

**JORGE TEILLIER AND A NEW RESIDENCE ON EARTH:  
THE POETIC IMAGINATION IN CONTEMPORARY  
CHILEAN POETRY**

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...le pregunté si por casualidad recordaba el nombre del autor del poema premiado, que debería haber publicado "La Quinta Rueda" el 18 de septiembre del año del Golpe.

- Por supuesto - me dijo -. Se trataba de un poema excelente de Jorge Teillier.

Antonio Skármeta  
*El cartero de Neruda*

The final words of Antonio Skármeta's most popular novel, *El cartero de Neruda* (*The Postman*), identify Chilean poet Jorge Teillier (1935-1996) as the "winner" among the generation of poets that followed Pablo Neruda. Since Neruda's death in 1973 popular opinion indeed has held that Teillier was one of the best poets writing in Chile. The distinction "in" Chile was not completely gratuitous. The fissure in Chilean cultural life due to the 1973 military coup, which forced many writers into exile, still leaves its indelible mark on the country's literary history. Today many writers, now the senior generation and contemporaries of Jorge Teillier, have returned to Chile. It is within this context that *Editorial Universitaria* (Santiago) named Teillier "Best Living Poet " in 1995, making the final paragraphs of Skarmeta's novel all the more poignant. Teillier died just one year later in Viña del Mar.

Most Chileans treated Teillier's death like the loss of a national treasure. In spite of the attention and critical acclaim that Teillier's poetry has received both before and after his death, relatively little has been written about his work. It seems ironic that even in Chile, the land of poets and home of two Nobel laureates in poetry, critics have made relatively few attempts to situate his poetry either within the Chilean tradition or beyond it.

In many ways Jorge Teillier does present an anomaly. Unlike his contemporaries, Teillier publicly resolved to remain apolitical in his writing and by 1971 had declared a singularity of purpose in the aptly entitled essay "Sobre el mundo donde verdaderamente habito." Again, unlike his contemporaries, Teillier has no political program to advocate, but a vocation to pursue. In this early essay he proposed that the crucial point even within the conflictive milieu of the 1970's was merely a change of political or economic system but a change of the human heart. In reference to Neruda's call to young poets, in the name of social realism, to construct a new political socialism, Teillier summarizes his own stance as follows:

Son of a Communist, descendant of artisans and humble farmers, I knew, sentimentally, that poetry should be an instrument of struggle and liberation, and my first poet friends were those who were at that time following Neruda's example and were struggling for Peace. They were writing social poetry or "socialist realist" poetry. But I was incapable of writing [socialist realist poetry], and that created a sense of guilt that still pursues me.<sup>1</sup>

[Hijo de comunista, descendiente de agricultores medianos o pobres y de artesanos, yo, sentimentalmente sabía que la poesía debía ser un instrumento de lucha y liberación y mis primeros amigos poetas fueron los que en ese entonces seguían el ejemplo de Neruda y luchaban por la Paz y escribían poesía social o de "realismo socialista. Pero yo era incapáz de escribirla, y eso me creaba un sentimiento de culpa que aún ahora suele perseguirme (Teillier 1971: 12-13)]

Admittedly, the problem of the artist's political stance vis-à-vis the conflicts of his historical moment is not eliminated by a declaration like the one above. The resolution to remain apolitical is itself a political stance. Yet the truth of Teillier's declaration and the validity of the poet project outlined in "Sobre el mundo..." is confirmed in his poetry where the manner in which experience is ordered by the poet's artistic imagination is of unmitigated importance.

Although Teillier did not write extensively on the subject, his poetry and his theoretical observations reflect a clear interest in phenomenological concerns. Drawing on his reading of French and German literature and philosophy, Teillier constructs his own phenomenological project and

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Spanish original are my own unless otherwise marked.

gives us a means of framing his poetic world. In the following pages I will discuss first the tradition(s) from which many of Teillier's ideas derive, focussing on the workings of the poetic imagination, and second, the ways in which those ideas inform Teillier's poetry.

### **Poetic Insight and Imagination as a Mode of Being.**

Susanne Langer defines the true gift of music, perhaps the most abstract of arts, as insight rather than communication. Music articulates knowledge that cannot be rendered discursively. The same may be said of poetry. As Octavio Paz tells us, "thanks to the poet, the world is left without names. Then, for the space of an instant, we can see it precisely as it is" (Paz 1981:110). We have gained insight. Similarly, Georges Poulet refers to the phenomenon as the interior distance, an "interior vacancy in which the world is redisposed" (Poulet 1964:vii).

The ability to express the "beautiful" and living "truth", whether it takes the form of a poem or a sonata, is considered by some to be a minor miracle. Yet, incredulously, it happens. It happens precisely at the point where the imagination is able to simultaneously mediate the diverse elements that make up the structural framework of a poetic image or an extended piece of music. At that moment the imagination takes fire and the poet and composer alike are said to find themselves in "a more than usual state of emotion" (Coleridge 1983:151). This is not a mechanical process. On the contrary, it is defined by the peculiar dynamics of a creative drive, controlled entirely by the artistic imagination.

French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard had described the state of emotion as a creative daydream or trancelike experience perceived in a semi-conscious state. It is often colloquially referred to as "another world," but not in the neurotic or escapist sense. Rather, it is an actively creative, alternative existence which is concomitant with the prosaism of everyday society. To paraphrase Joseph Brodsky on the same subject, it is a spirit seeking flesh but finding a form. The result is art.

Such a state of affairs leads Argentine writer Julio Cortázar to playfully, if not rhetorically, pose the question: Do you dream while you are awake when you write a short story? Bachelard responded with an emphatic yes and called it reverie. The distinction between world and society alluded

to above be integral to Bachelard's conception of reverie. According to the French philosopher, reveries situate the creator in a world free from the social constraints of time and culturally acquired knowledge. Reverie makes the creator into "a person different from himself. And yet this other person is still himself, the double of himself." The singular poetic image may, in fact, be the seed of an entire universe imagined out of the creator's reverie (Bachelard 1960:79).

The reader and listener's continued recognition of the "beautiful" in a sonnet by Keats or a Beethoven symphony is, perhaps, the truly incredulous event. The phenomenon is not dependent upon linguistic nor musical literacy, but is part and parcel of the recipient's imagining consciousness, controlled in every detail by the artistic imagination of the creator (Langer 1953:264). In other words, the creator's state of emotion is communicated from within the piece, as it is reinhabited by the recipient imagination.

Perhaps one of the most poignant comments in this direction comes from Oscar Wilde in "The Critic as Artist" (1969) as he describes the sentient effects of music:

After playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were not my own. Music always seems to produce that effect. It creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears. I can fancy a man who had led a perfectly commonplace life, hearing by chance some curious piece of music, and suddenly discovering that his soul, without being conscious of it, had passed through terrible experiences, and known fearful joys, or wild romantic loves, or great renunciations.

Hence, duality of consciousness may be transferred to the listener, the reader or the observer in the continual interplay of illusion and life.

Langer contends that the illusion of life is the primary illusion of all poetic art. The poet's business is "to create the appearance of "experiences," the semblances of events lived and felt, and to organize them so that they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life (Langer 1953:213). Bachelard had already begun an inquiry into literary dual consciousness in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*. For Bachelard what lay at the heart of the matter was the question of what it means to be a sensitive subjective human in an objective, material

world. He argued that in dreaming before an inert object, a poet would always find a drama of life and non-life. Furthermore, there exists an intermediary region between the two where the dialectic is deadened. In a similar vein Coleridge calls poetry "a rationalized dream" that unites form to feelings at a level below conscious awareness: "What is the Lear, the Othello, but a Divine Dream/all Shakespeare and nothing Shakespeare" (Coleridge 1983:59).

Literature on the double has flourished during this century, and personal statements of the phenomenon have become routine, but no less necessary. Jorge Teillier's own statement is included in "Sobre el mundo donde verdaderamente habito". The title of the essay already alludes to the more-than-usual state of consciousness which the poet as creator inhabits. Within the first lines of the essay Teillier describes with simple eloquence the newness and wonder of poetic creation. His opening comments bear witness to a soul, which is discovering a world it would like to inhabit:

Since I was twelve years of age, I wrote poetry and prose, but it was in Victoria, the city where I still live, that my first poem was born when I was about 16 years old. It was the first one that I saw, with incomparable surprise, as written by another.

[Desde los doce años escribía prosa y poemas, pero en Victoria, ciudad donde aún suelo vivir, fue donde nació mi primer poema verdadero, a eso de los dieciséis años, el primero que vi, con incomparable sorpresa, como escrito por otro (Teillier 1971: 11)].

Later Teillier expands the notion of a double in words that are distinctly Borgesian:

The person who writes is not necessarily myself. To some extent I am present as a conscious being. On the other hand, the creation is born of my clash with my double, that person who I perhaps would want to be. That is why the poet is the least likely to say how he creates. When the poet wants to find something he goes to sleep.

[El personaje que escribe no soy necesariamente yo mismo, en un punto estoy yo como un ser consciente, en otro la creación que nace del choque mío contra mi Doble, ese personaje que es quien yo quisiera ser tal vez. Por eso el poeta es quizás uno de los menos indicados para decir cómo crea. Cuando el poeta quiere encontrar algo se echa a dormir (Teillier 1971: 18)].

But is it really a sleeping state that Teillier describes here? Probably not. Teillier's observation bears a certain resemblance to Cortázar's clever inquiry into the waking dream. In both cases reverie is unquestionably a spiritual phenomenon which may recall the oneiric state but differs from it in a fundamental way because, Bachelard remind us, reverie can be conscious of itself. Paradoxically, reveries are not easily recounted. Here the "dreamer" must rely on a different order of expression, the sort that Langer describes as insight. In order to write a poetic reverie, the poet must bypass empirical language, which recounts fact yet says nothing of the truth, and gain access to the far more innocent and truthful expressions of human experience. Perhaps this is what leads Bachelard to conclude that an excess of childhood is the germ of a poem.

### **The Childhood of Man**

Bachelard privileges children with living both in the rational world and in the world of the imagination. Eventually, in later adolescence, the two worlds are separated and the world of imagination is dispatched to the realm of the poetic. Because poets and children are both marginal beings in the rational world, there is a continuity of the great childhood reveries with the reveries of the poet. Childhood solitude produces a creative and liberating reverie. Similarly, the solitude of adulthood returns the poet to the original childhood reveries and provides a way to inhabit the world.

This is the main thrust of Teillier's essay:

The poet is a marginal being, but from that marginality and displacement his strength can be born; that of transforming poetry into a vital experience and entering another world, distant from the loathful world in which he lives ... [his] poetry is considered the leper of this world where the imagination is dying and where inspiration is relegated to the attic with old furniture.

[El poeta es un ser marginal, pero de esa marginalidad y de este desplazamiento puede nacer su fuerza: la de transformar la poesía en experiencia vital, y acceder a otro mundo, más allá del mundo asqueante donde vive ... la poesía está considerada como la lepra en este mundo en donde muere la imaginación, en donde la inspiración está relegada al desván de los muebles viejos (Teillier 1971: 14)].

Nevertheless, imaginative tendencies do not die easily; instead they become suppressed into the subconscious by reason and logic in an ever-more analytically oriented world. The task of the poet then is to recognize within the human soul "the permanence of the nucleus of childhood, outside history, hidden from the others, disguised, but which has real being only in its instants of illumination" (Bachelard 1960:100).

Our tendency, however, is to treat childhood in thematic rather than imaginative terms. The return to childhood is not always a regressive act. It can be, and an often time is, a deep source of wisdom and of poetic inspiration. The power of Wordsworth's line "the child is father to the man" resides in the acknowledgement that rational analytical thinking must retain some propensity for the imaginative awareness that is the universe of the child. Fortunately, some of the world's greatest poets have also been great dreamers of childhood wonder; Holderlin, Blake and Dylan Thomas are just a few examples. Among the poets of childhood, one detects an affinity of poetic temperament rather than causal influence. In the case of Dylan Thomas, like Teillier, he too chose not to sever the ties that bound him with his childhood. The central themes of his poetry arise from his Welsh upbringing, his near obsession with its facts and fictions. In the natural landscape of Wales Thomas manages to recapture something of the lost Eden and a vision of paradise regained. Like Teillier, Thomas' obsession with his childhood was to lead him in the end to a rediscovery of innocence (Emery 1962:1).

It is not surprising, then, that both Jorge Teillier and Dylan Thomas have theorized about poetry, innocence and death. Thomas once remarked that he thought of his poetry "as statements made on the way to the grave." For Teillier, poetry is "The fight against our enemy, time, and an attempt to integrate oneself with death" [la lucha contra nuestro enemigo el tiempo, y un intento de integrarse a la muerte] (Teillier 1971: 15). He speculates that this is perhaps why childhood is present in his work. In his opinion it is the time closest to death. Childhood and death often appear in juxtaposition in his poetry. For example the poem "The Last Island" [La última isla] begins with the following declaration: "Again life and death are confused" [De nuevo vida y muerte se confunden]. On another occasion, reflecting upon the child of yesteryear, the poet draws a discerning picture of his companionship with death:

I open my eyes, in order not to see the tree of my dreams withered,  
and under it, death holding out her hand to me.  
(Teillier 1991:41)  
[abro los ojos para no ver reseco el árbol de mis sueños  
y bajo él, la muerte que me tiende la mano  
(Teillier 1971: 27).]

The juxtaposition of death and childhood is more subtle in the poem "In order to talk to the Dead" ["Para hablar con los muertos"]. As the title suggests, the poet gives instruction for speaking with the dead, but Teillier's instructions also describe the most effective means by which we speak with children:

In order to talk to the dead  
you have to choose words  
that they recognize as easily  
as their hands  
recognized the fur of their dogs in the dark.  
.....

In order to talk to the dead  
you have to know how to wait:  
they are fearful  
like the first steps of a child.  
But if we are patient  
one day they will answer us.  
(Teillier 1993: 27)  
[Para hablar con los muertos  
hay que elegir palabras  
que ellos reconozcan tan fácilmente  
como sus manos  
reconocían el pelaje de sus perros en la  
oscuridad.  
Para hablar con los muertos  
hay que saber esperar:  
ellos son miedosos  
como los primeros pasos de un niño.  
Pero si tenemos paciencia  
un día nos responderán.  
(Teillier 1971,:46).]

The children that appear in Teillier's poetry have the gift to communicate with beings from different centuries, with shadows and dreams of dead ancestors. At other times the child's ability to communicate is a result of the absence of language, as in the following verse:



No one smiles in the silence  
A girl who does not know how to talk  
goes on talking to her shadow.  
(Teillier 1993: 35)  
[En el silencio no se sonríe a nadie.  
Una niña que no sabe hablar  
sigue hablando con su sombra.  
(Teillier 1971: 55).]

We should note, however, that when Teillier speaks of childhood he is not referring to an overly idealized childhood in which evil is absent. Instead he recognizes that "childhood is a state we should reach, a recreation of the senses in order to receive clearly the admiration before the wonders of the world" [la infancia es un estado que debemos alcanzar, una recreación de los sentidos para recibir limpiamente la admiración ante las maravillas del mundo] (Teillier 1971: 15). In this state the demarcation between possibilities and destinies is blurred. An obvious paradox results: Teillier's past has a future. His use of the past tense is incidental. Teillier's poetry is not about a world that exists in time and space; it is a poetry that is continually bringing a world into existence, as for the first time. By the poet's own admission, it is invention: "I don't want to remember anything but the future" [Yo no quiero recordar sino el futuro] (Teillier 1971: 143). In a similar vein one of Teillier's contemporaries, Jaime Quezada, writes "I write for a future that was yesterday" [Escribo para un futuro que fue ayer] (Quezada 1973:11). Of course, the blurring of the boundary between past and future requires the complicity of the present. To paraphrase Rainer Maria Rilke, for many readers the power of that which is entirely of the future looks so much like the authority of the past that the two are bound to be confused.

Therefore, to read Teillier's poetry as a cipher of deep nostalgia for youth would be to seriously impoverish his work and reduce it to a vulgar search for immortality. What the great dreamers of childhood reflect in their art is nostalgia for the solitude and melancholy of the bored child from which rich imagination and creativity emerge. Moreover, the material of nostalgia more deeply explored brings forth a transformation of memory into vision. "Reverie toward our past, then, reverie looking for childhood seem to bring back to life lives which have never taken place, lives which have been imagined" (Bachelard 1960:112). The same process perhaps lead Rilke to the magnificent line with which he ends the Ninth Elegy:

Look I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor  
future are growing less. . .  
Supernumerous existence wells up in my heart.

### **Origins of Consciousness.**

The central problematic then is how to express an origin of consciousness, that precise moment of insight to which Langer refers. As mentioned earlier, analytical-oriented experience cannot supply adequate means for this expression. According to Ernst Cassirer, myth alone is the language in which the experience of origin is expressed:

What never is but always becomes, what does not, like the structures of logical and mathematical thought, remain identically determinate but from moment to moment manifests itself as something different can only be given a mythical representation (Cassirer 1968:3).

The ability to think and experience meaning mythically provides but one means to bridge the gap between analytical experience and the purely subjective elsewhere that we have been defining. The poet is situated at the center of that empirical lapse -- at the frontier between history and myth, memory and imagination -- and is at liberty to confuse the two. Bachelard forewarns that the further one goes toward the past, the more indissoluble the memory-imagination mixture appears. Thus Hobbes could proclaim in 1651:

Imagination and memory are but one thing,  
which for divers considerations hath divers names

Teillier acknowledges the meshing of historical anecdote and myth, memory and imagination in his essay "About the World I Really Inhabit":

I want to establish that, for me, the important thing about poetry is not the purely esthetic side, but poetry as a creation of myth, of a space and time that transcends the everyday, while using the everyday.

[Quiero establecer que para mí lo importante en la poesía no es el lado puramente estético, sino la poesía como creación del mito, de un espacio y tiempo que trascienden lo cotidiano, utilizando lo cotidiano (Teillier 1971: 16)].

He later emphasizes the creation of myth as a distinguishing feature of his poetry. Here we must recall that in an earlier essay, "Poets of the Hearth," [Los poetas de los lares] Teillier confirms that individuals,

particularly familial relations, are elevated to the category of mythical figures and are transformed into guardians of a mythical time and place. In this regard Teillier complements Rilke's technique in the *Elegies*. In both cases the mythical dimension derives from a sense that each item presented is a repository for both an intrinsic *and* transcendent virtue. Thus Teillier can write about "light from broken lanterns" [lucis de linternas rotas] that illuminate, through the centuries, man's former splendor.

Teillier's poetry acknowledges that the constant interplay of facts and values, realities and dreams, memories and imaginings in human life is both psychologically and philosophically sound. However, examined within this dialectical relationship "the past is not stable; it does not return to the memory either with the same traits or in the same light" (Bachelard 1960:104). Perception and/or imagination always intervene. Hence, Teillier asks in a poem entitled "If I Could Return" [Si pudiera regresar]:

If I could return  
Would I find you clearer  
than in my faithful memory?  
[Si pudiera regresar  
¿Te encontraría más nítida  
que en mi memoria fiel?]  
(Teillier 1971: 41)

But the selective and modifying properties of the "faithful memory" are self-evident and, perhaps in response, Teillier later writes in "Imagen para un estanque":

Then I must ask of time  
a recollection that won't be distorted  
in memory's turbid pond.  
[Entonces debo pedirle al tiempo  
un recuerdo que no se deforme  
en el turbio estanque de la memoria.]  
(Teillier 1971: 29)

In the end, Teillier acknowledges the general assumption since the Copernican Revolution that the mind does not receive, nor reproduce, a dependably objective reality; the mind always enters into what it perceives and understands. Langer goes even further in her analysis to state that the literary past (or memory) is not an act of perception at all but a conceptual structure. In perception the imagination is restrained

by associative patterns, while in esthetic activity the imagination is free. Unencumbered, the poet makes a semblance of events that are experience-like, but not entirely experiential; a virtual history (Langer 1957:266). The virtual history of literature, although a completed form, need not be inspired by the author's memories, or anyone else's for that matter.

I awake holding in my hands the grass and land  
of a place where I have never been  
[Despierto teniendo en mis manos hierbas y tierra  
de un lugar donde nunca estuve.]  
(Teillier 1971: 60)

This last verse calls to mind Coleridge's flower.<sup>2</sup> Here the link between the real and the imaginary --the present and the past-- is not a flower but the land. Teillier often relies on images of soil, land and earth as a means of linking the real with the imaginary. In a poem significantly entitled "Happiness," [Alegría] a land image forms the central metaphor for happiness:

The rails glimmer  
but no one thinks of traveling.  
The smell of newly pressed apples  
drifts from the cider mill.  
We know we'll never be alone  
as long as a handful of fresh earth remains.

.....  
The red lantern vanishes  
on the last car of the train.  
Tramps sleep in shade  
of the linden trees.  
For us it's enough to gaze  
at a handful of earth in our hands.  
(Teillier 1993: 5)  
[Centellean los rieles  
pero nadie piensa en viajar.  
De la sidrería viene olor  
a manzanas recién molidos  
Sabemos que nunca estaremos solos  
mientras haya un punado de tierra fresca.  
.....

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<sup>2</sup> "If a man could pass through paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke - Ay!- and what then?" Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Desaparece la linterna roja  
del último carro del tren.  
Los vagabundos duermen  
a la sombra de los tilos.  
A nosotros nos basta mirar  
un puñado de tierra en nuestras manos.]  
(Teillier 1971: 28).

Once again land is seen as proof of a kind of paradise; proof that happiness may exist. Holding proof of paradise in one's hand is repeated in a simple poem entitled "Gift" [Regalo] in which earth, fruit of the earth and humanity are intertwined:

A friend from the South  
has sent me an apple  
too beautiful to eat right away.  
I hold it in my hands:  
It is heavy and round  
like the earth.  
(Teillier 1990: 61)  
[Un amigo del sur  
me ha enviado una manzana  
demasiado hermosa  
para comerla de inmediato.  
La tengo en mis manos:  
es pesada y redonda  
como la tierra. ]  
(Teillier 1971: 62).

For Teillier, a complete union between humanity and earth will, in the end, lead man to a the origin of human existence, paradoxically depicted as a perfect death in the following verse:

That old voice makes us reintegrate with the earth,  
there, where we will meet and disappear  
to discover, for a moment,  
that we may reach a perfect death.  
[Esa vieja voz nos hace reintegrarnos a la tierra,  
allí donde nos reuniremos y desapareceremos,  
para descubrir, por un momento,  
que podemos lograr una muerte perfecta.]  
(Teillier 1971: 63)

Although seemingly nostalgic, Teillier's poetry meditates upon an experience of the past that goes beyond all recorded history and reaches Bachelard's anonymous, poetic childhood which has deeper roots than the individual's memories (Bachelard 1960:125). Teillier's poetic childhood bears witness to the childhood of man, the threshold of original life. Here, the apprehension of an origin transforms the observer into the "other," a being cognizant of belonging to two distinct worlds. Teillier's meditation on the first snow, [Nieve nocturna], is a prime example:

Can something exist before snow?  
Before that implacable purity,  
implacable as the message of a world  
we don't love but belong to  
and which can be divined in that sound,  
still a brother of silence.

.....  
To look at snow in the night one has to shut his eyes,  
remember nothing, ask nothing,  
disappear, slip away, like snow into the visible silence.  
(Teillier 1990,:3)

[¿Es que puede existir algo antes de la nieve?  
Antes de esa pureza implacable,  
implacable como el mensaje de un mundo que no amamos  
pero al cual pertenecemos  
y que se adivina en ese sonido  
todavía hermano del silencio.

.....  
Para mirar la nieve en la noche hay que cerrar los ojos,  
no recordar nada, no preguntar nada,  
desaparecer, delizarse como ella en el visible silencio.]  
(Teillier 1971: 26).

The last lines of the poem are an invitation to the reader to enter a state of reverie parallel to the poet's experience, an experience expressed as a series of contradictory images revolving around the visibility or invisibility of things. The indication is that in order to see/experience a thing, in this case the wonder of snow; one must rely on a different sort of sight capacity. It is beyond history, beyond language and beyond the traditional subject-object dichotomy. Finally the invisible Other of the poet and the reader move in the direction of ontological possession and realize his/her poetic being in the "visible silence" of the image.

Bachelard claims that once a poetic childhood comes back to life through reverie, all the great archetypes of the maternal and paternal forces appear -- archetypes that create a universally accepted, depersonalized memory, which possesses the great homogeneity of myth. Thus Teillier often spoke of the mythical nature of time, space and character in his poetry. Chilean critic Juan Villegas identifies this technique in the Teillier's homage to fellow poet and friend Teófilo Cid entitled "Aparición de Teófilo Cid." Within the first few lines of the poem, Teillier transforms the protagonist from friend and teacher to the guardian of a message for all mankind; the elegy to a friend becomes an elegy to the redeemer of humanity. Teófilo Cid "appears" as the hero endowed with special powers who transcends death and time and wins the battle against evil. *Evil* is represented in temporal terms as a "after" and in spatial terms as "the city" Logically, *Good* is seen as the time before the *Fall* in the paradise of the southern frontier (Villegas 1979:4). In this homage to a friend, as in many other poems, Teillier is less concerned with recuperating the mythical paradise of the frontier, than with a *future* Arcadia still open to mythical apprehension.

The reexperience of an anonymous childhood is indeed at the root of Teillier's thoughts on the lost age of man. According to Teillier, the poet's unconscious contains:

his memory of a golden age to which the innocence of poetry turns. If I am strange in this world, I am not strange in my own world, the creator reflects (...) In due time, it seems to me that every poet in this society tends to consider himself a survivor of a lost age, an archaic entity

[su recuerdo de la edad de oro a la cual acude la inocencia de la poesía. Si soy extraño en este mundo no soy extraño en mi propio mundo, reflexiona el creador (...) A su debido tiempo, me parece que todo poeta en esta sociedad se suele considerar un sobreviviente de una perdida edad, un ente arcaico] (Teillier 1971: 13-14).

These same thoughts are sublimated in recurrent images of the child and childhood memory in Teillier's verses. In a collection of 51 short verses entitled "Things Seen" [Cosas Vistas], the poet writes:

In front of a red light  
I stop  
waiting to cross the street.  
A child looks at me  
from his mothers arms.

Something he must tell me,  
something I must tell him  
something that must be he.  
Until the light changes  
I sink into those astonished eyes  
irretrievable.  
[Frente al semáforo rojo  
me detengo  
esperando cruzar la calle.  
Un niño me mira  
desde los brazos de su madre.  
Algo tiene que decirme,  
algo tengo que decirle,  
algo que será él.  
Hasta el cambio de luz  
me hundo en esos ojos asombrados  
irrecuperables.]  
(Teillier 1978: 43)

As we see here, buried in a lost memory the vital sensation of childhood glimmers and suddenly everything is again. It is that "presencing" event to which Teillier's poetry speaks. With a single, recurrent image he brings to life a whole universe that perhaps never was but is emerging now. This is perhaps why many of Teillier's recurrent images animate a childhood memory of security in all of us, whether or not our real experience ever included the constituent elements of his imagery. Ultimately, Teillier muses over the phenomenon first defined in his essay "About the World I Really Inhabit" in a poem entitled "Under an Old Roof" [Bajo un viejo techo]:

Tonight I sleep under an old roof,  
mice run over it as they did long ago,  
and the child who lives in me is reborn in my dreams,  
breathes again the odor of oak furniture,  
and looks toward the window full of fear,  
since he knows no star ever comes back to life  
[Esta noche duermo bajo un viejo techo,  
los ratones corren sobre él, como hace mucho tiempo,  
y el niño en mí renace en mi sueño,  
aspira de nuevo el olor de los muebles de roble,  
y mira lleno de miedo hacia la ventana,  
pues sabe que ninguna estrella resucita.]  
(Teillier 1990: 40-41)



In short, the essay "About the World I Really Inhabit" [Sobre el mundo donde verdaderamente habito] offers proof of a phenomenological project: the task of gathering the poetry of childhood reveries in actuality. The poems cited above offer only a few of the more salient examples of Teillier's poetic practice. Unless the reader accepts Teillier's phenomenological project --unless he/she accepts his poetic world, a world that falls outside the norm and is free from the constraints of pure reason-- he/she is in a poor position to judge his poetry aesthetically.<sup>3</sup>

To discover the imaginative roots of a poet like Teillier we must follow Bachelard's and the poet's advice and go beyond the "time of fevers" (adolescence) to find the tranquil time, the time of happy childhood. The reader and critic must enter a world where awe-struck discovery, as Langer suggests, is the norm. Teillier himself tells us in the final pages of his essay: "My instrument against the world is another vision of the world, which I must express through the right word, so difficult to find" [Mi instrumento contra el mundo es otra visión del mundo, que debo expresar a través de la palabra justa, tan difícil de hallar] (Teillier 1971: 16). Teillier, like Paz, understands that within that non-discursive instant, when the world is left without names or words, we may finally encounter true knowledge of the world and perhaps a model of humanity.

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<sup>3</sup> Here we take esthetic judgement to imply indifference about the reality of what is represented; in the standard terminology of esthetic criticism, esthetic judgement is "disinterested." A work of art is a product of a unifying imagination, it may be considered a system of closely knit internal relationships. When an esthetic critic looks for the principles of order in an individual poem, he is implicitly acknowledging that the poem constitutes a unique coherent universe of its own. The implied phenomenological reduction is that shutting everything else out, the mind is open to experience of the object. cf. O.B. Hardison Jr., ed., *The Quest for Imagination: Essays in 20th Century Aesthetic Criticism* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve, 1979).

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