

come into focus, but this is less a failing of Vladislavić's prose than it is an essential part of the narrative: for the novel, doing justice to Johannesburg is less a matter of grasping the city whole than it is of learning to see it as an amalgam of its parts, and of getting lost in its dizzying maze of experiences.

Brady Smith

§

Heriberto Yezpe, *The Empire of Neomemory*. Oakland, CA and Philadelphia: Chainlinks, 2013. 274pp. \$15

Heriberto Yezpe's *The Empire of Neomemory* is not strictly a manifesto; the size and scope of the text position it as a serious scholarly intervention. But its style (the chronic use of polemically charged and open-ended declaratives: "Patriarchy is not sustained by fathers. Patriarchy is constructed by pseudo-sons." "All translation is a colonial act.") and the particular intensity of its intellectual furor belong to the lengthy political/aesthetic manifesto tradition in Latin American letters. *Manifesto*: "made public." In Yezpe's hands, this rhetorical genre makes manifest the *pantopia*, that invisible yet omnipresent specter haunting the margins of our late capitalist world as the limit expanse of empire, "a total space, individuated from every other space, which contains all things, all events, ordered under the same set of laws, under the same empire." Memory and mnemonics are the basis upon which pantopia is founded, for both function as a flattening of temporal difference over an infinite expanse. Yet Yezpe resists the ongoing "Americanization of the world"—Hollywood romanticism and cultural imperialism under a single topology—through a disintegrative praxis that embraces a poetics of difference, disorder, forgetfulness.

The focal point of Yezpe's critique is not the United States, the pantopia par excellence, but Charles Olson, the lexical progenitor of the "postmodern" and inheritor of the Poundian tradition of paratactic epic verse. Yet Yezpe is not interested in Olson's position as the paterfamilias of a dominant lineage of twentieth-century, Anglo-American poetry: rather, Olson serves as "a microanalysis for decoding the psychopoetics of Empire." The symptom, in this case, precedes the diagnosis. Yezpe reads Olson's volume *Letters for Origin* as ethnographic "projectivism," and his journeys into Mexico and its Mesoamerican past as the colonization of indigenous America's mythic past for a fresh batch of occulted "neomemories"—the selective accounts of history recycled to fit a linear, and thus reversible, model of time. "Neomemory," Yezpe writes, "is an arithmetic in which parts are subtracted from *historical memory*...in order to obtain a database of new, purified, sublime mnemonics." In Yezpe's view, Olson's work ushers in a new mode of ethnographic

research-based writing. To quote Jose Marti's classic essay "Our America" (1891), Yepez marks Olson as that "prideful villager who thinks his hometown contains the whole world" and "who believes the universe to be in good order"—as though, in Olson's words, "the human universe is as discoverable as that other. And as definable."

For Yepez's Olson, space is the place: space is the "central fact to man born in America," Olson claims. Olson's cross-cultural, panoptic imaginary brings the American present and the Mesoamerican past into a space-time manifold that Pound once called the "vortex." Olson's sense of space-time depends on locating himself physically and cognitively at sites where America could be felt to extend back into deep Mesoamerican time. Geolocation brings forth a spectral entity that Yepez calls the "Oxident," a neologism among an army of neologisms in the text, fusing intellectual and cultural *oxidization* with the geographical-historical *Occident*. In "Co-Oxidant Kink-Time Empire," the crucial middle section of *Empire*, Yepez dissects the true intention of Olson's "proprioception" at such sites: Olson's field excursions into Mexico were made ultimately not to supplement his scholarly inquiries in Mesoamerican studies but to plumb his own psychological depths. "His journey in Mexico—damn psychology—would remain tainted by the death of his mother, by his far-flung escape from Frances [Boldereff], by his complicated personal mythology," Yepez claims. "What we cannot lose sight of is that Olson didn't travel to Mexico. He traveled to his memory." Olsonian "archaeology" is thus a personal mnemonic of its own pantopic drive: reaching toward the general insight rather than the particular finding, this is the kind of thinking in which archaeological reconstruction renders all knowledge discoverable and reshapable. This drive in turn abstracts local culture from the particularities of the field site and submits it to the integrative dynamics of the incorporative (American) state—the ultimate, political expression of pantopia.

As *Empire* progresses, Yepez turns outward from Olson toward the workings of empire more generally. The book's middle section concludes with the surprising homology between Olson's pantopianism and his understanding of Mesoamerican cosmology. Olson's vision of space-time turns out to be not much different from, for instance, the Hopi vision of time-space (time and space united as a single process), while the Mayan obsession with calendrical systems resembles the USAmerican/Oxidental pantopian vision of absolute "co-control by analogy." The final section of the book shows a general acceptance (on Yepez's part) of the mass-scale adoption of Oxidental values, one in which we, like the Mayans or the ancient Greeks, work as "infomemes" for the mnemonic technologies of empire. Empires, be they Aztec or North American, are the same across time not because they share

the same space but because they engender the same (fallacious) myth of an absolute unified field in which time can be annulled or fabricated at will—as capital, as patriarchy, or as cultural product.

At its crux, Yepez's argument both succeeds and fails at synthesizing Olson's poetics with the macroform of transhistorical empire. Yepez chooses not to fully engage with Olson the *poet*—neither with the massive corpus of the Maximus poems and its complicated stages of composition, nor with the specific nuances of Olson's lyrical typology. We lose all of Olson's innovations: his idiosyncratic line breaks and enjambments, his prosodic experiments with Whitehead's process philosophy, his peculiar forms of punctuation and spacing, his obsession with “composing by ear” and with the reinstatement of embodied breath and shamanic orality. Yepez's few penetrating insights into canonical poems like “The Kingfishers” (perhaps the only poem he devotes more than two pages to) are always by analogy: “Olson's models were cinematographic.... In the art of montage, which he practiced in ‘The Kingfishers,’ Eisenstein was his teacher.” What we are left with by the end of Yepez's text is Olson the ideologue and prose-writer, but hardly Olson the fabricator of worlds and radical poetic forms. The insistence that we regard Olson as a “novelist of poetry” or as a mere militaristic propagandist of Empire (“his war veteran's vision camouflaged itself until it became subtle poetry”) seems to highlight Yepez's seeming discomfort with poetry per se. Olson is ultimately cast as a conceptual metonym: despite everything, he is not the target but the means to identifying the target. The belief that a hermeneutical account of the biography and prose statements of a poet can supersede an account of the poetry itself seems to arise from a deeper belief that a critique of the outside (the ideological climate in which poetry is assembled) might successfully decode the inside (the formal qualities of the poems themselves). But this sidesteps the possibility of a more integrative approach. Yepez's belief that “poetry is beautiful...because it sings the song of Empire” betrays a fundamental bias: if all poetry is in some way imperialistic then we learn to read Empire first and poetry last, or not at all.

Once upon a time, Roberto Fernandez Retamar's *Caliban* (1971) reversed the meaning of Caliban's pejorative signification of the suspended, postcolonial status of Latin American culture. Reading broadly, *The Empire of Neomemory* does something similar: it is an implicit manifesto of liberation, one that eschews the theology of political breakage in favor of a cosmic-poetic freedom from Oxidental “thinking through accumulation” without pretending to offer solutions nor guidelines for action. Yepez deftly, often abrasively, administers a “hurricane” critique of the aesthetics of empire that, as the book's translators (Jen Hofer, Christian Nagler, and Brian Whitener) claim, takes “the specific, technical language of the empire's memory machine and turn[s] it inside out, to turn it not against itself...but rather to chart its funda-

mental emptiness, the play of mirrors of its spectacle.” Like Retamar’s *Caliban*, Yepes’s play of mirrors brings him to include not only Olson but himself; not only the United States, but also Mexico and the rest of the late-capitalist world as complicit entities within “a system of imagistic relations...in which it is possible to process, eradicate, select, or re-formulate the mnemonic.”

Jose-Luis Moctezuma

§

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, *Autobiography of a Corpse*. New York: New York Review Books, 2013. 256pp. \$15.95

Writing in Moscow in the 1920s and 30s, Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky’s fiction went mostly unpublished in his lifetime, falling victim to its author’s expansive style, ironic politics, and raging bad luck. A novel accepted in 1928 was later rejected by Soviet censors; collections of stories were championed by editor friends and scheduled for production, then lost when publishers folded under political pressure. Although he ran a few stories in magazines, the only volume printed in Krzhizhanovsky’s lifetime was a slim 1931 monograph, “On the Poetics of Titles,” a critical analysis of naming conventions. After his death in 1950, Krzhizhanovsky’s lifelong partner, the actress Anna Brovcek, wrapped his manuscripts in brocade and hid them in a wooden chest for decades, waiting for the time when they could be published. Thanks to her efforts, his stories began to run in Russian literary journals in 1989. The joyously implausible plots and strange publication history of *Autobiography of a Corpse* only serve to underscore the discomfort these stories must have provoked when they were first written. Nearly a century later, the book still exemplifies absurdism’s special capacity for prepolitical work, articulating those vague but acutely felt problems that lie beyond realism’s grasp.

This approach was explicitly contrarian. In 1934, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, Andrei Zhdanov famously proclaimed socialist realism as the official state style, with the goal of all art “to depict reality in its revolutionary development.” Krzhizhanovsky doggedly advanced another view—to the detriment of his publishing record—rejecting both utopianism’s and realism’s constraints. “*Lo posible es para los tontos*,” proclaims “The Elbow Biter,” describing a freak determined (impossibly) to bite his own elbow—the possible is for fools. These stories are clean, colorful, and brimming with metaphysical logic made material through the daily stuff of 1920s Moscow. They show Krzhizhanovsky’s excitement during his prolific early years in the city, confronting its housing shortages, print rivalries, and the difficulties of an infant experimental state. The conceits are wonders. In “Thirty Pieces of Silver,” Judas Iscariot’s coins from Gethsemene slide hand to hand across