state of the poet during this time period in question, a main premise of this analysis, as schisms among the Sandinista leadership grow wider. Even though he does not take on

strategy of the FSLN electoral campaign was to push ahead with its pro-business economic policies and soften its revolutionary image as much as possible. (222)

Sandinista officials in *Cántico cósmico* to fight against his emasculation resulting from internal party discord as overtly as he does with Ronald Reagan and the Roman Catholic Church, he certainly does so in his memoirs, strongly criticizing Daniel Ortega's submissive nature in relation to his wife Rosario Murillo with whom the poet is engaged in a very heated feud. He writes:

Allí me di cuenta hasta qué punto era la dependencia que Daniel Ortega tenía de su esposa. . . . Una estupenda *Cantata a Sandino* de los hermanos Mejía Godoy, después que se estrenó en el Teatro Popular Rubén Darío con grandes aplausos, fue prohibida por Daniel influenciado por la Rosario su esposa. (*La revolución perdida* 352, 362)

Later he continues, "En realidad la Dirección Nacional no podía hacer nada con respecto a la Rosario Murillo, porque Daniel Ortega su esposo no podía hacer nada" (374). His depiction of the Sandinista leader is clearly an attempt to emasculate the Nicaraguan president and avenge his own castration at the hands of Ortega's wife.

Cardenal inserts his collection *Vuelos de victoria*, almost in its entirety, into *Cántico cósmico* much as this latter epic injects the small Central American nation of Nicaragua geographically and thematically within the much grander scale of the universe.⁸⁹ The history of the Sandinista revolution as euphorically depicted in *Vuelos* immediately following the insurrectionary triumph suddenly reads as an important albeit considerably smaller event within the context of *Cántico* in which the lyrical voice contemplates spacetime, or "espacio-tiempo," a

⁸⁹Cantiga 18 is entitled "Vuelos de victoria" and contains many poems from the collection of the same name although the poems are not limited to this *cantiga* but are scattered throughout *Cántico cósmico*, usually within the larger context of *cantigas* with new verse preceding and/or following their insertion. Lines have been added or deleted at the beginning of some of the originals and it is obvious that the poet took great care to maintain the flow and seamless transition from verse to verse and within each *cantiga*. Some poems, such as "Reflexiones de un ministro" as cited earlier in this study, appear to be altogether missing from *Cántico*.

multi-dimensional perspective that zooms out spatially as described earlier, but also constructs a revised temporal context. In Cardenal's poem, Jesus is considered a geologic contemporary, "contemporáneo nuestro geológicamente" (155), and within this timeframe, individual historic events are perceived differently by the reader relative to important geological milestones within the vast history of the universe. In some ways, the poet seems to console himself by downplaying the magnitude of contemporary events, which would include the imminent downfall of the Sandinistas, by poetically toying with the concept of spacetime and placing his melancholy within a complex context with unknowable significance:

(El mundo no es una ilusión
sino nuestra visión del mundo es la ilusión
o la confusión del mundo con la visión.)

.....
estamos hundidos en una realidad toda distorsionada. (*Cántico cósmico* 247,
289)

The simple euphoria celebrating the Sandinista victory of 1979 described in *Vuelos de victoria* as the culmination of evolution was naïvely seen from a short-term perspective and vision. The poet has gained wisdom and is now capable, as evident in *Cántico cósmico*, of situating events authoritatively within the appropriate context of the universe, taking into account spacetime dimensions. He roots his epic in the material origins of the universe, the Big Bang, atoms, neutrons, protons, stardust, and gains a wider perspective, free from the one-dimensional illusion that deceives the naked eye of many humans who have yet to reach such an enlightened state: "Pero cualquiera, aquí parado, diría que no se mueve. / Y el tiempo es unidimensional / por lo cual sólo hay futuro por delante. / No volverá el pasado" (218). With greater wisdom and

authority to ponder outside of our seemingly one-dimensional reality, the poet is able to pen *Cántico cósmico* and demonstrate that the world is not as simple as we might first view it.

By inserting *Vuelos de victoria* within the context of *Cántico cósmico*, the poet is also able to weave the Nicaraguan peasantry and its revolutionary martyrs, now eternally wedded to the Nicaraguan material landscape, within his universal narrative, assuring them a perpetual resting place among the stars. By affording them space in his poem alongside the story of the Big Bang and his assertion that everything and everyone is stardust, the poet guarantees these Nicaraguans an essential place within *Cántico cósmico* and thus within the universe itself, given that this epic poem proclaims to be the universe's own consciousness.⁹⁰ Materially, nothing ever dies. The martyrs' lives and deaths not only contribute to the fall of a dictatorial dynasty, they collectively take steps "towards the new man," "hacia el hombre nuevo" (153), reflecting the observation that everything in the universe is movement, motion, and process, not a static state of being. Within the now poetically emphasized complexities of a multi-dimensional universe, it is impossible to know the ultimate destination of this movement, but the Nicaraguans' contributions perpetually dwell within the material and ever expanding universe endlessly evolving and advancing towards Omega.⁹¹ The revolution and its participants are essentially a star that has burned but that eventually collapsed within itself. This stardust, however, does not cease to exist. Where it goes is not knowable, as the lyrical voice himself ponders, "¿Adónde van las estrellas que se hunden a sí mismas?" (179). However, the poet and readers' can find consolation in the certainty that the motion as exemplified by the Nicaraguan martyrs continues in accordance with the laws of the universe, and the insertion of these martyrs into Cardenal's

⁹⁰ "¿Qué hay en una estrella? Nosotros mismos. / Todos los elementos de nuestro cuerpo y del planeta / estuvieron en las entrañas de una estrella. Somos polvo de estrellas" (31).

⁹¹ "Todas las cosas tienden ardorosas hacia un centro común. / ¡Punto Omega!" (*Cántico cósmico* 405). This reflects the Chardinian notion that the universe unites in its diversity, constantly evolving towards a common point, labeled "Omega" (Flach 175).

epic cosmos ensures their immortality. Their self-sacrifice and motion “towards” a higher consciousness serve as a testament to man’s true collective and constantly changing “nature,” in contrast with Jeane Kirkpatrick’s pessimistic assertion regarding humanity’s competitive, violent, and stagnant attributes. The Contra war and U.S. intervention may have fractured the potentially fruitful bond that Cardenal had sought to forge with the Nicaraguan peasantry but the poetic inclusion of the martyred *campesinos* in his universal epic not only grants them the literary equivalent of immortal sainthood, but their exploits shine brighter in a vast universe in which Reagan’s counterevolutionary comportment appears less significant and much more short-lived in the multi-dimensional spacetime prism of *Cántico cósmico*.

Cardenal ties this vanguard notion of (r)evolutionary Nicaragua to its literary past, establishing linkages between the nation’s contributions to human progress and its lettered heritage. The poet again establishes himself as a descendant of a trailblazing paternal lineage of Nicaraguan literary forefathers much as he does with Rubén Darío in “Canto nacional” as described in Chapter 2 of this analysis. This time, however, Cardenal pays frequent homage to Alfonso Cortés (1893-1969), discovering a precedent in the fellow Nicaraguan’s verse of exploring the universe.⁹² In so doing, Cardenal can trace his pioneering poetic contemplation of the stars as being originally of Nicaraguan heritage, thus claiming ownership over the space that he occupies figuratively as he voices observations regarding the universe and creation. Cardenal does not venture into the cosmos alone but girds his meditations with the musings of a fellow

⁹²Of Cortés, Steven F. White writes:

Two of Nicaragua’s greatest poets lived in the same house and are buried side by side in the cathedral of León. . . . The Nicaraguans call Cortés “El Poeta Loco” but insist that, although he lost reason and was prone to fits of violence that coincided with the full moon, he never lost his ability to create poetry. . . . The *poesía alfonsina* is a metaphysical poetry concerned with Space, Time, Being, God, Form and Matter. These poems are like great bolts of lightning divorced from any kind of temporal context. In Cortés’ song of internal space, the poet wanders in a world of imagination and dream. (*Poets of Nicaragua* 1)

Nicaraguan who also had the courage to take to the skies of his imagination. In this following excerpt he refers to the Cortés poem “La danza de los astros”:

¡El poder mirar ahora mundos en el presente y en el pasado!

Ecuaciones de Alfonso:

distancias = silencio

visión = sonido

(Ecuaciones de Alfonso Cortés).

El universo no está contenido en el espacio

sino el espacio en el universo. (181)

Cardenal draws upon the work of Cortés to pen his own contemplations with more authority, rooting them to Nicaraguan literary traditions. He summons Alfonso Cortés no less than ten times throughout *Cántico cósmico*, making reference to “el Loco” as a mad genius who was able to imagine the multidimensional character of the universe through the power of the imagination even before Western science. Cardenal heightens his own prestige while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of Nicaraguan literary contributions in his memoirs by again claiming to be the first to discover and promote the work of Alfonso Cortés. Even in his childhood, he refused to tease the mad poet even as other children did:

Y los muchachos le hacían burlas. Digo le hacían, porque creo que yo no le hacía burla. Una sirvienta de mi casa, la Berta, me contaba que era un poeta loco; que ese loco era poeta. . . .Y así eso del poeta loco sería algo que me infundiría respeto, o quién sabe qué sensación de misterio, o de simpatía tal vez, o de afecto. . . . Mucho tiempo después yo sería el mayor estudioso de la vida y la obra de Alfonso Cortés, y quién más lo ha conocido y difundido. (*Vida perdida* 386-7)

Cardenal presents himself as the heir of such literary greats as Alfonso Cortés while also claiming credit for discovering the genius of the mad poet's work. Just as Nicaragua's (r)evolutionary significance in the entire scheme of the universe is deceptively hidden from view as the Sandinista's political fortunes decline during the 1980s (an important theme of *Cántico cósmico*), so, too, is the importance of Alfonso Cortés shrouded from view, precisely because of his profound, cutting edge contemplations:

[El poeta José Coronel Urtecho] me dio una carta arrugada de Merton, perdida y recién encontrada dentro de un libro, fechada abril 1964, donde le decía de Alfonso extrañamente: "He is a wonderful and symbolic man, perhaps one of the most significant people of our age in the entire world. To have such significance one must of course be hidden as he is." (*Cántico cósmico* 296)

The contemplations of both poets appear insignificant just as the Sandinista revolution increasingly does during the time frame in question, but an enlightened eye such as those of Cardenal and Thomas Merton can discern the contributions that are made to evolutionary progress by focusing on the larger picture of the universe.

The ecological component of Cardenal's epic poem is also of utmost importance given the environmental transgressions perpetrated against Nicaragua's natural body and habitats. In addition to the contamination of the land, water, and air caused by capitalist industrial mining and exploitation of natural resources, harbors are mined in egregious acts of aggression by the CIA and agricultural production is disrupted. For Cardenal, these injustices are merely part and parcel of capitalism in which corporations and banks profit without concern for ecological health and balance: "Sin importarle el delicadísimo balance, / la fauna, insectos, el clima / las aguas,

menos aún la belleza / a Commercial Credit” (265), “. . . la sagrada realidad de los animales es sólo recursos naturales” (266). As in previous stages of his writing career, Cardenal depicts the destructive extractive “writing” on the national, natural body as parallel to the injustices perpetrated on its inhabitants, human and non-human alike, that sustain themselves via their close-knit relationship with the land: “‘Así se empezaron a morir los peces, los camarones / por el cianuro. Nuestro río antes era cristalino.’ / (Y como los camarones y los peces: los miskitos y los sumos.)” (197). Environmental degradation at the hands of corporate capitalists wreaks havoc and violence on the surroundings just as war and its surrogates, such as Somoza, mutilate people: “(El Miskito con la lengua cortada y la boca cosida con alambre)” (206). The propaganda war that justifies this mutilation of humans, wildlife, and the environment in order to sell merchandise and maximize profits in the capitalist system contaminates the mind as well as the body: “Monopolio de lo que el public lee, oye, ve, / como llenan el aire de monóxido de carbono, mercurio, plomo” (188). Ecocritic Patrick Murphy has made the observation that, “from an ecological perspective, issues of inhabitation and sustainability [in *Cántico cósmico*] are overlain by, but not identical to, national sovereignty, political independence, and indigenous rights” (“Poetic Politics” 213). While they may not be identical, these elements are inextricably linked in Cardenal’s poem as he weaves the injustices perpetrated against the Miskito and Sumo indigenous communities within the poetic imagery describing ecological havoc.

Patrick Murphy has also noted the larger scale of Cardenal’s epic poem in dealing with environmental matters and the poet’s concern for the working relationship between the peasantry and the earth itself:

Cardenal displays a much more scientific based ecological perspective at the same time that he is spiritually driven by his quest for environmental justice. And he

places his perspective on ecology within a much larger cosmology of universal matter. For Cardenal, the environments that concern him are the ones in which the Nicaraguan people live today, and these are invariably inhabited environments. While Neruda is deeply moved by and enamored of soaring mountains and tumultuous coastlines, Cardenal is more affected by people engaged in agriculture.⁹³ (“Poetic Politics” 215)

In Cardenal’s revolution, freedom and independence of the workers depends upon the liberation of the land and vice-versa. This emancipation of the national territory does not merely imply freedom in a political sense but also ecological, following the irrefutable laws of the universe: “La ley ecológica de todo relacionado con todo” (265). The premise of capitalism lies in the notion of separation, that harmony, happiness, and balance are found elsewhere, uprooted from one’s locale, thereby undermining the bonds of ecological inhabitation that strengthen the connection between the earth and life that is sustains as one collective body:

Esos anuncios místicos de automóviles
o líneas aéreas
vete vete vete
gozarás en *otra parte*
Compre nuestro carro y arribará al país de la felicidad
En realidad arribarás a la ciudad de las vidas sin significado
.....
Y así el combatiente campesino del Frente Sandinista creía
que esas mujeres desnudas en las revistas, en carteles,

⁹³In his article, Patrick Murphy makes a comparison between Pablo Neruda’s *Canto general* and Cardenal’s *Cántico cósmico*.

no eran reales, es decir no eran fotos de mujeres reales,

no habían sido de carne jamás, sino fantasía de pintores. (264, emphasis in orig.)

This verse again reveals the poet's continued insistence on the elevated consciousness of the Nicaraguan peasantry. The *campesinos* are caught between the warring sides in the Contra conflict, and both the revolutionaries and reactionaries make continued attempts to conquer peasant allegiances, as the poet does here. In Cardenal's version of events, he has been co-author of this enlightenment of the peasantry via his promotion of primitivist painting and advocacy of poetry workshops. Within his cosmological epic, this inculcated agricultural proletariat is eternally preserved in history, thus assuring the enduring legacy of the poet's contributions on this front in the face of Reagan's aggression. Just as he works to protect the memories of the martyred peasantry, he simultaneously advocates for the conservation and stewardship of the land in which they are buried and on which their descendants will depend for their sustenance and survival.

Exiled to a "third nature," the multi-dimensional spacetime of the universe, due to the divisive Contra war, Cardenal expands his ecological concerns to include the whole planet in *Cántico cósmico*. He writes, "la tierra toda era la profanada" (265), "—el pillaje del planeta—" (263). In addition to the ecological crimes committed by capitalism within Nicaraguan national boundaries, Cardenal writes of environmental devastation across the globe, including the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India, where a gas leak at a pesticide plant killed and maimed thousands.⁹⁴ In the United States and abroad, Reagan and the purveyors of capitalism spread destruction that transcends national boundaries:

En vez de fertilizante lluvia

lluvia ácida.

⁹⁴See page 278 of *Cántico cósmico*.

Los árboles marchitándose bajo la lluvia ácida.

Nieve venenosa.

Lagos sin un pez.

El fitoplancton moribundo.

Del cielo cayendo azufre sobre las frutas.

Pinos empalidecidos por el ácido sulfúrico. (*Cántico cósmico* 231)

The poet emasculates the agents of these crimes against creation, depicting them as infertile beings that only sow seeds of destruction. Murphy has noted,

[T]he cosmic dimension of . . . love leads Cardenal even beyond the “whole earth” that concerns Neruda to a concern for the entire universe, and along with that a sense of time of greater magnitude than Neruda’s deep geological and ecological history. (“Poetic Politics” 214)

The miniscule rock of earth that floats around the sun in one solar system amongst many is at once the epitome of insignificance but to its living inhabitants a living, breathing, invaluable organism that sustains life; an oasis of blue floating in vast nothingness. To all of humanity and the abundant non-human animal and plant species that dwell on earth, it is indispensably significant, the only planet upon which we can realistically hope to survive, a fact that provides impetus to the lyrical voice’s calling to care for the environment and all creatures. More than ever before in his writing career, Ernesto Cardenal speaks with great urgency, not only to Nicaraguans, the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden, but to all of humanity, revolutionaries and reactionaries alike, to those in the metropolis as well as the periphery. He rises above the fray playing out in his homeland to a higher plane of the universe in order to issue a warning

about the ecological catastrophe that lurks on the horizon for all of the earth's inhabitants should a change not be made. On this small island in space, all living creatures are in this together:

La humanidad todavía es múltiple.

Nos salvamos todos o nadie.

El universo es Uno.

Uno en el que todos somos.

Compas, nos salvamos todos o ninguno. (328)

He calls for reconciliation among all earthlings and uses planetary allusions to make his point: “Los hombres que formamos el Hombre / o mejor dicho formaremos. / O tenemos por delante solamente un planeta pelado como Marte. / Una nube en forma de hongo levantándose lentamente / en el horizonte...” (67). With the use of first person plural, Cardenal deems his purpose to be that of molding man for the most urgent task of preventing complete ecological destruction of the planet. It is important to note the lyrical voice's self-correction regarding verb tense, shifting from that which happened in the past to that which will happen in the future. The Sandinista revolution is not the culmination of the reshaping of man. The planet is in the process of moving towards the cultural creation of a new man and Cardenal is one of the self-appointed co-authors of this creation. His preaching pedestal at the level of the cosmos gives him a moral and geographical higher ground to summon the bigger picture. War knows no boundaries, contamination recognizes no borders, capitalism and resource extraction cannot expand indefinitely. Life everywhere on our planet is in peril and Cardenal's wisdom and consciousness are on the cutting edge of evolution in assuring a brighter, sustainable future for all of earth's creatures.

Conclusion

Cardenal's epic thus encapsulates four different and plausible interpretations of the "cosmos," the interim space between earthly and transcendent love, the interconnectedness of all beings as per Zen teachings, the search for meaning and purpose amidst the alienation and chaos of the universe, and a "third nature" or realm through which the lyrical voice enters into dialogue with empire and responds to historical and autobiographical events as they unfold. The poet inserts his nationalist vision within the larger context of the universe in an attempt to rescue his poetry as well as his legacy from those that appear to thwart his idea of (r)evolution. He vies to win over, at least symbolically, the peasantry caught in a tug-of-war between revolutionaries and reactionaries. He simultaneously secures their immortality by including the martyred Nicaraguan *campesinos* within his epic poem as the progeny of (r)evolutionary forebears such as Che Guevara. Likewise, Cardenal places the nation of Nicaragua within a (r)evolutionary lineage of predecessors among which the Sandinistas are the vanguard, blazing the trail on the cutting edge of cultural, artistic, and political advancement, the poet himself being a principal author of this unprecedented change. The juxtaposition of the four cosmos within the text augments the Chardinian tension between unity and diversity and allows the poet to poetically unify a revolution which appears to increasingly fracture and divide when seen from the unidimensional and distorted perspective of the present, but represents an evolutionary step forward when seen from the multidimensional prism of spacetime from which the lyrical voice emanates. Exiled from women, the poet courts God's creation, in his case the land and peasantry of Nicaragua, in the hopes of establishing a fruitful revolutionary union conjoining his ideas with the material realities of his fecund nation via an enlightened *campesino* class:

Día y noche, macho y hembra, arriba y abajo.

Yang el Cielo (masculino) y Yin la Tierra (feminina).

Ella boca arriba, mirando al cielo, y él boca abajo, a la tierra.

Él el movimiento, y ella la quietud.

El entendimiento y la intuición.

Todo es rotación. El Yang vuelve al Yin y el Yin al Yang.

Cada uno la semilla del opuesto.

Cópula de los contrarios es el cosmos.

Marcharse es volver y volver es marcharse.

El hombre es el sol y la mujer la sombra.

Renuncié a esas muchachas por el acto sexual cósmico. (357)

Cardenal foregoes physical contact with the female body and the natural body in celibacy/exile to channel his energy towards another gendered union, that of his ideas with a feminized peasantry which poetically overlap with the same soil that produces the fruits of *campesino* labor. By framing the liberation of Nicaragua in such Chardinian evolutionary terms as that which is forged in the union of difference, Cardenal is unwittingly complicit in two ways with (neo)colonial discourse that tends to rationalize the colonization of the periphery by the metropolis and, later, development schemes popularized in the mid-twentieth century by such economists as W. W. Rostow.⁹⁵ First, in terms of the evolution of “idealized revolutionary subjects” as per Saldaña-Portillo’s analysis, Cardenal, too, is guilty of considering revolutionary transformation “an epochal conversion experience, as the epistemic death of a prior subject, the subject of prerevolutionary and premodern consciousness” (9), much like developmental models sought to produce “developed” liberal citizens via the production of capitalist national economies

⁹⁵Walt Whitman Rostow (1916-2003) served as advisor to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and is the author of modernization theory which is considered by some to be the “apex” of the “arc” of development strategies which were formulated during the twentieth century (Saldaña-Portillo 8).

(13). This tendency is evident in Cardenal's description of Solentiname residents such as Olivia who, upon receiving primitivist painting instruction in the commune, was able to appreciate the natural bounty of the land and to thus escape the cage of ideological oppression. Poetically, Pancho Nicaragua picks up his machete to clear away the vestiges of his prerevolutionary consciousness, the "yerba mala," that once obscured the path to revolutionary consciousness and liberation.⁹⁶ Secondly, Cardenal also commits an error that Fernando Coronil points to in his critique of Marx, that of the celebration of the "productive engagement of Monsieur le Capital with Madame la Terre" where the former is deemed to be a "masculine and creative order" which bonds with a "feminized and subjected domain" in the periphery where "nature passively awaits capital's fertile embrace" (57). Not being a member of the *campesino* class, Cardenal ventures to bring about this productive engagement via the evolution of an enlightened peasantry, the feminized populace that, once engendered in marriage with Cardenal's ideas, will subsequently engender the land in a synergetic fertile embrace as the surrogate purveyors of Cardenal's channeled masculinized, nationalist vision. It is through the peasantry that Cardenal attempts to plant the poetic seeds of his ideas that are to finally take root in the creation of a new society and nation. The poet places the blame on empire and its agents as the force that hinders his union with his people and the "cosmos" becomes the space where the poet fights his emasculation. Through a revised blueprint of place, the poet is able to reformulate the meaning and purpose of his own life and the Sandinista revolution of which he played an important part. Even if his verse does not accurately depict all of the facets leading up to the Sandinista downfall, from a literary standpoint, *Cántico cósmico* certainly deserves to be hailed as a remarkable poetic achievement. Russell O. Salmon has written:

⁹⁶As indicated earlier, this poetic reference to Pancho Nicaragua is taken from Cardenal's "Amanecer" from his *Vuelos de Victoria* collection. It should be noted that this poem also appears as part of Cantiga 16, "Lo más oscuro antes del alba," in *Cántico cósmico*.

The question has lingered among the critics during the 1980s as to whether Ernesto Cardenal could produce quality poetry after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution. Would he have the time, the energy, and the perspective to compose significant poetry? *Cántico cósmico* answers this with a resonant “yes.” . . . [T]he reader grasps the totality of Cardenal’s thought and the enormity of his poetic genius in his search for “the creation of a new and radiant humanity.” (xxiii)

It is precisely the tension and struggles between formulations of place as analyzed in this present study that augment the significance and literary quality of *Cántico cósmico* as compared to the oversimplification and unanchored euphoria that characterize the poetry found in *Vuelos de victoria*. With the legacy of his life and his writing on trial, Cardenal’s poetic contemplations of place take on a more nuanced and complex texture which not only redefine Nicaragua’s position in the scheme of the universe but also lead to a superior, more impressive form of poetic expression.

CHAPTER 4: RETURNING TO PLANET EARTH—COUNTERING THE NEOLIBERAL TURN & OLD AGE IN ERNESTO CARDENAL’S CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE (1990-2014)

Only survival could give us all of what we want, and survival is not an option. So, like the biblical Moses denied access to the Promised Land, we stand gazing through the lens of shared values and history toward a future we will not enter.
--Samuel Scheffler (*Death and the Afterlife*)

The fourth and final period to be considered in this study, namely the years between 1990 and the present, has been characterized by dramatic shifts throughout the world in economic, political, social, ideological, environmental, and cultural terms.⁹⁷ Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Soviet Union was dismantled in 1991, bringing an end to the Cold War and to the “lineal historic clash” between the two prevailing metanarratives represented by capitalist, free-market ideologies and communism (Burbach 19, 158). As the United States began to stand alone as the world’s sole “superpower,” neoliberalism became the new orthodoxy as articulated by the “Washington Consensus” of the 1990s (Harvey, *Brief History* 13). State sponsored socialism throughout the world, or the “traditional socialist project” arising from “government fiats [or] self-defined vanguard parties” collapsed (Burbach 4). These changes in the world at large coincided with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to the US-backed UNO coalition and its presidential candidate, Violeta Chamorro, on February 25, 1990.⁹⁸ Upon victory, the Chamorro government adhered closely to its electoral platform and immediately began moving policy toward a “full embrace of capitalism” (Enríquez 1). Sociologist Laura J. Enríquez points out that the economic adjustment program put in place by the Chamorro government in 1990 brought Nicaragua “into the fold of those countries—then

⁹⁷This study analyzes the work, life and times of Ernesto Cardenal through the year 2014.

⁹⁸The UNO (Unión Nacional Opositora) coalition was made up of fourteen different parties. Violeta Chamorro is the widow of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, former editor of *La Prensa* newspaper whose assassination in 1978 sparked the uprisings that eventually led to the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

representing almost the entire Latin American region—that had embarked on the path of reforms that flowed out of neoliberal economic thought” (67). As she demonstrates in her study, this sudden move away from socialism in favor of drastic austerity measures, privatization, trade liberalization, and currency devaluation in Nicaragua had devastating effects over the peasantry who have become more marginalized as a result (65, 70). Analysis shows that neoliberal reforms have meant increasing poverty levels in general throughout Central America, accompanied by declining living standards, lack of access to social services, and dramatic increases in inequality (Brown 605).⁹⁹ Neoliberalism, in contrast with the collectivism advocated by the revolutionary government, has “fragment[ed]” society economically, socially, and politically (Babb 41). Anthropologist Florence E. Babb goes so far as to argue that the harsh effects of neoliberal measures have been “inscribed” on the individual bodies of working-class and poor Nicaraguans as “poverty, hunger, and despair” (199). The environmental movement in Nicaragua, first initiated under the Sandinista natural resource policy of 1979, was also curtailed as the neoliberal framework took “center stage and displaced plans for environmental protection,” thus threatening the natural body of nation that the Sandinistas had sought to safeguard (Babb 215-6). Throughout the 1990s, both under the Chamorro regime (1990-1996) and the neoliberally inclined presidency of Arnaldo Alemán (1996-2001), political and cultural icons such as Rubén Darío and Augusto César Sandino, heavily propagandized by the FSLN in revolutionary Nicaragua, were appropriated by those attempting to uphold the neoliberal power structure. These symbols were universalized and neutralized in an attempt to obliterate any associations

⁹⁹It should be noted that austerity measures were implemented during the late 1980s under the Sandinista government in response to soaring inflation and large deficits resulting from expenditures necessary to defend against the Contra insurgency in addition to subsidies for social programs such as health care and education. In 1988, the Sandinista government enforced the “Stabilization and Adjustment Program” which called for cuts to social services, increased emphasis on export-oriented production, currency devaluation, and the lay-off of thousands of public employees. (Babb 111). In 1989, the Sandinistas implemented even more drastic measures and they were criticized for having taken the country in a “neoliberal” direction (112).

linked to the struggle for social justice (Babb 251). Thus the writing of the neoliberal project has extended from the natural heritage of nation, across the bodies of its inhabitants as well as the environment, to the official remembering of the past, the realm of the historical.¹⁰⁰

The Sandinista loss at the ballot box and the changes that followed had a profound effect on Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal. Already sixty-five years old at the time of the electoral defeat in 1990, it is evident in his poetry and his memoirs that he increasingly reflects on what is to become of his life and work in the wake of the revolutionary downfall, as mentioned in the previous chapter of this study. Regarding the elections, he vividly describes his reaction to the devastating results in his memoirs: “Si la madrugada del triunfo de la revolución fue para mí el más bello sueño de mi vida, la madrugada de la pérdida de las elecciones fue la peor pesadilla que he tenido” (*La revolución perdida* 444). He had dedicated his creative energies to the revolutionary cause only to see his efforts fade, first with the shuttering of his Ministry of Culture in 1987 and then with the unexpected defeat at the polls. In his memoirs, he describes these events and their ramifications in relation to the ministry’s sponsorship of cultural programs, in this case a literary festival in Nicaragua:

Este Festival Internacional del Libro fue el festival de la libertad absoluta del libro en la Nicaragua libre, y de la libertad de la revolución. Habíamos planeado estar haciendo este festival cada dos años, y a los dos años se realizó el segundo, pero ya no fue por el Ministerio de Cultura porque ya no había Ministerio de Cultura. Un año después se perdieron las elecciones y ya no hubo otro festival del libro ni muchas otras cosas más. (*La revolución perdida* 379)

¹⁰⁰The term “natural heritage” refers to the human and non-human inhabitants of Nicaragua as well as the earth, water, and air.

The loss of the election was not only significant in economic and political terms, but is also deemed a cultural setback in that it undid many of the artistic and cultural policies advanced during the Sandinista years.

In the poetry created during this stage of his writing career, Cardenal essentially picks up where he leaves off in *Cántico cósmico*, where his melding of mysticism with astrophysics becomes a central theme. Many of the arguments presented in the previous chapter of this study are relevant to his writing dating to this current period of production as well. With the elimination of the Ministry of Culture and Cardenal's relegation to what he himself describes as nothing more than an "honorary" position as president of the "Consejo Nacional de Cultura" (*La revolución perdida* 330), the poet soon thereafter witnessed the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, and the collapse of the socialist, environmental, and artistic projects previously promoted by the FSLN during the revolutionary period, events which intensify the sense of alienation already evident in *Cántico cósmico*. To make matters worse, Cardenal has been repeatedly harassed and persecuted by former Sandinista allies, namely Daniel Ortega, who has been known to publicly chastise and attempt to legally prosecute the poet in retaliation for the latter's criticism of Ortega (Prado). It should come as no surprise then that the exilic positionality on the part of the poetic voice in many of the poems penned during this time period is often evident as previously highlighted in the case of *Cántico cósmico*. The "starscapes" from which the exilic lyrical voice speaks and reformulates place in *Cántico cósmico* are also evident in a majority of the more recent poems to be considered here. As Luce López-Baralt puts it, "Cardenal, que ha saboreado hasta las heces la decepción política y la extrema soledad, interroga al cosmos. . . . [H]uye a las galaxias solo y sin interlocutor" (108-9). It has been noted that both *Telescopio en la noche oscura* (1993) and *Versos del pluriverso* (2005) were both originally

intended to be extensions of *Cántico cósmico*, but were ultimately published as separate collections, highlighting the strong similarities between these two distinct eras of production (López-Baralt 38, 75; Pastor Alonso 81).

Of the new poems and essays published by Ernesto Cardenal between 1990 and 2014, the four poems “Pluriverso,” “Con Martí mirando las estrellas,” “El universo de 3 libras,” and “Hoyos blancos” from *Versos del Pluriverso* (2005), the essay “Este mundo y otro” (2011), and the five poems “Reflexiones en el río Grijalva,” “El celular,” “Elegía a Cristina Downing,” “El origen de las especies,” and “El saqueo del museo del Irak” from *Hidrógeno enamorado* (2012) will be analyzed in this chapter.¹⁰¹ In these works, the poet’s fascination with the cosmos, astrophysics, quantum physics, and evolution is again on display. Not only do these elements come together on the pages of Cardenal’s poetry and provide clues to the writer’s philosophy in metaphysical, spiritual, and political terms, but they also point in the same direction as argued in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. That is, Cardenal has been alienated and exiled and poetically speaks from the realm of the stars, Said’s “third nature,” to reconstruct place, reformulate utopia, and preserve his legacy in a changing world. Upon close examination of these more recent collections, the dialogic nature of Cardenal’s poetic construction of place once again becomes clear. His verse responds to important autobiographical and historical moments in the poet’s life as well as to prominent narratives in vogue at the time of production. I will utilize the addends in Kogl’s equation, namely “space” and “meaning,” as the foundation for this analysis, to demonstrate the dynamic nature of Cardenal’s poetic places. The schematic in introduction shows how space and meaning are not static nor are they mutually exclusive categories. Identity

¹⁰¹ *Hidrógeno enamorado* is a Spanish language collection containing both new and selected poems, the latter of which span from his *Epigramas* (1961) through various *cantigas* chosen from *Cántico cósmico*. Four of the five more recent poems, specifically “Reflexiones en el río Grijalva,” “El celular,” “Elegía a Cristina Downing,” and “El origen de las especies,” interestingly first appeared in the English collection *The Origen of Species and Other Poems* (2011) before being officially published in their original Spanish in *Hidrógeno enamorado* (2012).

crises and/or alterations of meaning can result both from direct human interactions with and across physical space as well as from the dialogue that occurs as multiple meanings attached to place come into contact. Ernesto Cardenal's poetry enters into dialogue with historical and autobiographical moments as well as with (neo)colonialist narratives prevalent at the time of production. Cardenal also responds in this work to the spatial "writing" inscribed by imperialism upon the land and the bodies that inhabit it.

This present analysis will not reiterate the "exile" argument proposed in the previous chapter pertaining to *Cántico cósmico*, but will instead focus on that which subtly differentiates Cardenal's current poetry from his previous poetic landscapes. In his most recent work, the exilic tendency in Cardenal's work is poetically woven within a counter-discourse inspired by the neoliberal turn evident around the globe. The poet wrestles with the very conceptual apparatus that has allowed neoliberalism to become the dominant mode of discourse and the fragmentation that it has exacerbated. By formulating new spatial and temporal representations of the earth and of the universe in response to the "time-space compression" observed in neoliberal transactions, Ernesto Cardenal advances a unifying perspective of the universe, advocates for a renewed sense of history and for the protection of the "commons," the collective body of humanity and the Earth alike (Harvey, *Brief History* 4). While still remembering the fallen heroes of the Sandinista struggle whose legacy is now being negotiated in neoliberal Nicaragua, Cardenal's poetry assumes a more transnational character, globalizing along with the neoliberal conceptual apparatus which he aims to counter. In a sense, Cardenal's verse gradually returns to the earth from the cosmos as this period of production progresses, but rather than focusing extensively on

Nicaragua, he enters a phase of poetic “planetization” (López-Baralt 125), a transition that coincides with the rampant globalization of free-market capitalism.¹⁰²

Neoliberalism and “Common Sense”

In his memoirs, Cardenal laments the social, political, economic, and cultural effects that follow the rise of the UNO coalition to power. Mirroring the disheartening analyses of neoliberal shock treatment alluded to above and the devastating effects that experts have observed in the wake of economic restructuring, Cardenal describes the impoverishment of Nicaragua under Chamorro’s neoliberal inclinations:

Esos 17000 millones de dólares en compensación por los daños causados por la agresión de los Estados Unidos fueron perdonados por el nuevo gobierno de Violeta Chamorro (sic) después de la pérdida de las elecciones, “en gratitud por todos los favores recibidos”. Se alegó que la ayuda que los Estados Unidos darían a Nicaragua sería mayor que la deuda que se había perdonado, o sería que fueron presionados, pero lo que sucedió fue que la economía de Nicaragua pasó a manos de los Estados Unidos, y Nicaragua se convirtió en el segundo país más pobre de América Latina después de Haití. (*La revolución perdida* 431)

Local autonomy over economic affairs has now been surrendered to world financial markets upon victory of the US-backed UNO coalition over the Sandinistas. Interestingly, the poetry from this time period, unlike previous stages of production, makes less overt mention of the United States as the sole culprit responsible for the world’s woes, a point to be elaborated later in this study.

¹⁰²I will build this analysis upon the foundation of exile that I previously proposed in relation to *Cántico cósmico*. As such, I have organized this chapter thematically based on the more recent “additions” to the counter-discourse that the poet voices from his exilic stance, rather than structuring the study around each individual poem as in previous chapters.

With the downfall of the revolution, Cardenal bemoans the apathy and disenchantment of the world's youth that he attributes to the collapse of ideologies so prevalent in previous epochs of world history:

Ahora la mayor parte de los jóvenes en Nicaragua, con la revolución perdida, han quedado apáticos, apolíticos, desencantados, sin creer en partidos, ni en líderes ni en ideologías. Pero esto no es sólo la juventud de Nicaragua, sino en la de América Latina, y en gran medida, creo yo, en la del mundo entero. Existe en todas partes la crisis de la izquierda y de todos los movimientos populares. Después de la pérdida de la revolución sandinista ocurrió el derrumbe de los socialismos del Este, el fracaso de los movimientos guerrilleros y revolucionarios, la derrota de las izquierdas en muchos países de América Latina, y el triunfo de gobiernos antipopulares electos popularmente, y aun en algunos casos reelectos popularmente. (*La revolución perdida* 454-5)

The collapse of socialism both within Nicaragua and the world at large and the declining faith in collectivism inherent to this ideology is the source of great concern for the poet. The altruism and “compañerismo” that were “born” within the Sandinista revolution, as the poet puts it, are fragmented by deliberate policies implemented by the new government to do just that. Cardenal tells us, “Esa palabra *compañero* se prohibió cuando hubo cambio de gobierno” (*La revolución perdida* 384, emphasis in orig.). This account goes along with the observation of Florence E. Babb noted earlier regarding the conscious universalization and neutralization of iconic revolutionary symbols by those attempting to gird the neoliberal framework.

David Harvey has made the following argument as it pertains to collectivism and the threat it poses to the neoliberal establishment:

For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The founding fathers of neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as ‘the central values of civilization’. In so doing they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideals. These values, they held, were threatened not only by fascism, dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements (sic) for those of individuals free to choose. (*Brief History* 5)

The overt government policy in Nicaragua under Chamorro to restrict the “compañerismo” that Cardenal so cherishes makes sense within this critique. Neoliberalism, as Harvey defines it, is as follows:

[A] theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (2)

Throughout his study, Harvey notes the atomizing, or “individualizing,” tendencies of neoliberalism, as well as the “alienations, anomie, exclusions, marginalizations, and environmental degradations produced through the practices of neoliberalization” and the “wholesale commodification of nature in all of its forms” (205, 160). A quote in Harvey’s work

attributed to Margaret Thatcher, a strong proponent of the neoliberal model, attests to the underlying premise of individualism at the heart of neoliberal thought: “There [is] . . . ‘no such thing as society, only individual men and women’” (23). Harvey maintains that this way of viewing the world has become “hegemonic as a mode of discourse,” and the similarities between Cardenal’s version of events, Florence Babb and other analysts’ accounts, and Thatcher’s words are evident. Most important to this dissertation is the process by which the “conceptual apparatus” to which Harvey refers has become a dominant mode of thought. Relying on the theories expounded in Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, Harvey utilizes the concept of “common sense” to explain the rapid spread and acceptance of neoliberal thinking throughout the world. He states:

Common sense is constructed out of longstanding practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national traditions. . . . Common sense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices. (39)

He goes on to argue that “[n]eoliberal rhetoric, with its foundational emphasis on individual freedoms . . . [has become] incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3, 41). This explains the amazing advancement and acceptance of neoliberalism across the globe in its appeal to deeper ideals and practices shared by a large segment of humankind.

The dilemma then, for those wishing to curb the rising tide of neoliberal thought, is that conjectured by Alejandro Bendaña, historian and former FSLN advisor: “Neoliberalism fragments society, the question is how people regroup to struggle” (Babb 41). Rather than advocating a socialist agenda for political reform or aiming to tear down the capitalist system

that is so prevalent in Nicaragua and around the planet, the first step must be to bridge the gaps among a fragmented populace by dismantling the very conceptual apparatus as per Harvey's Gramscian analysis, that "common sense" that makes the advent of neoliberalism possible in the first place. Cardenal's poetry enters into dialogue with this neoliberal discourse, as early as on the pages of *Cántico cósmico* and this becomes even more pronounced in his essay "Este mundo y otro" and his poems "Pluriverso" and "Origen de las especies." He seeks to poke holes in the preconceived notions and common wisdom that prevail regarding neoliberal rhetoric, and more importantly, the individualism that it champions. At first glance, this neoliberal "common sense" apparatus deceptively seems to conform to larger observations of the world, the universe, and its inhabitants, but Cardenal counters this by offering a divergent representation of creation. In "Este mundo y otro," an essay in which Cardenal argues that creation is not as humanity initially perceives it via the senses, the poet advocates a renewed perspective of the universe:

Debemos vivir experimentalmente los descubrimientos científicos de los últimos siglos, aunque los sintamos antinaturales. . . . Necesitamos una transformación, para que lo que sintamos sea congruente con lo que realmente sucede, para que no sintamos las cosas como no son. (11)

One human tendency in particular that is in need of transformation is precisely the hegemonic view common in neoliberal discourse that the earth and its inhabitants are comprised of individual and autonomous entities that roam freely and apart from one another. Countering this observation, Cardenal asserts: "La idea de que el individualismo fue primero está en contra de la historia cósmica. . . . El agruparse ha sido inherente a la evolución desde que los primeros quarks se juntaron para formar neutrones y protones" (16). He goes on to insist the following:

Nos engañamos si consideramos las partículas atómicas como separadas y como entidades distintas. La física actual nos enseña que todos estamos intrínsecamente entretejidos e interconectados con todo el universo aunque aparezcamos como físicamente separados. (65)

He succinctly sums up this assertion by making a claim that highlights a predominant theme in his poetry: “La separación que los objetos tienen en nuestro mundo es una ilusión” (66). Thus, in one concise sentence, Cardenal undermines the entire premise upon which the conceptual apparatus of neoliberalism is founded.

Vivid poetic imagery of starscapes that conjure up similar notions appear already in several *cantigas* of *Cántico cósmico*. In what appears to be a bleak observation of the unceasing expansion of the universe in which the galaxies and stars are increasingly isolated and alone, dying individually one by one, the lyrical voice tells the reader:

Las galaxias se alejan cada vez más de nosotros
y las unas de las otras

y nos alejamos también nosotros
en nuestro universo de dispersión.

Y estaremos cada vez más aislados.

El espacio más vacío cada vez.

Y cada vez más frío.

Cuando toda galaxia quede sola

sin vecino a la vista,

en ellas las estrellas se extinguirán una a una,

cada vez con menos estrellas para reemplazarlas

Hundiéndose una a una en hoyos negros. (29)

This apparent expansion and division is misleading, as he establishes later in a different *cantiga*: “La unidad no la vemos por un error de óptica” (327). In his essay, “Este mundo y otro,” Cardenal makes a similar point: “El universo constantemente se expande, pero no se expande en un vacío exterior. Las galaxias no se van separando en el espacio, sino que el espacio se va agrandando” (39). In other words, the space between everything in the universe appears to be exterior, or outside, of each respective object, but actually all comprise the same entity which itself continues to grow. The apparent space between what appear to be atomized, individual items or beings is not really separate at all, but deceives us into thinking so as an optical illusion.

In “Pluriverso,” Cardenal continues with imagery of the cosmos and references to the physical laws of the universe. As the name of the poem suggests, the verse makes reference to a plurality of universes, multiple voices and experiences, all of which comprise the singular universe (Pastor Alonso 80).¹⁰³ Differentiating itself from *Cántico cósmico*, the lyrical voice of “Pluriverso” makes explicit mention of neoliberalism:

«Si la naturaleza no fuera bella...» (Poincaré)

El *Kosmos Kosmético* (bello) según Justino,

San Justino.

Aunque ahora nos oprimen los injustos.

«Si Dios estuviera con vosotros, Justino,

no os oprimirían los injustos»

dijo el pagano.

Kosmético, a pesar del neoliberalismo. (17, emphasis in orig.)

¹⁰³Thematically, the title of the collection *Versos del pluriverso* has the same connotation, indicating the common thread that unifies the majority of the six poems it contains.

The poet here alludes to a quote by French mathematician and philosopher Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) in this verse, the entire context of which is as follows:

The scientist does not study nature because it is useful to do so. He studies it because he takes pleasure in it, and he takes pleasure in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful it would not be worth knowing, and life would not be worth living. I am not speaking, of course, of the beauty which strikes the senses, of the beauty of qualities and appearances. I am far from despising this, but it has nothing to do with science. *What I mean is that more intimate beauty which comes from the harmonious order of its parts*, and which a pure intelligence can grasp. (Poincaré 19, emphasis added)

Cardenal alludes to Poincaré's quote in "Pluriverso" to capture the holistic beauty of the universe, composed of seemingly distinct parts that are in reality of the same origin, the Big Bang, and fused together as a whole in working harmony. Despite neoliberalism and its view that the universe is comprised of autonomous, individualized components, this is in fact deceptive, an optical illusion. All of creation is intrinsically linked and every part is dependent upon the rest. To have God amongst us, according to Cardenal, is to be in communion with one another, with the Earth, and with the cosmos, in recognition of this beauty. In *Cántico cósmico*, he already declares "la tierra entera es el Cuerpo de Cristo" (340). The poetic voice warns the reader, "Nos salvamos todos o nadie. / El universo es Uno. / Uno en el que todos somos. / Compas, nos salvamos todos o ninguno" (327-8). To be with God in "Pluriverso," then, is to be in collective harmony with our brethren despite the neoliberal agenda that fragments us. With this awareness, the poet maintains, the unjust cannot prevail in their oppression. This consciousness upends the neoliberal conceptual apparatus that conceives of freedom as individual. On the contrary, the

poetic voice asserts that such emancipation is necessarily collective. As if responding to Bendaña's question of "how people regroup to struggle" in the wake of neoliberalism's fragmentation (Babb 41), among other perplexing, sad problems that we encounter, Cardenal writes in his poem "El universo de 3 libras," the following advice: "Cuando no tengas respuesta, mira las estrellas" (44). They may not give a direct answer and might instead pose more questions. But, he continues, "La respuesta seremos todos, ellas y nosotros, / porque somos todos la tristeza. / Tal vez el que seamos muchos en las galaxias / será la salvación" (44). Together, in numbers, and the realization that all aspects of the universe are experiencing the same plight, will bring rise to a resolution. In bucking the trend of individualism as championed by neoliberal thinkers, Cardenal counters by declaring, "Cada vez más inadecuado pensar como individuos" (15), and his poetic representation of the universe bolsters this claim.

In "El origen de las especies," a poem which commemorates Charles Darwin's "consciousness-altering" theory of evolution (Waldman viii), the lyrical voice poetically zooms back to the Earth and the biological evolution of species, emphasizing the common origins of all living things on the planet. Instead of focusing on the physical Big Bang from which the universe outwardly expands as described in *Cántico cósmico*, the poet begins his verse with the biological Big Bang: "Que toda la vida de la tierra / venga de una sola célula: / el gran misterio" ("El origen" 275). John Lyons makes an insightful observation, finding links between origins and destinies in this particular poem:

What Cardenal captures here is that that second critical moment in the development of the cosmos, when energies coalesced to produce a single biological cell that then proceeded to divide and further divide in a process we call life, was an historical event every bit as momentous as the Big Bang. . . . If all

species are interlinked because of their descent from a common ancestor,

Cardenal's proposal is that our destinies are also interlinked. (xx)

This poetic biological Big Bang magnifies the sense of unity and togetherness of all of humanity as well as that of all living creatures that inhabit the earth. If humanity travels the same journey from our common point of origin to a shared destination, as John Lyons suggests, then the neoliberal "common sense" notion of competitive and atomized individuals seeking to fulfill autonomous dreams of freedom is incompatible with this outlook. Regarding Cardenal's work, Luce López-Baralt has noted, "El espíritu de la evolución es contrario al egoísmo porque nos conmina a pensar de manera colectiva" (125). The destiny of humanity moving along an evolutionary trajectory is linked and it is, therefore, essential that all of humankind treat one another as we treat ourselves, thus establishing an important intertextuality between Cardenal's poetic interpretation of biological science and the biblical teaching of loving "your neighbor as yourself" (*New American Standard Bible*, Rom. 13:9). While the prevailing argument may be, as David Harvey has noted, that "only the strongest and the fittest survive" in the "Darwinian neoliberal world" (*Brief History* 157), Cardenal appropriates Darwinism to depict an interdependent universe in which all life can be traced to a singular cell and collectively strives for a higher evolutionary plane.

Cardenal's poetic representation of Darwin's theory has important social and environmental implications as well. It should be noted that the notion that humanity comprises the same organism despite the apparent diversity throughout the populace could be seen as blurring the boundaries between competing subjectivities. The poetic voice in "El origen de las especies" tells the reader: "Bajo diversidad de vidas / todos iguales" (278), an observation which could be interpreted to include not only biological references, but also racial, gender, classist,

national, and cultural differences. This interpretation demonstrates how the poet's biological depiction of Chardin's "unity in diversity" undermines not only the neoliberal model and the individualism that it espouses but how it could also be deemed problematic for identity politics and the trend to create social movements based on ethnicity, gender and the like to counter global capitalist hegemony.

Protection of the Biological and Ecological "Commons"

In ecological terms, Cardenal's biological Big Bang packs a powerful poetic punch, highlighting the interdependence between the natural environment and humankind as one biological organism:

. . . De una sola célula

árboles animales tú

todos hermanos

todos somos una modificación de otro

.....

Hace un billón y medio

nos separamos del hongo

por variación y herencia

.....

Nos parecemos tanto

que en realidad somos

variaciones del mismo tema

.....

Insecto ave reptil lirio Einstein

como toda transición es lenta
toda especie parece sin transición
pero toda vida es una sola vida

.....

El mismo ADN en común
con todos los animales

.....

Sólo hay un animal . . . ¹⁰⁴ (“El origen” 276-7, 280-1, 284)

The ecological interdependence that is implied in the above verse is also explicitly stated in Cardenal’s poem “Reflexiones en el río Grijalva,” a poem inspired by a tourist trip along the river and through an immense canyon in Chiapas through which the water runs. Here the lyrical voice assumes a much more strident environmental stance.¹⁰⁵

. . . ¿Es indiferente el universo
a nuestra angustia ecológica
tan sólo de unos pocos locos?
¿O en nosotros grita el universo?
.....

¿Lo que se eche al Grijalva a quién le vale?

¿O hay alguien más detrás del cosmos

que llora

más allá del espacio

¹⁰⁴It is interesting to note the absence of punctuation marks in “El origen de las especies,” the thematic interconnectedness of all beings on the planet paralleling the undivided words of the poem.

¹⁰⁵The Grijalva River runs through southeastern Mexico. It is 300 miles long and extends through the states of Chiapas and Tabasco.

y antes del tiempo
por lo que destruimos ahora?
.....
hay que ver en verdad la relación
entre nuestra visión ecológica
y nuestra cosmovisión . . . (258, 260-1)

The poetic voice laments the ecological destruction of the planet in this verse and reiterates the interrelated nature of the cosmos. He places himself within a smaller, ostracized group of critics that may appear to be on the fringe for observing the unity of all things and for decrying the environmental devastation caused by humankind. In a world in which a predominant conceptual apparatus has taken hold which allows the purveyors of neoliberal capitalist policies to prevail, anyone who bucks this trend, as Cardenal does here, is considered “loco,” or mad, for not adhering to the hegemonic “common sense.” Even if it appears insane to resist the ideologies seemingly so natural and pervasive in the present world, it is actually those that seek to uphold neoliberal thinking that are an aberration in the entire scheme of biological evolution, or so the poetic voice stresses: “evolución contra el statu quo / que tanto quieren los banqueros” (“El origen” 283). As much as the global financiers and capitalists would like to deny our common origins and destinies and maintain their stronghold, the status quo, as if the universe were static, evolution has persisted for billions of years. Capitalism is no more than a short lived bump along the evolutionary trajectory towards perfection.

María Ángeles Pérez López has noted the environmentalist stance of Ernesto Cardenal, drawing upon the work of prominent ecocritic and Latin Americanist Steven White:

La búsqueda de la justicia medioambiental, dentro de un planteamiento ecocrítico del desarrollo capitalista, será conjugada por el nicaragüense [Cardenal] tanto con el materialismo de Darwin y Marx, como con el modelo ecologista que representan los pueblos primitivos de América, tal como ha estudiado Steven White. (Pérez López 68)

While this literary critic notes the thread of environmentalism that runs through Cardenal's evocation of Darwinian and Marxist thought as well as the poet's fascination with the original human inhabitants of the Americas, further elaboration is needed to connect Cardenal's current ecological poetic ruminations with the neoliberal turn that so characterize the times. Along with the neoliberal penchant for prioritizing the market above all else necessarily comes the presumption that everything in existence can be treated as a commodity, as David Harvey has pointed out. He continues his argument thus: "Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, and social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to the legal contract" (*Brief History* 165). This has resulted in the "wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms" and the "escalating depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water) and proliferating habitat degradations" (160). Drawing on the writings of Karl Polanyi, Harvey highlights the shaky foundation upon which neoliberalism rests:

For at the heart of liberal and neoliberal theory lies the necessity of constructing coherent markets for land, labour (sic), and money, and these 'are obviously not commodities . . . the commodity descriptions of labour (sic), land, and money is

entirely fictitious'. [. . .] [C]apitalism cannot function without such fictions.¹⁰⁶
(166-7)

Cardenal counters these fictions in his verse by poetically zooming back to planet Earth as a whole to draw upon the common ownership of all of creation, of our DNA and biological heritage. He responds to prevalent narratives to reclaim the commons to which Harvey refers and that neoliberal capitalists seek to commodify and privatize. When Cardenal writes, “Somos un solo Cuerpo,” in his poem “Elegía a Cristina Downing,” his assertion not only has Christian connotations, but can also be interpreted as a rewriting of the fictions of neoliberal rhetoric (269).¹⁰⁷ The neoliberal narrative has been scrawled upon the predominant ways in which humankind perceives the world as well as across the ecological body that is wounded in the name of the capitalist agenda. That which is classified as “private” within the capitalist system has in fact been usurped from its rightful owners, namely all living things which together with the land, water, and sky form the complex organism called Earth.

Reclaiming the Cultural “Commons”

In his recent writing, Cardenal wrestles to regain control not only of the biological heritage of the globe, of “ADN nuestro Adán” (“El Origen” 279), but also the cultural commons over which the neoliberal project has been scribbled. As mentioned earlier, Sandinista revolutionary icons have been the subject of universalization and neutralization by the neoliberal administrations which governed in the years following Chamorro’s victory in 1990. It is, therefore, no surprise that Cardenal continues to vie for their remembrance and to advocate for their inclusion amongst the pantheon of heroes that have sacrificed themselves for the (r)evolutionary cause so prominent on the pages of his work. In the poem “Hoyos blancos,” in which the lyrical voice positions himself

¹⁰⁶David Harvey refers to Karl Polanyi’s text *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).

¹⁰⁷“Elegía a Cristina Downing” is a poetic eulogy written in honor of the cousin of Cardenal’s mother.

in the year 1991, Sandino is poetically revived and the martyrs who once resided in the Solentiname community, namely Donald, Elbis, Laureano, Felipe, and Alejandro are once again eulogized, along with heroes of the Cuban revolution (48, 55, 56). Generally, however, Cardenal's focus during this period of production moves beyond the Sandinista revolution to acquire a more global stance and protection of the cultural commons which parallels the way he vies to reclaim the biological heritage of the planet. In "El saqueo del museo de Irak," for example, a poem in which the lyrical voice bemoans the destruction of a museum at the hands of coalition forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he writes:

. . . pensé hacer un poema
por ser el único museo del mundo
que era de toda la humanidad
.....
el único museo de la evolución humana
.....
Irak como cuna de la civilización
.....
Europa aún en tinieblas
son 100.000 años de la especie humana
y sólo 10.000 son de civilización
que empezó en Mesopotamia
.....
Pero no sólo la historia de Irak
60.000 años

de historia de la humanidad fueron saqueados

las galerías quedaron vacías

.....

destruidos 10.000 años de historia

.....

14.000 objetos que ya no están o están

destruidos pisoteados en el suelo

todo por el petróleo . . . (270-3)

In this excerpt of the poem, the poetic voice laments the destruction of humanity's cultural heritage, the artefacts that serve as evidence of humankind's common wisdom, lineage, and origins, that are obliterated and obscured by those that profit from war, division, and the privatization of our natural heritage, in this case, oil. It is by no accident that Cardenal chooses the Iraq War as a powerful symbol to poetically rue the advent and spread of neoliberal capitalism. As David Harvey argues, the international coalition that invaded Iraq under U.S. pressure, did so to promote the "neoliberal reconstruction of the Iraqi state," and did so basing their actions on a narrow interpretation of the word "freedom" as envisaged by the neoliberal architects of the project (*Brief History* 184). Just what this "freedom" entails is specified by Harvey in his analysis as "the full privatization of public enterprises, full ownership rights by foreign firms of Iraqi businesses, full repatriation of foreign profits . . . the opening of Iraq's banks to foreign control, national treatment for foreign companies and . . . the elimination of nearly all trade barriers" (6).¹⁰⁸ In short, the "freedoms" that the construction of this "neoliberal state apparatus" embodies "reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses,

¹⁰⁸This quote in Harvey's text is attributed to an order made by Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

multinational corporations, and financial capital” (7). Cardenal reframes this pre-emptive war carried out in the name of freedom as something that conversely robs humanity of its common cultural heritage. The museum serves the poet well as a powerful symbol that allows him to underscore the common cultural links that unite all readers, a history which has been obscured by neoliberal rhetoric that emphasizes human individuality over collectivity. The fossilized remains discovered and analyzed by Darwin in Cardenal’s “El origen de las especies” fulfill the same function in biological terms, as the poetic voice proclaims, “la tierra entera un gran museo” (280). The earth houses our common genetic heritage in a way similar to that of the Iraqi museum which once displayed our shared cultural roots before its destruction at the hands of capitalist invaders. The global character of the poet’s lament is more pronounced here, a theme upon which this study will elaborate later.

Exposing Neoliberal Inscriptions

In addition to capturing the egregious acts of desecration carried out upon the earth’s natural body in an ecological sense and against civilization’s shared cultural heritage in the name of neoliberalism, Cardenal’s poetry also depicts the realities of neoliberal policies as the “inscription” of “poverty, hunger, and despair” on the bodies of the working-class and poor, to use Florence Babb’s words, and draws the reader’s attention to his/her unwitting participation as consumer and thus as co-author of the neoliberal project (199). In his poem, “El celular,” the poet juxtaposes a happily conversant cell phone user with the plight of the Congolese people as numerous multinationals scour the landscape in search of coltan and enslave local children to mine the minerals necessary for cell phone production. I cite the poem here in its entirety:

Hablas en tu celular
y hablas y hablas

y ríes en tu celular
sin saber cómo se hizo
y menos cómo funciona
pero qué importa eso

lo grave es que no sabes
como yo tampoco sabía
que muchos mueren en el Congo

miles y miles
por ese celular
mueren en el Congo

en sus montañas hay coltán
(además de oro y diamantes)
usado para los condensadores
de los teléfonos celulares

por el control de los minerales
corporaciones multinacionales
hacen esa guerra inacabable
5 millones de muertos en 15 años

y no quieren que se sepa
país de inmensa riqueza
con población pobrísima

80% de las reservas mundiales
de coltán están en el Congo

yace el coltán desde hace

tres mil millones de años

Nokia, Motorola, Compak, Sony

compran el coltán

también el Pentágono y también

la corporación del New York Times

y no quieren que se sepa

ni quieren que se pare la guerra

para seguir agarrando el coltán

niños de 7 a 10 años extraen el coltán

porque sus pequeños cuerpos

caben en los pequeños huecos

por 25 centavos al día

y mueren montones de niños

por el polvo del coltán

o martillando la piedra

que les cae encima

también The New York Times

que no quiere que se sepa

y así es que no se sabe

ese crimen organizado

de las multinacionales

la Biblia identifica

justicia y verdad
y el amor y la verdad
la importancia pues de la verdad
que nos hará libres
también la verdad del coltán
coltán dentro de tu celular
en el que hablas y hablas
y ríes en tu celular. (262-3)

The writing of neoliberalism across the land and the human bodies of the poor in the Congo is vividly portrayed in this verse, as the small bodies of the children climb through the equally tiny holes in the earth in search of coltan. The extraction of this mineral as a commodity to be sold on the world market by multinationals is depicted as theft on a grand scale that robs the Congolese people both of their natural wealth and of their children, and subjects them to poverty, war, despair, and death. The rich treasures buried in the land are turned against the locals in economic and physical terms as this “poverty-stricken population” is paid a mere twenty-five cents a day to expose their children to the hazardous effects of coltan powder and falling rocks in the mines through which they crawl. Interestingly, the culprits behind this “organized crime” are multinational corporations, “Nokia, Motorola, Compak, Sony,” with obscure national affiliations. While the Pentagon is implicated, the explicit mention of the United States as the main antagonist that so dominated Cardenal’s earlier work is relegated here to a globalized network of cronies that prosper from this multinational capitalist venture.

Perhaps most important is the complicity of the oblivious consumer who unwittingly talks and laughs into an electronic device, the origins of which s/he knows little. David Harvey

turns to Marx in his analysis of this phenomenon, particularly the latter's observation that "[m]oney and market exchange [draw] a veil over, [mask] social relationships between things," a condition further accelerated in the present-day neoliberal context in which players in the market are more globally diffuse (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 100). Harvey continues:

The conditions of labour (sic) and life, the sense of joy, anger, or frustration that lie behind the production of commodities, the states of mind of the producers, are all hidden to us as we exchange one object (money) for another (the commodity). We can take our daily breakfast without a thought for the myriad people who engaged in its production. All traces of exploitation are obliterated in the object. . . . We cannot tell from contemplation of any object in the supermarket what conditions of labour (sic) lay behind its production. The [Marxist] concept of fetishism explains how it is that under conditions of capitalist modernization we can be so objectively dependent on 'others' whose lives and aspirations remain so totally opaque to us. (101)

Like Marx, Cardenal seeks to "tear away that fetishistic mask" (101), especially the much more pervasive and insidious mask of neoliberalization which hides the realities of the "disposable worker" so prototypical throughout the global economy (*Brief History* 169).¹⁰⁹ The poet attempts to pierce the opaqueness of the global market that obscures the writing of capitalist transactions over the bodies of the earth and the world's poor by juxtaposing their landscape with the inscriptions of poverty and despair on the bodies of the children. It is this economic system that impoverishes them by denying them equal rights and ownership to resources to which they too should be considered heirs. Poetically he seeks to shed light upon the rampant capitalist

¹⁰⁹Harvey borrows the term "disposable worker" from K. Bales' work *Disposable People, New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

consumer culture exemplified by the second person singular “you” to whom he speaks in “El celular,” the buyer who superficially thrives on the purchase and use of state-of-the-art technologies but whose laughter rings hollow, oblivious, and almost cruel in its juxtaposition to the plight of the poor (*Brief History* 170). The market thrives on the obfuscation of reality and the poetic voice implicates the multinational corporations, the Pentagon, and the New York Times as being responsible for the cover-up. The consumer is blissful in his/her ignorance of reality and the poetic voice presents himself as a global citizen who acknowledges that he, too, at one time was also oblivious as to the cell phone’s origins: “como yo tampoco sabía” (“El celular” 262). Despite the deceptive notion that the free market confers freedom upon the world’s masses as per neoliberal rhetoric, the poet insists that uncovering the “truth” behind these fallacies is where liberation lies: “la importancia pues de la verdad / que nos hará libres / también la verdad del coltán” (“El celular” 263). Cardenal reasserts the meaning of place that has been stripped from space by global capitalists, undoing the phenomenon simplified by Scott DeVries’ formula “Space = Place – Meaning.” By being equipped with information concerning the deleterious effects of neoliberal globalization and unrestrained consumerist tendencies, it can be inferred from the poem that knowledgeable and conscientious global citizens in the vein of the poetic voice can collectively and mutually confer freedom upon one another contrary to the narrative espoused by neoliberalism. Thus, the poet draws the reader’s attention here to humankind’s economic and ecological interdependence, pulling away the fetishistic mask of neoliberalism that hides the “others,” obscures the minerals mined from their environment, blurs our interconnectedness, and attempts to obliterate meaning attached to space. He simultaneously chips away at the neoliberal conceptual apparatus that obscures our biological and cultural kinship as outlined in the aforementioned poems. Far from a revolutionary call to arms in the

hopes of constructing a communist Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth as he had once done in earlier poems, Cardenal poetically depicts the injustices that we ourselves perpetrate upon the Earth and the global workforce by simply participating conceptually and as active consumers within the globalized economy. He advocates a change of perspective in his recent work by simultaneously highlighting the transgressions committed within the neoliberal framework and poetically reframing the biological, cultural, and geological heritage of the earth outside of the neoliberal paradigm.

Spacetime and History

One additional way that Cardenal accomplishes this task, yet to be discussed, is by reframing the concept of space and time and juxtaposing his representation of these dimensions on occasion with those privileged by the neoliberal model. David Harvey has offered several observations regarding neoliberalism's "intense" interest in information technologies and the effects of their proliferation in society:

These technologies have compressed the rising density of market transactions in both space and time. They have prolonged a particularly intensive burst of what I have elsewhere called 'time-space compression'. The greater the geographical range (hence the emphasis on 'globalization') and the shorter the term of market contracts the better. This latter preference parallels Lyotard's famous description of the postmodern condition as one where 'the temporary contract' supplants 'permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family and international domains, as well as in political affairs'.¹¹⁰ (*Brief History* 4)

¹¹⁰Harvey quotes Jean-François Lyotard from the latter's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as the end of metanarratives and temporally locates the shift from modern to postmodern culture in the middle of the twentieth century. While Lyotard does not bemoan the end of metanarratives, Harvey, in his assessment of neoliberalism, does.

In his work, Harvey notes the disastrous results that the spread of this “short-term contractual logic” and “geographical mobility of capital” has had on the global workforce and the environment (166, 168). Producers are pressured to extract as many natural resources as possible during the short life of contracts, and this tendency, combined with the rampant consumerism encouraged by neoliberal “possessive individualism” has had serious consequences in terms of climate change and loss of biodiversity (170, 172-4). Harvey cites several sources to gird his chilling assertion that this era of neoliberalization coincides with the “fastest mass extinction of species in the Earth’s recent history” (173). At the same time, he argues that laborers around the globe are easily exploitable by capital that has the advantage of unfettered geographical mobility while the workforce does not (168). Literary critic and political theorist Frederic Jameson also focuses on the spatial and temporal transformations inherent in what he calls this third, late, and final stage of capitalism, noting the cultural ramifications inherent in these economic exchanges (*The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* xviii-xix). He argues that the world has entered a “crisis of historicity” due to the prevalent emphasis on space in the global market at the expense of temporality and maintains that culture has become “ahistoricized” as a result (6, 16, 25). In this decentered world of multinational capitalism, the alienation of the human subject has been displaced by his/her fragmentation (Jameson 14). Cultural representations of this postmodern subject appear in an ahistorical “bricolage” of borrowed and reshuffled texts in a world that privileges reproduction over production (96). Ernesto Cardenal’s attempts to reassert a “totalizing” narrative of time and space throughout his writing career certainly can be attributed in part to his Marxist and Christian influences. However, his increasing insistence on these themes and the profound poetic metaphysical ruminations regarding “spacetime” that begin to

I argue that Cardenal poetically depicts place to counter the short-term contractual logic celebrated by neoliberalism and he employs universals to achieve his goal.

appear with great frequency in *Cántico cósmico* and thereafter undoubtedly correspond in part to the same atomization, fragmentation, and individualization as mentioned in both Harvey and Jameson's theoretical analyses. In Jameson's conceptualization of this late stage of capitalism, space is prioritized over time. David Harvey notes the "time-space compression" in neoliberal market transactions and bemoans the prevalence of short-term contracts. Cardenal, on the other hand, poetically emphasizes the equal and interdependent importance of both dimensions. "El tiempo es distancia," he exclaims in *Cántico cósmico* (39). In "Pluriverso," he reiterates this theme: "Espacio y tiempo que no pueden separarse: hablar de espacio es tiempo y viceversa" (12). In an era when it is now commonplace to "ceaselessly reshuffle the fragments of preexistent texts" without historical reference (Jameson 96), Cardenal stresses the interconnectedness of space and time and places renewed focus on the notion of movement in an ever expanding universe. In Cantiga 19, he writes: "No hay cuerpo inmóvil. / La materia existe sólo en movimiento. O mejor: / el movimiento es la existencia de la materia. / No hay movimiento sino en el espacio y el tiempo" (*Cántico cósmico* 157). "Now" may mean nothing more than "here," as he writes in Cantiga 6, but in his teleological representation of the universe constantly striving towards perfection, movements forward necessarily imply the advent of new eras and the end of old ones.¹¹¹ As such, I argue that Cardenal seeks to reassert historicity in much the same way that Jameson does. To do so is to fortify the teleological universals upon which he constructs his poetic place. Cardenal's fascination with the night sky and the stars corresponds with his erudite understanding and appreciation of geologic history. To gaze at the stars is to observe the past:

Tiempo es espacio.

Es el avance de la materia en el espacio.

¹¹¹“‘Ahora’ quiere decir nada más que ‘aquí’” (*Cántico cósmico* 39).

Nada hubo en el espacio sin el tiempo
y tiempo ha habido sólo en el espacio.

La materia se mueve y ella es tiempo-espacio.

Mirando al espacio miramos hacia atrás en el tiempo,
hacia atrás solamente. (*Cántico cósmico* 65)

The origin from which we have come spatially and historically is who we are and what we are to become in Cardenal's poetic universe in which matter is constantly in motion and time-space inseparable. It may appear from our present perspective that the night sky is static, unmoving, and time is one-dimensional: "Pero cualquiera, aquí parado, diría que no se mueve. / Y el tiempo es unidimensional. . . ." (*Cántico cósmico* 218). But Cardenal again advocates for a change in perspective regarding the way that the reader perceives the universe and the world, this time in relation to space and time. To be disconnected from historical and spatial anchors is to appear to float in aimless fragmentation, allowing the pervasive ideologies that privilege only the "here" and "now" to persevere and flourish, such as seen on Wall Street, the symbol of global capital:

Sus ventanas copia del palacio Pitti
y las arcadas, del palacio Strozzi
(fachadas más florentinas que cualquiera de Florencia)
y en sus sótanos el oro, el oro en ladrillos
brillantes ladrillos amarillos
de eso bancos y otros bancos. Es hora
que se abren los bancos en Wall Street. . . . (*Cántico cósmico* 225)

The architectural borrowing noted here is akin to Fredric Jameson's observation of the cultural tendency of late capitalism to borrow and endlessly reshuffle preexistent texts. This façade on

Wall Street, symbol but no longer epicenter of a now diffuse and decentered multinational capitalist network, embodies the hegemonic conceptual apparatus that has allowed neoliberalism's global expansion that privileges space and ahistoricity, the short-term contract in the ever present now:

Telefonean a Tokio
a banqueros ya en la cama y a gnomos
en Zurich entre trufas y vinos
y ya todos de acuerdo
y de las ventanas florentinas sale el humo de los habanos
con palabras como

“cien millones”

“trescientos”

Telefonean otra vez desde Wall Street
5 de la tarde hora de Frankfurt.
No se fumigará el cacao. Los finqueros están huyendo.
La cosecha ya era mala además,
“no estamos con pánico”
Ya los diarios han dicho a 8 columnas REVOLUCION EN GHANA! (*Cántico cósmico* 225)

In this verse, capital moves around the world without restrictions and without regard for time at any given location.

In the aforementioned poems, namely “El origen de las especies” and “El celular,” included within more recent publications, Cardenal skillfully juxtaposes this neoliberal logic

with reminders of more “accurate” temporal and spatial landmarks that impart upon his verse a renewed sense of shared history and space. In an excerpt from “El origen de las especies” regarding biological evolution cited earlier, he writes: “Insecto ave reptil lirio Einstein / como toda transición es lenta / toda especie parece sin transición / pero toda vida es una sola vida,” reminding the reader of the constant collective journey, and thus perpetual forward motion, of all life despite the misleading appearance of a static and stagnant “now” (“El origen” 281). He uses specific numbers to demonstrate just how slow this transition is and overtly states the importance of temporality, and, in so doing, a renewed sense of History: “desde hace 400 billones de años / los primeros 200 sólo microbios / De ahí / la necesidad de la temporalidad / de que el tiempo pase / si no no habría evolución / ni futuro” (279). In concrete terms, he delivers a vision of a collective evolutionary journey over time and highlights the temporal as essential in allowing this progress.

Nowhere does the juxtaposition of Cardenal’s time with the short-term contract espoused by neoliberal thought stand out more starkly than in “El celular,” cited in its entirety above. Again, he utilizes precise numbers to demonstrate the long history of the coltan reserves, which have lain beneath the surface of the Congo for “three thousand million years.” This eyebrow raising figure contrasts with the youth of “7 to 10 years” that crawl into the “tiny holes” with their “tiny bodies” to mine the mineral for cell phone production, an electronic device that exemplifies the communication technologies so privileged by neoliberalism (Harvey, *Brief History* 159). While the coltan has an age topping three billion years, the wars to extract this resource has killed five million Congolese in fifteen short years, a numerical value revealing the devastation that free-market short-term contractual logic has wreaked as juxtaposed with the incomprehensibly long geologic duration of the coltan. The poet ties the mining of this mineral

historically with gold and diamonds, the former of which harkens back to the advent of capitalism with the discovery and conquest of the Americas in 1492. Cardenal establishes a link here between his homeland and that of the Congolese people, thus asserting his authority in understanding the plight of those suffering within an extractive economy. The ephemeral and fleeting conversation of the poetic “you” via the cell phone that introduces and concludes the poem encircles the workers within the hellish confines of the socioeconomic conditions they must face much like the poetic tiny holes trap the small bodies of child laborers whose lives are truncated at the hands of multinational entities. The consumer who has bought into the logic of convenience and efficiency that the cell phone represents is also guilty as purveyor of a mindset that privileges space over time. Cell phones allow the user to roam freely much like the mobility that global capital exhibits.

Cardenal also juxtaposes the long periods of evolution and transition in human history, this time in cultural terms, alongside the brief, almost instantaneous destruction of this heritage in “El saqueo del museo de Irak” under invasion by global imperialists. He writes:

... el colegial puede enumerarlos

sumerios acadios babilonios asirios

persas griegos partos judíos árabes

destruidos 10.000 años de historia

.....

como el saqueo de Bagdad por los mongoles

una agresión a la identidad nacional

y a 7.000 años de historia cultural

estante por estante fueron tirados al suelo

estatuas ánforas jarrones asirios
babilonios sumerios persas griegos
el plinto de mármol de 5.000 años
que sobrevivieron a los sitios de Bagdad
pero no a la “liberación” de Bush
60.000 años de historia de la humanidad . . . (272-3)

This verse demonstrates the seemingly chaotic, always transitory nature of human populations over time. Items that persevered for thousands and thousands of years of human history despite the tumultuous transformations that saw the rise and fall of various civilizations and the occupancy of the region by a variety of cultures ultimately could not survive the shortsightedness of the invaders who did not respect the time and longevity of the relics that they destroyed so quickly in the rush to secure and exploit the oil. It is important to note the poet’s usage of the word “liberación” within quotation marks in this verse, as the appealing term “freedom” is often employed to advance global capitalist policies and also the military operations that are often used to advance these ideologies. The “freedom” unleashed upon the region was responsible for the almost instantaneous destruction of artefacts that had stood the test of time over millennia and in the midst of various civilizations.

Cardenal’s Life and Legacy

Another factor pertaining to time and Cardenal’s depiction of place in this era of literary production concerns the poet’s own personal reflections over his own life and legacy. His verse captures an optimism of human progress and perseverance that promise to outlive the poet who is eighty-nine years of age as this study is being written.¹¹² Cardenal ties his faith to the belief that humanity continues along a teleological trajectory, forever advancing towards the

¹¹² Ernesto Cardenal was born on January 25, 1925.

Chardinian Omega point, with the notion that death is a necessary part of life that ensures the perpetual resurrection and survival of the earth's organism. This teleological life/death cycle confers a certain immortality on the poet, who, with his verse, has contributed to the very evolution that he presages. He writes of death as recycling and resurrection in "Hoyos blancos":

La muerte es reciclaje.

La muerte es otra fase de la vida.

El planeta es todo reciclaje, o no habría vida.

Si no ¿cómo?

Sagrado reciclaje.

Es entrar a nuevas combinaciones.

En nosotros hay algo que no muere.

Un ADN de los cuerpos resucitados...

Es un fenómeno orgánico de resurrección. (49-50)

Even if this notion of resurrection provides some consolation, the poet still laments the passage of time in this stage of his writing career. He recalls various events throughout his life that go beyond his memories of the Sandinista revolution and he reflects upon his own eventual physical demise. In "Con Martí mirando las estrellas," a poem that captures the awe-inspiring night sky via the contemplations of a star-gazing child who sits next to Cuban writer José Martí, the lyrical voice bemoans the unceasing forward movement of time in terms of the mortality of each individual: "El tiempo. El tiempo. ¡Nuestro enemigo el tiempo!" (28). In "Pluriverso," he similarly grieves the clock's perpetual march forward in relation to motion in space, again linking temporal and spatial dimensions which he contemplates so frequently in his poetry: "Los

movimientos de los átomos son reversibles, / pero nosotros, hechos de átomos, / no somos, ¡ay!, reversibles. / La película no corre para atrás” (12). But he finds consolation in the passage of time because it is what moves creation along its evolutionary trajectory: “Pero en él se mueve la creación y sin él / no habría evolución” (28). This mirrors his later observation in “El origen de las especies”: “De ahí / la necesidad de la temporalidad / de que el tiempo pase / si no no habría evolución / ni futuro” (279). The space-time continuum not only allows creation to evolve but also predicates the existence of past, present, and future that coincide with the expansion of the universe. Gazing at the stars in fascination, the poet is able to simultaneously view the past, the origins of creation, as well as beyond into the eternity of the future. Notice how he utilizes the first-person plural possessive pronoun to modify “future” and the emphasis he places on it with exclamation marks: “Nuestros ojos son para ver la luz / hasta el comienzo del tiempo / y más allá del comienzo: la eternidad / ¡nuestro futuro!” (“Con Martí” 28). Cardenal finds solace and purpose in life in this collective future which all of creation shares, a perspective which provides an intersection between the most personal reflections pertaining to his own autobiographical history as well as the counter-discourse he constructs pertaining to the hegemonic capitalist logic so dominant on the world stage. In his recent work, philosopher Samuel Scheffler has considered the possibility that “our conception of ‘a human life as a whole’ relies on an implicit understanding of such a life as itself occupying a place in an ongoing human history, in a temporally extended chain of lives and generations,” an observation that reveals strong similarities with this interpretation of Cardenal’s work (43). The poet uses his poetry as a vehicle to simultaneously immortalize his values that will live on in other readers beyond his own passing and to meditate upon his own life within the larger context of the collective future that he

envisions. Regarding this intersection of life, death, values, the future, and the human psyche, Scheffler writes:

We want to act in ways that will help preserve and sustain the things that we value, but death marks the end of our ability to do this. . . . [D]eath poses a problem for our relationship with time. We want to personalize our relation to the future, yet for most of the future we will no longer be alive. (32)

Cardenal's verse preserves his values for posterity and his poetic rendering of time and evolution provide a literary framework in which his life has meaning in a collective chain of generations all of whom build upon the contributions of their ancestors in an ever advancing evolutionary front. In terms of the passage of time, the "now" of the present is not enough to bestow meaning on one's life. It is the future on time's continuum, even in the absence of physical resurrection and eternal life on an individual level, that make life meaningful and substantive, hence Cardenal's frequent and intense ruminations regarding Darwin's theories coupled with new developments in astrophysics. An insightful observation by Niko Kolodny sums up this point succinctly:

Whereas the expectation that others will survive me, that humanity will go on, is necessary for my valuing much of what I do, the recognition that I will *not* survive, that my life will *not* go on, is likewise necessary for my valuing much of what I do. (11)

Cardenal's poetic contemplations of time, particularly from *Cántico cósmico* to the present, seem to be precisely centered upon this point. Experiencing the fall of the Sandinista revolution and now entering into old age, the poet wonders what is to become of his life and his poetry. This construction of place with an increased emphasis on evolution over time imparts a greater significance upon his life and work.

Cardenal's metaphysical consolations are interwoven with an existential counter-discourse that clashes with the dominant conceptual apparatus of our times. There is a strong correlation between the survival of one's own value system after death and the legacy that the individual who holds these values leaves behind in terms of his/her contributions towards the betterment of all of creation. By continuing to write poetry prolifically into old age and entering into dialogue with the predominant ideological trends currently in vogue, Cardenal renovates his (r)evolutionary vision to be relevant within the conflicts that mark the times. By taking on the hegemonic "common sense" notion of individualism and freedom, the poet creates space for his own relevance and the collectivist ideologies that he has advocated throughout his life. In respect to the "afterlife" and individualism, Kolodny has noted the following:

If ["life after death" is in fact the "collective afterlife" as posited by Samuel Scheffler, that is, the] "existence of other human beings after our death," . . . then it complicates, in subtle but far-reaching ways, prevalent assumptions about human individualism and egoism. It suggests limits to our individualism, in that it reveals that much of what we value, even if not overtly social, depends on implicit collective preconditions. (5, 8)

Cardenal recognizes that his own life and legacy are intertwined with the collective survival and prosperity of the human species, hence his ecological anxieties and his poetic construction of alternative universals that collide with the destructive individualism so embraced by humanity and the free market ideologies that facilitate its ruinous expansion. The poet's representation of place includes a portrayal of time that counters the neoliberal celebration of the "now" that disastrously turns a blind eye to history and the future. David Harvey writes:

The time horizon implicated in a decision materially affects the kind of decision we make. If we want to leave something behind, or build a better future for our children, then we do quite different things than would be the case were we simply concerned with our own pleasures in the here and now. For this reason, time gets used in political rhetoric in confusing ways. (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 202)

Cardenal's work elaborates on the importance of time within a larger cosmological metaphysical framework that intrinsically links the "here and now" of which Harvey speaks, to the entire trajectory of creation, past, present, and future.

Poetic "Planetization"

Turning briefly to the spatial dimension in Cardenal's work within his space-time contemplations, the poet's writing enters a phase of transnational "planetization" that coincides with the same free-market globalization with which he grapples. To be sure, Cardenal has always had an internationalist component in his work, composing verse related to indigenous civilizations throughout the Americas, the Cuban revolution, and his travels abroad. However, his most recent collections contain even less overt references to both the United States as the main antagonist and to the poet's native Nicaragua as protagonist, giving way to a more globalized imagery. The United States is still seen by many as the main purveyor of neoliberal global imperialism around the world and still appears on the pages of Cardenal's writing as such, although playing a diminished role. It should be noted that the U.S. economy over the last several decades has become more "interwoven into global production systems and financial networks than ever before" (Harvey, *Brief History* 196), a trend that has likely influenced the way it is depicted by

the Nicaraguan poet. Roger Burbach et al. have noted the importance of the transnational corporation in the diffusion of capital:

Over the past four decades the world economy has undergone a transition from a system of international trade centered on national economies to a globally integrated system of production under the aegis of transnational corporations. This has marked a new epoch in the history of capitalism. Neoliberalism has served as the economic doctrine for breaking down barriers to the free flow of capital around the globe. (13-4)

Cardenal certainly utilizes the names of transnational corporations more frequently in his most recent poetry and the United States has taken a backseat, as seen in “El celular,” quoted earlier, arguably due to the new national and international context in which Cardenal pens his verse. Another example of this phenomenon is this excerpt from his poem “Reflexiones en el río Grijalva”:

[. . .] pero de pronto
en un recodo
del río
un remanso de agua paralizada
alfombra fétida
de detergentes coca-cola ketchup shampoos kellog
chile Tabasco frascos bolsas plásticas bolsas bolsas
pasta Colgate crema Gillette llantas envases vacíos
Agua de Colonia latas abiertas Listerine caja de
kleenex pedazo de zapato gato muerto trapos kotex

platos de cartón potes de pintura juguetes florero
roto...
todo flotante
en el suave vaivén del agua
como un kilómetro de desechos
el bote rápido bogando lento entre zopilotes
hasta salir al fin de
aquel averno de productos fétidos
de toda clase de marcas
el cadáver de un Súper [. . .] (257)

Cardenal skillfully paints this image of a fetid whirlpool of waste containing an array of products from various origins. The garbage symbolizes not only the destructiveness and unsustainable nature of this rampant use-and-dispose culture, and the lifestyle that it supports, but also the far reaching tentacles of a transnational market that extends to all corners of the globe. Not even the Río Grijalva that runs through the canyons and forests of Chiapas, Mexico, is immune to the effects of this globalized commerce and the ideologies that allow its advance. Multinational product names like “coca-cola,” “Listerine,” “Colgate,” and “Gillette,” have all converged to make their stamp on the landscape, and their legacy, as symbolized by the fetid carpet into which they are woven, is toxic.

Once again, the shadow of the consumer as a willing participant is complicit as a vector of detrimental lifestyle practices and logic. With irony, the poetic voice later utters the faulty reasoning that propels us along this destructive course: “compremos y compremos en los Supers / alma mía que mañana moriremos” (“Reflexiones en el Río Grijalva” 258). We, the consumers,

upon accepting the logic that privileges the short-term contract, lend a hand in the contamination of the environment as witnessed in the Grijalva and further promote the very logic that sustains this consumerism and carries it to even the most remote regions. Cardenal's poetry assumes a transnational character precisely to contend with the deleterious ideologies of neoliberalism which seem to know no boundaries or borders.

Conclusion

Ironically, Cardenal himself has become a transnational writer, not just thematically in his poems, but on the supply side of goods available on the global market. As López-Baralt has noted, his most recent important work, "El origen de las especies," first appeared in the English edition entitled *The Origin of Species and Other Poems* (2011) well before its eventual publication in the original Spanish (1967). For many years, Cardenal traveled as spokesman for the Sandinista cause, garnering international support and helping to raise funds for the nationalist revolution during the Cold War. His poetry received national and international attention and helped solidify revolutionary sentiment, shining a spotlight on the injustices committed by the Somoza regime. Many of his poetry collections have been translated into multiple languages and are available across the globe and he continues to travel widely to read his poems in front of international audiences. This appears to be the first time, however, referring to the case of "El origen de las especies," that his work was first published in English for a global audience before appearing in his native Spanish. While still highly acclaimed within his native Nicaragua, the climate and context within which he finds himself in his homeland has drastically changed with the fall of the Sandinista government, the subsequent neoliberal turn, and the increased friction and heated public wrangling that occurs between himself and former FSLN leaders. There is no longer a critical mass of public sentiment within Nicaragua to unite disparate groups to vie for change or

a vanguard party that advocates massive systemic reforms. “Leftist” national leaders, such as Daniel Ortega, who won the presidential election in 2006 as the FSLN candidate, have solidified their dictatorial grip on power in Nicaragua by coopting revolutionary rhetoric for personal political gain.¹¹³ Internationally, neoliberal capitalism has achieved global hegemony with little unified resistance after the fall of alternative metanarratives. As Peter H. Smith has noted, the post-Cold War environment has provided Latin America in general with a “distressingly slim range of practical options,” essentially with “nowhere . . . to turn” (274). In this setting, Cardenal has tended to poetically zoom back to earth to construct place as a planet largely devoid of (or, at the very least, with weakened) national borders. With the neutralization of formerly potent revolutionary icons and little impetus to stir the flames of national insurrection within Ortega’s “false revolution” now bolstered by hollow rhetoric, Cardenal planetizes place and tempers the rebellious zeal so typical of his earlier work in order to pen verse that prioritizes a higher awareness, appreciation, and protection of the commons on a global scale (Prado).

Thematically, Cardenal does not fall into the quagmire of neoliberal logic as do many opposition groups that hold individual freedoms to be “sacrosanct” and thus collapse into the very neoliberal narrative that they aim to counter (Harvey 41).¹¹⁴ However, Cardenal’s experience does reveal the conundrum that writers and artists face when seeking to paint alternatives to global capitalism. This artistic predicament predates the Washington Consensus of the 1990s, but has been all the more difficult during the last few decades given the “evaporation of any sense of historical continuity and memory, and the rejection of meta-narratives” that has

¹¹³Cardenal has publicly likened Ortega’s presidency to a “dictatorship” in interviews (“Ernesto Cardenal a Daniel Ortega”). The poet has called the latter a traitor: “El presidente nicaragüense no es el sandinismo sino su traición” (Prado). Facing prosecution and house arrest at the hands of the president, Cardenal has declared that the revolution is now comprised of those in opposition to the FSLN leader (Paul). Recent news reports indicate that Ortega could take office for an “unprecedented” fourth consecutive term after the National Assembly abolishes a constitutional clause that limits each president to two-terms (“Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega”).

¹¹⁴Neoliberal rhetoric prioritizes individual freedoms above all else. Thus, it is difficult to simultaneously rebel against the neoliberal model while upholding the tenets of individualism.

characterized this time period (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* 55). In a traditional Marxist sense, uniting workers across space has always been an important component in class struggle (236). In a globalized world, establishing political alliances that conjoin the local with the global are all the more problematic due to the fragmentation wrought by the neoliberal model. Even the less lofty ideal of disseminating refashioned poetic imaginings (in Cardenal's case, concerning the global "commons"), requires artists to become complicit as participants in the globalized capitalist economy to convey their message to international audiences, as the publication of the English language "The Origin of Species" demonstrates. Those who seek to offer alternatives run the risk of fortifying the same global capitalist networks and supporting the very information technologies that have facilitated the hegemonic rise and longevity of the neoliberal globalized economy in the first place. In the meantime, and perhaps similarly to the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (FZLN), better known as the Zapatistas, whom he mentions in "Reflexiones en el río Grijalva," Cardenal circulates his poetic vision of the world by utilizing the only tools at his disposal.¹¹⁵ He aims to simultaneously elevate his own relevance on the global stage in old age, at a time when the Sandinista revolution has faded into oblivion, while he at the same time contributes a unifying, healing, and inspirational poetic counterpoint to the neoliberal mindset so pervasive in today's world.

It is important to note that Cardenal resistance to neoliberalism does not include a blind opposition to technology per se, but rather its use towards exploitative ends. In fact, he exhibits a modernist faith in technological advances as the means to alleviate the suffering and inequality observed around the world. In his essay, "Este mundo y otro," he writes: "Naturalmente que la

¹¹⁵ The Zapatistas are a guerrilla group that rose up in the Mexican state of Chiapas to denounce the implementation of NAFTA on January 1, 1994. They were able to capture national and international attention with "colorful and able leadership" as well as a masterfully publicized campaign in which they utilized the media and technologies to disseminate information pertinent to their cause (Smith 229-30).

tecnología puede ser buena o mala según el uso que se le dé. A Dios le alegraría el invento del martillo y los clavos para trabajar la madera, pero no el que esa tecnología sirviera para crucificar” (64). He expands upon this topic in his memoirs, specifically referring to information technologies and the promise that they hold:

¿Habrá salida? La evolución encuentra siempre una salida. Y por eso es que ahora vemos esas inmensas oleadas de juventud convocadas por algo nuevo que es el internet. Quienes estaban apáticos se reúnen de pronto espontáneamente, sin partido, ni líder, ni organización, ni ideología. Primero han sido concentraciones multitudinarias de jóvenes de todas partes del mundo en una ciudad determinada, y ahora empiezan a ser movilizaciones simultáneas en múltiples ciudades del mundo entero. (*La revolución perdida* 455)

Despite this faith in technology, nothing can surpass the intellectual capacity of the human mind to advance, as Cardenal indicates in this English translation of “Theory of Language”: “our brain, larger than it should be, / is the biggest computer in the world” (*The Origin of Species and Other Poems* 25). People advocating for change, just as Cardenal does with his reassertion of the global commons, are the motor behind the evolution of our species and ultimately our universe:

Como nunca antes, la evolución está haciendo brotar en todas partes personas que desean un cambio, y proclaman que otro mundo es posible, hombres y mujeres que son la evolución adelantándose, y la evolución haciéndose más y más consciente. Somos un proceso que comenzó en el Big Bang. Las subpartículas atómicas se juntaron en átomos, y los átomos en moléculas, y las moléculas en células, y las células en organismos hasta llegar al organismo con la conciencia humana, y ahora estos organismos se juntan en sociedades. Y no sería

científico pensar que somos ya el final de la evolución. ¿Podemos imaginar lo que será la humanidad dentro de miles de años? ¿Cómo podemos decir que ya llegamos al fin de las utopías? (*La revolución perdida* 455)

From Cardenal's perspective, integration is a trend that characterizes all steps of the evolutionary processes that make up the universe and is a phenomenon that should be embraced. Historian Greg Grandin makes an astute observation regarding prevalent attitudes in Latin America in relation to this point:

Latin Americans, of course, have been plugged into the world economy since the days of slave ships and gold mines, so their skepticism regarding the benefits promised by the Washington Consensus can be excused. In this latest phase of globalization, it is not integration they resist but the particular kind of corporate integration that has been forced on them. If there is one overarching objective shared by the diverse and often opposing constituencies that make up Latin America's new left, it is a desire to wriggle at least somewhat free of U.S. control. (*Empire's Workshop* 210)

By increasingly representing place on a global, transnational scale in this latest phase of poetic production, Cardenal advocates for a more cooperative integration that celebrates humankind's common genetic, cultural, and geologic heritage. At the same time, he counters the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism that both subordinates and excludes large segments of the world's population from that to which we are all heirs and wreaks ecological devastation on the global environmental commons. On the spectrum of the poet's overlapping places presented in Chapter 3, namely *Cardenal / Solentiname (or Managua) / Nicaragua / Earth / Solar System / Milky Way / Universe*, Cardenal comes back to Earth from the stars of *Cántico cósmico* and *Versos del*

pluriverso so to speak, in order to poeticize the biological Big Bang that unites all life forms on the planet in his most recent construction of place. In this phase of poetic “planetization,” Cardenal attempts to bridge the gaps of fragmentation so that readers can collectively and conceptually “wriggle at least somewhat free” from the neoliberal common sense apparatus that so stymies the evolutionary integration of which the poet dreams.

CONCLUSION

When I considered the initial proposal for this study, I planned to conduct a comparative analysis of Ernesto Cardenal's work alongside the poetry of several other prominent Latin American writers, similar to such investigations by Analisa DeGrave and Patrick Murphy, among other scholars in the field.¹¹⁶ As I delved more deeply into the life and writing of Cardenal, however, I quickly realized the unique opportunity that his extensive body of work offers as the potential and sole subject for an "intra"-comparative, panoramic investigation that covers the entire trajectory of his lengthy career. Hailed to be the most important living Latin American poet, Cardenal has prolifically produced his brand of *exteriorista* verse for over sixty-five years to date (2014). Simply put, there is no other writer living in Latin America today with whom Cardenal's large body of work compares. Born in 1925, he has lived, witnessed, experienced, and "documented" in his poetry many of the trends and transformations of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first century. Rather than comparing his writing as one body of static work with that of other writers, his long and prolific career invites examination from within his corpus of poetry. By comparing his poems with those that he himself has penned earlier or later in life, one is better able to understand the historical and autobiographical moments that Cardenal has lived and witnessed, as well as how he adjusts his hopes and dreams in the context of the events that surround him.

Some scholars, such as Jonathan Cohen and Paul W. Borgeson, have invited readers to view Cardenal's verse chronologically, but have done so covering a shorter span of the poet's career and/or giving merely a general overview of the different phases in Cardenal's

¹¹⁶ Analisa DeGrave has compared Cardenal's work with that of José Emilio Pacheco and Sandra María Esteves. Patrick Murphy has located parallels and differences between Cardenal's *Cántico cósmico* and Pablo Neruda's *Canto general*. The analyses of both critics are cited in the body of this present study.

development over time.¹¹⁷ To my knowledge, the present analysis is a rare attempt to conduct an investigation of Cardenal's writing following the trajectory of his entire career. Any endeavor which aims to singularly and comprehensively examine Cardenal's poetry by traversing every collection and every element of his work over the course of his entire career would, of course, be an extremely ambitious and arguably unattainable goal. To narrow the scope, I first felt it was essential to establish a measuring stick of sorts for comparison to note changes, similarities, and trends in his writing. Given the primacy of geography in the construction of Nicaraguan identities throughout history, I chose poetic landscapes as my primary point of reference to examine Cardenal's subjective construction of place over time, noting changes as they relate to important autobiographical and historical moments in the life and times of the poet. Within Cardenal's particular *exteriorista* style of writing, a seemingly objective tone pervades much of his poetry. This is also true of his portrayal of landscapes. I was intrigued by the possibility of "decoding" his landscapes by undertaking a closer reading while simultaneously cross-referencing his memoirs and other historiographical accounts of the times in which each verse was written. By doing so, I hoped to better determine the subjectivity of place embedded in these landscapes. By carrying out a comparative analysis, I have found that landscape details are more than mere poetic backdrops or secondary adornments for the action presented in each verse. Through this study, it has become apparent that Cardenal's poetic representation of place is in dialogue with the autobiographical and historical context in which each verse was written.

In order to dissect and analyze the construction of place in Cardenal's writing, I turned to Alexandra Kogl's formulation, "place = space + meaning." This equation provided a valuable

¹¹⁷ I refer here specifically to Paul W. Borgeson's *Hacia el hombre nuevo: poesía y pensamiento de Ernesto Cardenal* (London: Tamesis Books, 1984) and Jonathan Cohen's introduction to Cardenal's *With Walker in Nicaragua and Other Early Poems 1949-1954* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press 1985).

tool to this end in that it succinctly expresses the importance of ideas as well as the material realm in the construction of place. I added an element of dialogue to Kogl's equation and thereby established a theoretical foundation to analyze the dialogic nature of Cardenal's poetic place(s). I applied this modified formula in order to locate the predominant narratives, as well as the autobiographical and historical moments with which Cardenal dialogues as per the "meaning" side of Kogl's equation. In regards to the "space" addend, I adopted an ecocritical stance to better understand the interrelationship between Cardenal's verse and the material world.

Given the long career of the poet, it was essential to divide his corpus of literature into smaller historical periods or phases. I devised this chronological breakdown by identifying the major autobiographical and/or historical moments or ruptures throughout Cardenal's life by referring to the historical record and to his memoirs. It was crucial to undertake a close examination of historiographical accounts as Nicaraguan transformation throughout the twentieth century is intensely registered across Cardenal's poetry and would become a major part of my focus. To summarize the demarcation lines that I utilized to structure my analysis, they are: (1) the production of his first *exteriorista* poem "Raleigh" in 1949 and his return to Nicaragua at the age of twenty-four after spending two years on foreign exchange in the United States and Europe, (2) Cardenal's second "conversion" to Marxism in 1970 while on an extended trip to Cuba, (3) Cardenal's exile from Solentiname in 1977 after his island commune was ransacked and destroyed by Somoza's forces, and (4) the electoral loss of the Sandinistas to UNO candidate Violeta Chamorro in 1990. The latter period covered in this study continues from the moment of the Sandinista defeat through the present day. These ruptures in no way indicate absolute breaks in Cardenal's writing, but rather serve as guideposts to understand transformations that become evident in his verse. Similarities in his poetry can straddle these lines, as is evident in Chapter 4,

in the examination of *Cántico cósmico* and those collections that have been written since. To be sure, certain elements in Cardenal's *exteriorista* style traverse his entire body of work since the beginning. Because my aim was to locate changes in representation and emphases as they pertain to Cardenal's construction of place, however, I chose particular demarcation "ruptures" that seemed appropriate in order to pinpoint these transformations over time.

Poetic Landscapes over Time

In Chapter 1, I analyze Cardenal's poetic landscapes during his first phase of production from 1950 to 1970. As my study indicates, U.S. foreign policy as well as Cardenal's own experiences during that time period clearly influence the poet's representation of landscape. He had just returned to Nicaragua in 1949 after spending two years in the United States where he was in contact with North American literature, lived in an international setting in New York, and studied Latin American history at the libraries that he had at his disposal. Cardenal's poetry paints with wonder the landscape of his homeland as if seen for the first time from the perspective of an explorer or traveler. As sources for these early poems, he utilized the writings of Clinton Rollins and Ephraim George Squier (the former is a fictitious character created by Henry Clinton Parkhurst) and Cardenal was able to figuratively fill their shoes and comprehend the awe that Nicaragua's majestic landscapes inspired in these adventurers precisely because the poet himself was returning from abroad and rediscovering his country for the first time. It is the only time throughout his career that he views Nicaragua through the eyes of a foreigner and marvels at the "otherness of his world" (Cohen, "With Walker" 7). Clinton Rollins, the protagonist in "Con Walker en Nicaragua," expresses chaos on the ground as the *filibusteros* infiltrate and attempt to conquer the native populations but he also reveals a psychological and emotional confusion, a feeling that also manifests itself in the seemingly contradictory

characteristics present in the poetic landscapes that surround the men. In the years immediately following World War II, many Latin Americans were also confused concerning the U.S. character and had difficulty determining whether their neighbors to the north were friends or foes, honest men or scoundrels and thieves. The dichotomy in the American character surfaces in the Walker/Rollins contrast as well as in the extremes presented in the poetic landscapes depicting the natural world. Cardenal is able to poetically represent the confusion and awe that Rollins expresses and the “transcultural identity conflict” to which the protagonist of the poem succumbs precisely because the poet himself has autobiographically and historically experienced similar phenomena around the same time that he pens this early verse.

As the United States becomes more antagonistic towards Nicaragua with the heating up of the Cold War, the colorful hues of “Con Walker” polarize into a more pronounced light/dark dichotomy in “Hora 0.” The lyrical voice clearly identifies himself as one of those in the dark of night, outside of the presidential palace, while the less sympathetic Americans and their surrogates interact under the artificial light at a party in the house on the hill. The transcultural conflict, as seen in earlier poems, gives way to sharply defined identities as the anti-communist crusade of the Americans during the Cold War forces everybody to draw lines in the sand and to pick sides.

A study of Cardenal’s verse from this time period also exposes links between the poet’s verse and specific imperial tropes to which he responds. In addition to appropriating tropes that appear in the writings of Alexander von Humboldt as well as testimony from former *filibusteros*, Cardenal seems to adopt imagery similar to Cold War rhetoric originating in Washington, particularly Eisenhower’s reference to the “domino effect,” a term that was to become common during the Cold War. As the U.S. was fretting over the spread of communism knocking on its

southern borders as country after country began falling to the red menace in domino like fashion, Cardenal's "Hora 0" sweeps through Central America depicting a similar phenomenon, but with an inversion of protagonists and antagonists. Just as the night of right-wing dictatorships spreads across the isthmus in a wave of suppression and terror, so too does the dawn of liberation illuminate each bordering country as dictators fall in succession until reaching the "Hora 0" and geographic ground zero of Nicaragua. Although Nicaragua is never far from view, Cardenal's earlier poems reveal a regional focus on Central America immediately after the poet's return from study abroad. A more Nicaragua-centric and nationalistic tone dominates Cardenal's construction of place between 1970 and 1979.

Cardenal's representation of landscape during this first phase of production also reveals the poet's prejudices and biases regarding gender roles and sexuality. Depicting the Nicaraguan landscape as a submissive, beautiful woman in need of protection, the masculine, heterosexual heroes come to the fore to shield her from the destructive forces embodied by William Walker, a feminized and possibly homosexual man who wreaks havoc due to his inability to appreciate the beauty of women and the feminized Nicaraguan landscape. Cardenal's conservative adherence to traditional gender roles and his apparent bias against homosexuality are constants throughout the course of his writing career as this study attests.

Cardenal's early stage of poetry also reflects a burgeoning ecological awareness in his verse although a more complex representation of this relationship between human and non-human inhabitants of landscape does not appear until later collections. The natural world is depicted mainly as a monolithic entity on which humanity depends, but the poet does celebrate and glorify those that recognize the natural bounty and/or live in harmony with their surroundings, as in the cases of Clinton Rollins and Augusto César Sandino, respectively.

Interestingly, Cardenal's construction of the heroic Sandino as the embodiment of the masculine, revolutionary, and heroic Nicaraguan male preceded Carlos Fonseca's subsequent tailoring of Sandino as the principal FSLN symbol almost a decade later (Zimmerman 74). The poet's preference towards non-violence manifests itself in his representation of landscape as the masculine protector rises to the defense of nation but never appears overtly as an agent of violence.

In Chapter 2, I examine the second period of Cardenal's writing, exemplified by "Canto nacional" and "Oráculo sobre Managua," and analyze notable transformations in the representation of landscape. The depiction of the human and non-human inhabitants of the natural environment becomes more complex, detailed, and vivid, and a plethora of regional terminology is employed to poeticize the local flora and fauna. Onomatopoeia is employed to conjoin language and discourse with the materiality of landscape, as seen in the abundant bird calls in "Canto nacional." The poetic lens zooms in upon nation and Cardenal's penchant for flight imagery enhances this focus upon the territory or natural body of Nicaragua. One notes a heightened presence and emphasis upon "yo," the lyrical voice in the first person singular that becomes evident in comparison with earlier poems, and an increased focus on his personal space, or "place," to employ Alexandra Kogl's terminology. This simultaneous focus on the self and nation can be explained by Cardenal's aim to fortify national awakenings in order to fight his own marginalization as potential democratic paths toward reform close under Somoza's increasingly oppressive dictatorial regime.

In "Canto nacional," Cardenal weaves his poetry and the lyrical voice into a poetic ecological web that includes Nicaraguan human and non-human inhabitants, important symbolic landmarks such as the Momotombo volcano, as well as a pantheon of paternal national

forefathers such as Rubén Darío. The poet contests symbols appropriated by empire and its surrogates, as seen in the case of the Momotombo stamp, for example, that eventually led to the ouster of President José Santos Zelaya in 1909. This event arguably put Nicaragua on the path of corruption, poverty, and injustice that it suffered throughout the rest of the twentieth century. The ecological web in “Canto nacional” also allows Cardenal to counter certain imperial narratives circulated at the time that linked revolutionary “conspiracies” in Nicaragua to international Soviet and Cuban plots designed to infiltrate Central America and poison the minds of the populace. Cardenal’s rising poetic cacophony of bird calls represents a home-grown organic revolution that springs from the material reality in which Nicaraguans live, thus countering these conspiracy theories. At a time when Communists and revolutionary segments of the population were commonly likened to cancerous growths, Cardenal’s ecological web implies that the U.S. and its surrogates are invasive microbes that threaten the intricate balance and harmony of the host web. The lyrical speaker presents himself as a prophetic voice in touch with the material realities of the Nicaraguan landscape and ecological web, capable of translating the various voices that fill this space. He poetically reclaims language and reasserts the legitimacy and autonomy of Nicaraguan-based knowledge in an epistemological sense from (neo)colonial usurpation.

Cardenal’s poetic portrayal of the Nicaraguan ecological web also unifies the diverse inhabitants of the national territory, blurring the lines between competing subjectivities that could potentially fracture the poet’s vision of a harmonious and united revolutionary front. He acknowledges the indigenous elements within his nation’s borders, as in the case of the Sumo and Miskito communities, but he weaves them into his poetic ecology with little reference to their historic “Anglo-affinity” and anti-Spaniard sentiments. A tension is observed in Cardenal’s

verse between the historic tendency in Nicaragua to obliterate indigenous difference via the construction of a mestizo race on the one hand and the recognition of these Indian elements on the other. Cardenal acknowledges their presence and celebrates their knowledge of and harmonious relationship with the natural world. However, he also conveniently untangles the historic snarls and conflicts that have marked the contact between the disparate groups occupying Nicaraguan territory.

Cardenal's ecological poetics manifest a deeper complexity during this time period than in earlier poems as he answers imperial writing "scribbled" across the Nicaraguan landscape. The poet gives non-human inhabitants a voice as the landscape emits protective shrieks to protest the theft and exportation of the national body in the form of natural resources. Historically, timber, minerals, rubber, and bananas have been transported via the Prinzapolka waterway, a vein along which Nicaragua's body could be said to have been materially depleted to enrich those in the metropolis. Cardenal begins to equate ecological exploitation with social injustice and the two become increasingly linked in this phase of poetry, demonstrating his pioneering contributions to what Analisa DeGrave calls "ecoliterature." The complexity and scope of his environmental stance only increase in later collections.

In "Oráculo sobre Managua," Cardenal utilizes poetic images of ecological contamination and juxtaposes them with the petrified footprints of Acahualinca to portray landscape as a scroll upon which competing subjectivities carve or write their narratives. The footprints are depicted as the resilient signature of the Nicaraguan people scrawled across the foundation of nation, a symbol used to reclaim ownership of the nation's natural body usurped and polluted by imperial powers. Cardenal also masterfully juxtaposes the petrified Acahualinca footprints with the steps of U.S. Apollo 11 astronauts across the surface of the moon in order to

condemn imperial exploits and U.S. empire's thirst for conquest. Cardenal wrestles to regain control over the moon as symbol of the Nicaraguan night sky, a celestial body that had come to represent the insatiable appetite of imperial exploits after the Apollo 11 mission.

Chapter 3 captures the extremes of the post-1979 experience which ranged from triumphant euphoria to defeat and despair. Cardenal's two collections *Vuelos de victoria* and *Cántico cósmico* are a testament to this pendulum of emotion. The majority of the poems in *Vuelos* contain simplistic representations of a harmonious and victorious Nicaraguan landscape in which the *campesinos* are reunited with the material environment that they work and from which they gain sustenance. Having foregone pleasures of the flesh due to his status as an ordained Catholic priest, Cardenal sought to figuratively inseminate the superimposed, fertile, and synergetic dyad *campesino / tierra* with his ideas. In *Vuelos*, he celebrates the success of this project to enlighten the peasantry who now seamlessly form part of the ecologically vibrant and lush landscape cured from the capitalist ills that not long ago sickened the nation under Somoza's regime.

If *Vuelos* is simplistic and naïve in its euphoria, *Cántico cósmico* is long, extremely complex, and sometimes optimistic, but with a deeper sense of melancholy pervading the text. Cardenal's landscapes shift to the stars as the poet escapes the faltering revolution in Nicaragua. He reformulates place in *Cántico cósmico* just as he does the poems that originally appear in *Vuelos de victoria*. He inserts *Vuelos* and thus his earlier constructions of place into the larger and more complex framework of his *Cántico*, salvaging them from oblivion and obscurity as they become an integral part of the vast network of space and galaxies in the multidimensional universe. Cardenal reworks his poetic places by zooming out and away to the stars and adjusting the historic scope of events on the ground by modifying the scale of each respective landscape.

As Cardenal is estranged from women, the Catholic Church, the peasantry, Solentiname, the Ministry of Culture, and from the likelihood that his revolution will ever take root as he had originally envisioned, he casts Nicaragua poetically as small and seemingly insignificant, but as a nation on a planet that is also infinitely small in an expanding universe. He establishes balance by emphasizing the relative physical (un)importance of all inhabitants on the globe, equally distributed around the miniscule rock called Earth.

I present four different and plausible interpretations of the “cosmos” in *Cántico cósmico*: (1) the interim space between earthly and transcendent love, (2) the interconnectedness of all beings as per Zen teachings, (3) the search for meaning and purpose amidst the alienation and chaos of the universe, and (4) a “third nature” or realm through which the lyrical voice enters into dialogue with empire and responds to historical and autobiographical events as they unfold. In this chapter I focus primarily on the fourth interpretation above, arguing that the poet inserts his nationalist vision within the larger context of the universe in an attempt to rescue his poetry as well as his legacy from those that appear to thwart his idea of (r)evolution. From an exilic vantage point, Cardenal fights to protect his legacy and to prevent his own emasculation at the hands of Reagan and the Catholic Church which have thwarted the fruitful bond that was to have been created between Cardenal, his land, and his people. Cardenal’s poetic representation of the universe undermines those narratives emanating from U.S. intelligentsia that were used to justify Reagan’s intervention into Nicaraguan affairs. In opposition to Jeane Kirkpatrick’s assertions regarding man’s competitive nature within a seemingly static universe, Cardenal finds evidence in the stars that all matter has a cooperative nature. While stressing unity, not division, as being the law of the universe, he also emphasizes the dynamic nature of creation.

The ecological component of *Cántico cósmico* is also of utmost importance in that the poet expands his environmental concerns from Central American and Nicaragua to consider the whole planet at once as seen from the lyrical voice's exilic and prophetic vantage point amongst the stars. He speaks from a higher plane in the universe to issue a warning about the imminent ecological catastrophe for all of earth's inhabitants should we not adopt a more collective and environmentally sound way of life.

In Chapter 4, I focus on Cardenal's post-1990 collections and note strong similarities between *Cántico cósmico*, *Versos del pluriverso*, and the newer poems contained within *Hidrógeno enamorado*. This phase of poetic production can be seen as a continuation of the project Cardenal undertook with *Cántico cósmico* in thematic, interdisciplinary, and spiritually contemplative terms. In addition, as I argue in Chapter 3, Cardenal similarly assumes a poetic position among the stars to fight his own marginalization and to protect his legacy and work in the wake of the Sandinista downfall. While cross-referencing Cardenal's recent poetry collections with his memoirs and anthropological studies of the period beginning with the Washington Consensus of 1990, however, I also note an additional emphasis in his work running counter to the conceptual apparatus that has helped propagate the neoliberal turn evident around the globe. The poems of *Hidrógeno enamorado*, in particular, seem to come back to Earth and enter a phase of transnational planetization as the emphasis shifts from the astrophysical origins of the entire universe to the biological Big Bang of life on Earth in "El origen de las especies," for example. Cardenal stresses the common origins of all living beings, a viewpoint that runs counter to the atomization and fragmentation inherent in the neoliberal model. Cardenal's representations of the planet and of the natural world clash with the "common sense" conceptual apparatus that girds neoliberal thought. Although living entities may appear to be autonomous

and independent, unattached beings, Cardenal's poetics paint the planet as a biologically interdependent organism that can trace its ancestry back to one living cell. On Cardenal's planet, one's individual behaviors affect the whole and the ripples can be felt worldwide. The seemingly jubilant and innocuous phone conversation of an aloof consumer in "El celular" has terrible consequences over the material realities of those living in the Congo for example. The extraction of coltan by faceless transnational corporations to produce the cell phone inscribes poverty, pain, and misery on the landscape and bodies of the locals. Similarly, the consumer in "Reflexiones en el río Grijalva" is the vector that pollutes the waterways through his/her purchasing habits. Each individual action affects all living organisms and their material existence, because all of life has a common material origin in Cardenal's poetic biological Big Bang.

Because all living organisms are interconnected, Cardenal's most recent poems set out to reassert and to advocate for the protection of the biological, cultural, and ecological commons, all endangered by the neoliberal dominant mode of discourse. The "commons" are intertwined and their exploitation for capital gain results in their degradation. The lust for oil in Iraq leads to the destruction of important cultural artefacts in a museum, the search for minerals to produce cell phones desecrates the bodies of children and their environment in the Congo, and the far reaching tentacles of the insatiable capitalist model that spreads consumerism to the far reaches of the globe contaminate the Grijalva River with a fetid carpet of toxic waste. The first step in protecting these commons is to displace the neoliberal conceptual apparatus while at the same time tearing away the mask that obscures the interconnectedness of all living things. Cardenal's poems expose the suffering caused by individual consumer choices.

The interconnectedness of Cardenal's place also intersects with the poet's reflections regarding his own life as he enters old age and ponders his legacy and the longevity of his work.

According to his philosophy, creation shares common origins and travels toward a common destination. Resurrection of each individual in physical terms is replaced with the idea of cyclical resurrection as all organic matter is recycled from generation to generation. The universe and all of its components collectively strive to reach successively higher evolutionary planes and each enlightened action contributes one small step in a slow but steady transition towards more advanced states of being. Cardenal seeks immortality by composing verse that hopefully propels readers to higher states of consciousness and understanding. He simultaneously advocates for the protection of the commons on which all life depends for the survival of Cardenal's poetic contributions is contingent upon the perseverance of the human race. In his verse, the poet rues the passage of time but also finds solace in the notion that all matter is in motion and continues upon the same trajectory towards the future. By inculcating present and future generations with his enlightened perspective, Cardenal ensures his own immortality by contributing to thoughts that others will carry through the ages. Ecological protections are of utmost importance because mass extinction means the end of evolutionary advancements that carry Cardenal's contributions to higher planes of consciousness. Without future generations, resurrection is impossible within the poet's representation of a constantly evolving universe.

Final Thoughts

By comparing the findings relative to each respective poem, the dialogic nature of Cardenal's representation of landscape and his constructions of place become clear. As per Alexandra Kogl's equation, it is evident that the poet reshapes the "meanings" embedded in his landscapes as he enters into dialogue with the political, historical, and autobiographical contexts as well as with prominent narratives in vogue at the time. On the "space" side of the equation, Cardenal

responds to the physical “writing” over the material bodies of nation (and later, planet) and/or the living beings that inhabit the spatial terrain represented in each poem.

U.S.-Nicaragua Relations. The meanings that Cardenal attaches to place are shaped largely by U.S.-Nicaragua relations and narratives emanating from U.S. empire, as well as by shifting political waters within Nicaragua itself. The transcultural identity conflict and light/dark polarization seen in “Con Walker en Nicaragua” and “Hora 0” respectively, symbolize the transformations taking place at the time between the United States and Latin America and the rhetoric used to justify changes in U.S. foreign policy. The unyielding U.S. support for the Somoza regime despite the ruthless oppression witnessed under “Tachito” in the late 1960s and early 1970s leads to a more self-centered, national focus in “Canto nacional” and “Oráculo sobre Managua,” as self-preservation and self-realization become increasingly intertwined with national sovereignty. In *Cántico cósmico*, Cardenal’s escape to the stars and his emphasis on a multidimensional universe can be seen as an attempt to evade his own marginalization as his revolutionary vision fractures and falters during the 1980s during the Contra war. Cardenal reformulates landscape and alters the poetic scale of place to contest narratives produced by U.S. intelligentsia that justify CIA intervention and support for the Contras. In *Versos del pluriverso* and *Hidrógeno enamorado*, he continues to vie for the preservation of his legacy and work by increasingly emphasizing the interconnectedness and common origins of all living things on the planet and our shared dependence on the Earth for our sustenance. He does so against the current of the hegemonic neoliberal model that has infiltrated economies as well as the cultural, ideological, ecological, social, and spiritual fabrics of communities all across the globe. Overt mention of the United States as main antagonist decreases as Cardenal’s focus appears to shift to

the vast network of global production systems that characterize the capitalist model of today. Poetic references to the United States still appear but are more integrated with the names of transnational corporations than before.

Ecopoetry. The ecological message of Cardenal's verse becomes increasingly dire as a panoramic view of his poetry suggests. His criticism of the environmental estrangement and degradation brought about by capitalism is a constant in his work, but the intensity of his warnings and the overall scale of environmental devastation are amplified over time in his poetry. His focus shifts from Central America, Nicaragua, and the United States, to include other Latin American and African nations, India, and ultimately the entire planet. "Meanings" attached to places either hinder or facilitate how human beings use or misuse any given space, hence Cardenal's insistence on wrestling with the capitalist and, later, the neoliberal mindset that condones environmentally destructive behavior. He also focuses on the materiality of place to simultaneously depict the ecologically damaging "writing" that is scribbled across the landscape and natural world upon which we all depend. Landscapes are not presented as mere symbols but as physically tangible, metabolic spaces that are part of intricate ecological systems. Cardenal raises awareness by poeticizing the ecological balance of life and removing the "fetishistic mask" that hides the imbalances wrought by human activities. By exposing the material ramifications of humanity's adherence to certain conceptual apparatuses, he sheds light on the consequences of upholding and assisting in the promotion and propagation of such meanings. Cardenal's poetry delivers an increasingly powerful pro-environmental message by addressing both sides of the equation, meaning and space, in a two-pronged approach.

I began this study with the assumption that Cardenal's poetic landscapes would be a crucial key to understanding his construction of identities and places given the primacy of geography throughout Nicaragua's history. The results of this investigation not only bear out this hypothesis but perhaps even more strongly than I had expected. Cardenal's pioneering, prophetic, and as of yet underappreciated ecological consciousness has likely sprung from his identification with a nation that has always been viewed materially as either an interim point of transit, a fruit plantation, or a supplier of extractive resources. Nicaragua's insertion into the global economy since the Spanish conquest has always been predicated on its geographical position and the material wealth that could be extracted and exported from its borders. Cardenal's alternative imaginings regarding the future prospects for self and nation understandably link liberation with the material realities of place. To be on the periphery is to witness on the ground the intrinsic connection between the social injustices committed against the human population with the exploitation, degradation, and disregard for the natural environment and its non-human inhabitants. In this regard, Cardenal's verse has been on the cutting edge of capturing the interrelationship between tyranny and environmental catastrophe and deserves recognition alongside other highly touted ecological treatises of the twentieth century. Given the rising concerns regarding global climate change and the degradation of the world's environmental "commons," further research and appreciation of the ecological component of Cardenal's poetry is essential.

Citizenship. Recognizing the innovative contributions of Cardenal's work in ecological terms should not obscure the fact that he also clings to less inclusive paradigms and these come through in his verse and his representations of landscape. As evident from this study, Cardenal

frequently blurs the lines of potentially competing subjectivities that do not fit into the alternative universals that he attaches to place. He adheres to traditional gender roles, viewing brave and courageous men as the creative and dominant force that must protect the submissive, fertile female. In Cardenal's universe, opposites attract and conjoin as the building blocks of creation, life, and the engine of evolution. This is seen on the molecular level, amongst celestial bodies, and in his representation of the biological Big Bang. The poet equates the creative attraction between oppositely charged protons and electrons with the biological sexes and consistently makes reference to this phenomenon in his poetic landscapes. By so doing, he discriminates against the homosexual community by hinting that same-sex unions are the antithesis of the creative forces witnessed in the universe. As seen in "Nueva York," the alienation and ills observed within the concrete and polluted landscape of New York are connected with images of homosexuality as if the latter were indicative of the disharmony inherent in the capitalist model and its estrangement from the natural world. References to a feminized and possibly homosexual William Walker in his earlier poems already establish a connection between destructive tendencies and what Cardenal deems to be unnatural sexual behavior. This theme is a constant in his work albeit with slight modification. It should be pointed out that in *Telescopio en la noche oscura* (1993), a poem not included in this study, he writes, "El que todo en el universo es macho y hembra / (aun lo homosexual lo es a su manera) . . ." (33), providing evidence that he has begun to acknowledge homosexuality following what he deems to be natural laws of the universe, despite his tendency, noted here as well, to "other" the gay community.

Cardenal begins mentioning indigenous communities more frequently in his verse in the late sixties and early seventies as seen in "Canto nacional," and he even dedicates entire collections to the American Indians, such as *Homenaje a los indios americanos* (1969) and *Los*

ovnis de oro (1988). In his memoirs, he attributes his growing interest in the original inhabitants of the continent to the influence of Thomas Merton. Cardenal seems drawn to their communal social structure and harmonious coexistence with the natural environment. His references to the aboriginal communities more frequently include those peoples residing outside of Nicaraguan borders, however. As seen in “Canto nacional,” he does weave the Miskito and Sumo communities of the Atlantic Coast into his ecological web but glosses over the historical tensions that have existed between the indigenous people and other sectors of Nicaraguan society. His Chardinian emphasis on “unity in diversity” appears to include all lifestyles, races, and creeds, but this analysis highlights that citizenship to Cardenal’s nation is not equally accessible to all. His vision maintains hierarchical differences in terms of gender, sexuality, and race to some extent. He also overlooks the diversity of the peasantry and depicts the *campesinos* as potential revolutionary subjects upon being successfully inculcated with the poet’s enlightened wisdom. This carries over into Cardenal’s representation of landscape where he arguably adheres to the same rationale employed by (neo)colonial narratives. He envisions revolution and national development as the coupling of his creative ideas with the submissive peasant/nature dyad.

Place. Ernesto Cardenal’s poetic places consist of a masculinized nationalism and a strong collective consciousness. This collectivity has always included a harmonious relationship with the natural world although its portrayal as one organism has developed and become more complex in his writing over time. Prominent symbols defining the Nicaraguan landscape are treasured and often repeated, strengthening the notion of ties between people, their material habitat, their shared history, and literary works by other Nicaraguan writers who make similar references to the same landmarks. The volcanoes Momotombo, Masaya, Ometepe, the large,

freshwater, inland Lago de Nicaragua and Lago de Managua, and the San Juan River are but a few examples. The moon, the sun, and the constellations are also important symbols that help establish material anchors to place.

The friendly and welcoming passivity of the locals of Cardenal's earliest poems transforms into a more hostile stance as a protective, masculine nationalism increases in intensity. Diverse elements appear in these poetic landscapes but they unite to form a revolutionary front. As the Sandinistas fail to create the Kingdom of God on Earth that Cardenal had prophesized, Nicaraguan nationalism fades from the front lines but serves as an example upon which to build future movements. Nicaragua is represented as a nation among a collective community of nations, all of equal significance occupying the same planet. As the reach of financial networks supersede national borders and information technologies condense space and time, the ardent nationalism of the 1970s gives way to a poetic current of transnationalism. Revolutionary zeal is scaled back while the insistence of a planet-wide cross-species collectivity comes to the fore. The creation of the Kingdom of God is pushed into the future, a common destination towards which the entire universe travels.

By decoding landscape representation in Cardenal's verse, the subjectivity of place becomes clearer. Rather than being static and monolithic backdrops for the action described in each poem, the landscapes themselves are a primary and dynamic referent. An analysis of their changing textures makes clear that Cardenal's poetic landscapes are not merely the product of a liberation theologian or an adherent of Marxist ideologies, but the result of a man responding to the historical and autobiographical context of his own life and times.

WORKS CITED

WORKS CITED

- Asturias, Miguel Ángel. *El Señor Presidente*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1997. Print.
- Babb, Florence E. *After Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992. Print.
- . *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Print.
- Bales, K. *Disposable People, New Slavery in the Global Economy*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2000. Print.
- Barbas-Rhoden, Laura. *Ecological Imaginations in Latin American Fiction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. Print.
- Belli, Gioconda. Interview. *Voces hispanas siglo XXI: Entrevistas con autores en DVD*. By Elvira Sánchez-Blake and Maria Nowakowska Stycos. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. DVD.
- . *Línea de fuego*. Ciudad de La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1978. Print.
- . *El país bajo mi piel*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores, 2001. Print.
- Benedetti, Mario. "Ernesto Cardenal: evangelio y revolución." *Casa de las Américas*. 63 (1970): 175-83. Print.
- Binns, Niall. "1963: el bosque, el libro y la tierra baldía." Prologue. *Poemas del país de nunca jamás y Crónica del forastero de Jorge Teillier*. Santiago: Tajamar, 2003. Print.
- . *¿Callejón sin salida?: La crisis ecológica en la poesía hispanoamericana*. Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2004. Print.
- . "Landscapes of Hope and Destruction: Ecological Poetry in Spanish America." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature & Environment*. 9.1 (2002): 105-119. Print.
- "Bio.: True Story." *Biography.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 8 August 2013.
- Borgeson, Paul W., Jr. *Hacia el hombre nuevo: poesía y pensamiento de Ernesto Cardenal*. London: Tamesis Books, 1984. Print.

- . "La poesía pos-revolucionaria de Ernesto Cardenal." *Re-Visiones de Ernesto Cardenal*. Ed. Julio Valle-Castillo. Managua: Asociación Noruega de Escritores (ANE) and Centro Nicaragüense de Escritores (CNE), 2010. Print.
- Brown, Ed and Jonathan Cloke. "Neoliberal reform, governance, and corruption in Central America: Exploring the Nicaraguan case." *Political Geography*. 24.5 (2005): 601-630. Print.
- Burbach, Roger, Michael Fox, and Federico Fuentes. *Latin America's turbulent transitions: the future of twenty-first-century socialism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing; London: Zed Books, 2013. Print.
- Cardenal, Ernesto. *Cántico cósmico*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1992. Print.
- . "Canto nacional." *Poesía y Revolución: antología poética*. México, D.F.: Editorial Edicol, 1979. 61-80. Print.
- . "Las cavernas." *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. 65-75. Print.
- . "El celular." *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. 262-3. Print.
- . "Con Martí mirando las estrellas." *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. 24-36. Print.
- . *Cosmic Canticle*. Trans. John Lyons. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1993. Print.
- . "Elegía a Cristina Downing." *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. 264-9. Print.
- . *En Cuba*. México: Ediciones Era, 1977. Print.
- . "Epístola a Coronel Urtecho." *Nueva antología poética Ernesto Cardenal*. 1978 Ed. México: Siglo XXI Ed., 2006. 275-85. Print.
- . *Este mundo y otro y otros ensayos*. Managua: Centro Nicaragüense de escritores, 2011. Print.
- . *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. Print.
- . *Homenaje a los indios americanos*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1972. Print.
- . "Hora 0." *Nueva Antología Poética*. México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978. 27-51. Print.
- . "Hoyos blancos." *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. 47-57. Print.

- . *Las ínsulas extrañas. Memorias 2*. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003. Print.
- . "Oración por Marilyn Monroe." *Nueva Antología Poética*. México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978. 88-90. Print.
- . "Oráculo sobre Managua." *Poesía y Revolución: antología poética*. México, D.F.: Editorial Edicol, 1979. 81-104. Print.
- . "El origen de las especies." *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. 275-85. Print.
- . *The Origin of Species and Other Poems*. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2011. Print.
- . *Poesía y Revolución: antología poética*. México, D.F.: Editorial Edicol, 1979. Print.
- . *Pluriverse: New and Selected Poems*. New York: New Directions Pub., 2009. Print.
- . "Pluriverso." *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. 9-23. Print.
- . "Reflexiones en el río Grijalva." *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. 255-61. Print.
- . *La revolución perdida. Memorias 3*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, S.A., 2004. Print.
- . "El saqueo del museo de Irak." *Hidrógeno enamorado*. Ed. María Ángeles Pérez López. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. 270-4. Print.
- . *Telescopio en la noche oscura*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, S.A., 1993. Print.
- . "El universo de 3 libras." *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. 37-46. Print.
- . *Versos del Pluriverso*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005. Print.
- . "Viaje a Nueva York." *Nueva Antología Poética*. México, D.F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978. 241-263. Print.
- . *Vida perdida*. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003. Print.
- . *Vuelos de victoria / Flights of Victory*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1988. Print.
- . *With Walker in Nicaragua and Other Early Poems, 1949-1954*. Middletown, Conn.:

- Wesleyan University Press 1985. Print.
- Carrasco M., Iván. "Cántico cósmico de Cardenal: un texto interdisciplinario." *Estudios Filológicos*. 39 (2004): 129-140. Print.
- Choay, Françoise. "Utopia and the Philosophical Status of Constructed Space." *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*. Eds. Gregory Claeys, Roland Schaer, and Lyman Tower Sargent. New York: New York Public Library/Oxford University Press, 2000. 346-53. Print.
- Cohen, Henry. "Review of *Hacia el hombre nuevo: poesía y pensamiento de Ernesto Cardenal* by Paul W. Borgeson." *Chasqui*. 15.2/3 (1986): 82-3. Print.
- Cohen, Jonathan. Introduction. *From Nicaragua With Love: Poems (1979-1986)*. By Ernesto Cardenal. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1986. 1-6. Print.
- . Introduction. *With Walker in Nicaragua and Other Early Poems, 1949-1954*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press 1985. 3-17. Print.
- . "Introduction: *Songs of Heaven and Earth*." *Pluriverse: New and Selected Poems*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Ed. Jonathan Cohen. New York: New Directions Books, 2009. Print.
- Cohn, Betsy and Patricia Hynds. "The Manipulation of the Religion Issue." *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*. Ed. Thomas W. Walker. Boulder/London: Westview Press, 1987. Print.
- Coronil, Fernando. *The Magical State: Nature, Money, & Modernity in Venezuela*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Print.
- Coyle, Michael. *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres, and the Discourse of Culture*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. Print.
- Cresswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. Print.
- Cuadra, Pablo Antonio. *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light: A Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Greg Simon and Steven F. White. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007. Print.
- Curry, Richard K. "'Canto nacional' de Ernesto Cardenal: Paradigma de una nueva poética." *Discurso: Revista de estudios iberoamericanos*. 11.2 (1994): 37-50. Print.
- . "Ernesto Cardenal: Poeta militante hombre de palabras." *Explicación de textos literarios*. 32.1-2 (2003): 91-102. Print.
- Danner, Mark. *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Print.

- Darío, Rubén. *Azul*. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca de Cultura, 1888. Print.
- . *Cantos de vida y esperanza, Los cisnes, y Otros poemas*. Barcelona: F. Granada, 1907. Print.
- . *El canto errante*. Madrid: M. Pérez Villavicencio, 1907. Print.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print.
- DeGrave, Analisa. "Ecoliterature and Dystopia: Gardens and Topos in Modern Latin American Poetry." *Confluencia* 22.2 (2007): 89-104. Print.
- DeVries, Scott. "Garbage Out: Space, Place, and Neo-imperial Anti-development in Gioconda Belli's *Waslala*." *Ecozon@: Revista Europea de Literatura, Cultura y Medioambiente* 1.2 (2010): 38-50. Print.
- Doubleday, C.W. *Reminiscences of the "Filibuster" War in Nicaragua*. New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886. Print.
- Eley, Geoff & Ronald Grigor Suny, eds. *Becoming National*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.
- Eliot, T S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1944. Print.
- Enríquez, Laura J. *Reactions to the Market: Small Farmers in the Economic Reshaping of Nicaragua, Cuba, Russia, and China*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. Print.
- "Ernesto Cardenal a Daniel Ortega: 'Estamos en una dictadura y en un país con un futuro incierto.'" *Informe21.com*. n. p. 20 Jan. 2010. Web. 13 Dec. 2013.
- Ernst, Carl W. "Interpreting the *Song of Songs*: The Paradox of Spiritual and Sensual Love." *Website of Carl W. Ernst*. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 25 July 2013. < <http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/sosintro.htm> >
- Esch, Sophie Sarah. "Travelers & Littérateurs at the Banks of the San Juan River: Intertextual Fluxion and the Desire for Universality (in Texts by Ephraim G. Squier, Mark Twain, José Coronel Urtecho and Gioconda Belli)." *Ciberletras: Revista de crítica literaria y cultura / Journal of Literary Criticism and Culture* 21 (2009): n. pag. Web. 21 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v21/esch.htm>>
- Flach, Frederic F. "The Phenomenon of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin." *Journal of Religion and Health*. 4.2 (1965): 174-9. Print.
- Flys Junquera, Carmen, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez and Julia Barella Vigal, eds. *Ecocríticas: literatura y medio ambiente*. Madrid: Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2010. Print.

- Freehling, William W. *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.
- French, Jennifer L. *Nature, Neo-colonialism, and the Spanish American Regional Writers*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2005. Print.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997. Print.
- García González, Sylma. *Originalidad y modernidad en la literatura mística de Ernesto Cardenal*. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana and Vervuert, 2011. Print.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Giménez, Martha. "The Politics of Exile: Class, Power, and the 'Exilic'." *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice*. 6 (2003): n. pag. Web. 25 June 2013. <http://clogic.eserver.org/2003/gimenez.html>
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Gobat, Michael. *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Military Rule*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print.
- Gold, Eva. "Military Encirclement." *Reagan Versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*. Ed. Thomas W. Walker. Boulder/London: Westview Press, 1987. Print.
- Gould, Jeffrey. *To Die in This Way*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998. Print.
- . *To Lead As Equals*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Print.
- Grandin, Greg. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006. Print.
- . *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.
- Hale, Charles. *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. Print.
- Harrison, Brady. *Agent of Empire: William Walker and the Imperial Self in American Literature*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004. Print.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.

- . *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Print.
- Hodges, Donald C. "Sandino's Mexican Awakening." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes*. 19.37 (1994): 7-34. Print.
- Houston, Robert. Foreward. *The War in Nicaragua*. By Gen'l William Walker. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. Print.
- "Jeane Kirkpatrick. biography." *Biography.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 8 August 2013.
- Johnson, Benjamin. "Vera Rubin and Dark Matter." *Contributions of 20th Century Women to Physics*. CWP and Regents of the University of California, 2000. Web. 19 July 2013.
- Jung, Carl. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. Print.
- Kane, Adrian Taylor, ed. *The Natural World in Latin American Literatures: Ecocritical Essays on Twentieth Century Writings*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Publishers, 2010. Print.
- Kauffmann, Ruth A. "Ernesto Cardenal's 'Cántico cósmico': A Vision for the Future." *Confluencia* 11.2 (1996): 3-18 Print.
- Kellert, Stephen R., and Edward O. Wilson, eds. *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993. Print.
- Kinzer, Steven. *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*. New York: Times Books, 2006. Print.
- Kirkpatrick, Jeane. "The Hobbes Problem." *The Central American Crisis Reader*. Eds. Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin. New York: Summit Books, 1987. 506-509. Print.
- Kogl, Alexandra. *Strange Places: The Political Potentials and Perils of Everyday Spaces*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. Print.
- Kolodny, Niko. Introduction. *Death and the Afterlife*. By Samuel Scheffler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.
- Larkin, Bruce D. Ed. *Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*. Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988. Print.

- "The Learning Network." *The New York Times*. 12 March 2012. Web. 8 August 2013.
<<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com>>
- Livingstone, Dinah. ed. "Outline Chronology 1954-1990." *Poets of the Nicaraguan Revolution: An Anthology*. London: KATABASIS: 1993. 245-263. Print.
- López-Baralt, Luce. *El cántico místico de Ernesto Cardenal*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2012. Print.
- Lyons, John. "Introduction: The Poetics of Contemplation." *The Origin of Species and Other Poems*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2011. xix-xxiii. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. Print.
- Merrifield, Andy. "Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 18 (1993): 516-531. Print.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. Print.
- Mires, Fernando. *El discurso de la naturaleza: ecología y política en América Latina*. San José (Costa Rica): Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1990. Print.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "Preface to the Second Edition of *Landscape and Power*: Space, Place, and Landscape." *Landscape and Power*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. Print.
- Moraña, Mabel, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.
- Murphy, Patrick D. "Dialoguing with Bakhtin over Our Ethical Responsibility to Others." *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*. Eds. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby. Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011, 155-67. Print.
- . "The Poetic Politics of Ecological Inhabitation in Neruda's *Canto General* and Cardenal's *Cosmic Canticle*." *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Eds. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt. Charlottesville/London: University of Virginia Press, 2010, 213-228. Print.
- Neil, William. *Harper's Bible Commentary*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Print.
- New American Standard Bible*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, 1997. Print.

- "Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega 'could stand for fourth term'." *BBC News: Latin America & Caribbean*. BBC. 10 Dec. 2013. Web. 18 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-25325926>>
- Norton, John D. "The Quantum Theory of Waves and Particles." University of Pittsburgh, 14 April 2010. Web. 19 July 2013.
- Parkhurst, Henry Clinton. "American Filibusters: Walker, the Filibuster." 1910. MS. Henry Clinton Parkhurst Collection. University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. Scrapbook. Print.
- Pasos, Joaquín. *Joaquín Pasos: 1914-1947*. León: UNAN, 1972. Print.
- Pastor Alonso, María Ángeles. "Canto nacional y Oráculo sobre Managua." *Re-Visiones de Ernesto Cardenal*. Ed. Julio Valle-Castillo. Managua: Centro Nicaragüense de Escritores, 2010. Print.
- Paul, Carlos. "La revolución en Nicaragua ahora está en la oposición, dice Ernesto Cardenal." *La Jornada*. DEMOS, Desarrollo de Medios, S.A. de C.V. 21 Oct. 2008. Web. 18 Dec. 2013.
- "People and Discoveries." *PBS Online*. WGBH, 1998. Web. 19 July 2013.
- Pérez López, María Ángeles. "El «Hidrógeno Enamorado» de Ernesto Cardenal." Introduction. *Hidrógeno enamorado*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional; Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2012. Print.
- Poincaré, Henri. *Science and method*. Trans. Francis Maitland. London and New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1914. Print.
- Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1954. Print.
- Porpora, Douglas. "Alienation and the Cosmos." *The Evolution of Alienation: Trauma, Promise, and the Millenium*. Eds. Lauren Langman and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 243-250. Print.
- Prado, Benjamin. "Daniel Ortega persigue a Ernesto Cardenal." *El País*. 22 Sept. 2008. Web. 18 Dec. 2013.
- Pring-Mill, Robert. "The Redemption of Reality Through Documentary Poetry." in *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1980. Print.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Renda, Mary. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1946*. Chapel Hill: University of N. Carolina Press, 2001. Print.

- Reséndez Fuentes, Andrés. "Battleground Women: Soldaderas and Female Soldiers in the Mexican Revolution." *The Americas*. 51.4 (1995): 525-553. Print.
- Richmond, Lewis. "Emptiness: The Most Misunderstood Word in Buddhism." *The Huffington Post* 6 March 2013: n.p. Web. 25 July 2013.
- Rogers, Tim. "River of Contention." *Nicaragua & El Salvador*. By Paige R. Penland, Gary Chandler, Liza Prado. Oakland: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, 2006. Print.
- Roos, Bonnie and Alex Hunt. "Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice." *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Eds. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt. Charlottesville/London: University of Virginia Press, 2010. 1-13. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. New York: Viking, 1991. Print.
- Ryden, Kent C. *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. Print.
- . "Yeats and Decolonization." *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Ed. Terry Eagleton. Minneapolis: UM Press, 1990. 69-95. Print.
- Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina. *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Salmon, Russell O. Introduction. *Los ovnis de oro / Golden UFOs*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992. ix-xxxv. Print.
- Scheffler, Samuel. *Death and the Afterlife*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.
- Schombert, James. "Quantum Physics Lecture." *Cosmology*. University of Oregon, n.d. Web. 19 July 2013. Print.
- Schoultz, Lars. *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy toward Latin America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.
- Shaw, Donald L. *Spanish American Poetry After 1950: Beyond the Vanguard*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008. Print.
- Sheets, John R. "Teilhard de Chardin and the Development of Dogma." *Theological Studies*. 30.3 (1969): 445-462. Marquette University. Web. 23 July 2013.
<<http://www.ts.mu.edu/readers/content/pdf/30/30.3/30.3.3.pdf>>
- Siddall, Stephen. *Landscape and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Print.

Smith, Peter. *Talons of the Eagle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.

Solis, Pedro Xavier. *El Movimiento de Vanguardia de Nicaragua: Análisis y Antología*. Managua: Fundación Vida, 2001. Print.

Soodalter, Ron. "William Walker: King of the 19th Century Filibusters." *HISTORYnet.com*. Aston, PA: Weider History Group, 2010. 4 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.historynet.com/william-walker-king-of-the-19th-century-filibusters.htm>>.

Stepan, Nancy. "Race, Gender, Science, and Citizenship." *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth & Twentieth Centuries*. Ed. Catherine Hall. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Stoler, Ann Laura and Carole McGranahan. "Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains." Stoler and McGranahan, eds. *Imperial Formations*. Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research, 2007. Print.

Sweet, David G. "Contra Attack on Waslala, Central Zelaya. April 3, 1984." *David G. Sweet: Collected Writings*. July 2012. Web. 16 May 2013.

"This Day in History." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 1 Nov 2012. <<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/eisenhower-gives-famous-domino-theory-speech>>

"Timeline." *Everyday Cosmology*. Carnegie Institution for Science, n.d. Web. 19 July 2013.

Turpin, Enrique. "Ernesto Cardenal, poeta místico: *Telescopio en la noche oscura* by Ernesto Cardenal." *El Ciervo*. 44.529 (1995): 31-2. Print.

United States. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. *Trade directory of Central America and the West Indies*. Washington: GPO, 1915. Print.

Urdanivia Bertarelli, Eduardo. *La poesía de Ernesto Cardenal: Cristianismo y revolución*. Lima: Latinoamericana Editores, 1984. Print.

Vega Miranda, Luis. "El fusilamiento de Ponciano Corral." *La Prensa.com.ni.: El diario de los nicaragüenses*. n.p. 17 Sept. 2007. Web. 16 Feb. 2014.

Von Humboldt, Alexander and Aimé Boupland. *Personal Narrative and Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America, During the Years 1799-1804, Volume 3*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1894. Print.

Waldman, Anne. Foreword. *The Origin of Species and Other Poems*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2011. Print.

- Walsh, Donald D. Preface. *En Cuba*. By Ernesto Cardenal. New York: New Directions, 1974. xi. Print.
- White, Steven F. *Arando el aire: La Ecología en la Poesía y la Música de Nicaragua*. Managua: 400 Elefantes, 2011. Print.
- . "Breve retrato de Joaquín Pasos." *INTI*. 21 (1985): 67-73. Print.
- . *Modern Nicaraguan Poetry: Dialogues with France and the United States*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993. Print.
- . "Pablo Antonio Cuadra's Ecocentric World." Introduction. *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light: A Bilingual Edition*. By Pablo Antonio Cuadra. Trans. Greg Simon and Steven F. White. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007. vii-xxviii. Print.
- . *Poets of Nicaragua: A Bilingual Anthology, 1918-1979*. Ed. Steven F. White. Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1982. Print.
- Williams, Tamara R. Introduction. *The Doubtful Strait / El estrecho dudoso*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. vii-xxxi. Print.
- . "Reading Ernesto Cardenal Reading Ezra Pound: Radical Inclusiveness, Epic Reconstitution and Textual Praxis." *Chasqui*. 21.2 (1992): 43-52. Print.
- Zimmerman, Marc. "Ernesto Cardenal after the Revolution." Introduction. *Flights of Victory / Vuelos de victoria*. By Ernesto Cardenal. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1985. Print.
- Zimmermann, Matilde. *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. Print.