

Subjectivity from exile

Place and sign in the works of María Zambrano

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the formation of a notion of subjectivity in the works of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano (1904-1991). Zambrano is one of the most important 20th Century Spanish philosophers, whose elaborations on subjectivity, society and poetry have influenced both political and aesthetic philosophy. Zambrano critiques the idea of an ideal subject as one of the fundamental problems of the modern European world-view, and at the root of the 20th century wars – civil wars in Europe as well as world wars. Zambrano fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, at the end of which she went into a 47 year long exile. With this critique she is commonly read as one of many European philosophers criticizing the transcendent ideal subject and opting for a rethinking of ontology and metaphysics. What has however not been thoroughly investigated up until now is the alternative notion of subjectivity posed by Zambrano. For this objective this thesis analyses prominent figures in Zambrano's works – such as confession, soul, heart, awakening, place and sign. In order to examine Zambrano's notion of subjectivity it moreover explores the metaphysical conditions of the possibility of subjectivity.

Exile is a theme in Zambrano's thought, but also and prominently a context through which the thesis interprets Zambrano's figures. By following the paces of Zambrano's exile, from her home in Madrid before the Spanish Civil War, to Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Rome and France, a part of the common European and Latin American intellectual history is outlined. The life in exile made Zambrano travel between countries and continents, and similarly her position in relation to the European philosophical canon can be seen as ambiguous. Her theory of subjectivity is elaborated in relation to among others Kant, Aristotle, and Heidegger and in relation to the Spanish philosophers José Ortega y Gasset and Xavier Zubiri, as well as the Cuban poets of the *Orígenes* group. Though a philosopher by schooling her language is best described as literary, sometimes poetical and towards the end of her life distinctly influenced by religious and mystic figures.

I argue in this thesis that at the core of Zambrano's thinking is a notion of subjectivity that maintains the possibility of human agency at the same time as it questions the very idea of subject unity. The subject is a constant process of creation, and as such it cannot be conceived of as fixed unity. At the same time the subject is embodied and in a place. The human condition is played out in Zambrano's works as a tragic measuring of forces between placed, embodied being and transcendence. This analysis of Zambrano's theory of subjectivity is thus an investigation of the tension between placed being and transcendence.

Keywords: Zambrano, Spanish Civil War, exile, subjectivity, place, sign, transcendence, Kant, Aristotle, José Ortega y Gasset, Xavier Zubiri,