

Ultraist Aggregation and Dada Agitation: Avant-Garde Attitudes in the Wake of War

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The Dada broadside manifesto of 1921, “DADA soulève tout” (“Dada Excites Everything”), contrasts the Zurich-born movement with other avant-garde movements of the day. While Dada agitates the artistic past and present with brash irreverence, the manifesto insists that “l’ultraïsme recommande le mélange de ces 7 choses artistiques” ‘ultraism recommends the mixture of these seven *artistic things*’ (Ribemont-Dessaignes, *DADA* 33; “Dada Excites Everything” 101). The manifesto considers the subjects of the seven lines preceding this take on *ultraïsme* to be the ingredients of the Spanish avant-garde movement: cubism, expressionism, simultanism, futurism, unaniam, neo-classicism, and “paroxysm.” Dada meanwhile declares itself to be different from all these trends. In answer to its own question, “Que fait DADA?” ‘What does DADA do?’, the manifesto says, among other quips, “Dada n’a jamais raison” (“Dada is never right”).

While the manifesto suggests that ultraism, the avant-garde movement that flourished first in Seville in the winter of 1918-19 and then in Madrid to 1925, mixes everything, the title “Dada soulève tout” may also be translated as “Dada stirs everything up.” It is important to note that *soulever* and *mélanger* convey somewhat convergent as well as contradictory senses.¹ Thus, an examination of these metaphors for cultural production is necessary if we are to parse the complex relationship between Dada and Ultra. The manifesto indicates that the difference is quite simple: Ultra is an avant-garde aggregator (it incorporates and combines in a *mélange*) while Dada is an avant-garde agitator (it unsettles, *soulève*, but it does not absorb). This essay will insist on certain similarities between ultraist

¹ In translation to English, both words might render “mix up,” but they denote quite different physical actions. *Soulever* can mean to shake up, to shift, to provoke, to remove, to raise, to whip up, to stoke. The noun *mélange* or the verb *mélanger* usually have less violent overtones, although *mélanger* can mean to muddle or jumble as well as to stir, to mix, to blend, to confuse. Elmer Peterson suggests that the *Dada soulève tout* manifesto “can also be taken for a mock advertisement for a detergent, and translated as ‘Dada gets everything out’” (19).

aggregation and dadaist agitation, but it will also work to understand how the distinction between the two could be meaningful to avant-garde tastes in 1921. My analysis will meditate especially on the fact that Dada and Ultra are the most important avant-garde movements arising in neutral Switzerland and neutral Spain, respectively, during and immediately following the pan-European disaster of the First World War. To perform my comparative analysis, I will look to Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes's poem, "Trombone à coulisse" ("Slide Trombone"), and its translation by the Spanish ultraist Rafael Lasso de la Vega, a "polyhedric and extravagant figure" (Rojas 41).²

If few scholars of Dada are well appraised of ultraism, many of the dadaists themselves, especially Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia, were quite aware of the Spanish group. They published poems in Spanish translation in ultraist magazines, corresponded actively with ultraists, and visited with them in Paris and Madrid. Tzara included the ultraists Guillermo de Torre, Rafael Lasso de la Vega, Joaquín "Jacques" Edwards, and Rafael Cansinos-Assens among the "Présidents et Présidentes Dada" in *Dada* 6. Madrid is even one of the cities listed on the "Mouvement Dada" letterhead used by Tzara in Paris (Dickerman 1).

Both movements were eager to challenge works and ideas from other periods and movements. Dada, owing to its proponents' more direct experience with the First World War, adopted the attitude of a caustic *blague* against culture. Meanwhile, Spain's relative isolation in neutrality meant that the avant-garde poets of Ultra could collect tendencies from abroad much more optimistically. The peculiarities of Ribemont-Dessaignes's poem in Lasso's translation will help me to demonstrate this point. Lasso's Spanish translation represents aggregation and the celebration of new forms of culture. Ribemont-Dessaignes's French original, in the context of Paris Dada, should be read as a lamentation on the dregs of culture, a

² Except where noted, all translations are mine. Lasso led a very colorful literary and personal life. Joaquín Caro Romero gives the sympathetic version, including Lasso's life of bohemian penury in Madrid, his claimed title of nobility, his many publications, both real and unverified, his friendships with important Spanish and Italian authors, and his flamboyant, aristocratic attitude. Elsewhere, many of the details of Lasso's biography, especially the book *Galerías de glaces*, supposed to have been published in Paris, are called into doubt (Bonet, "Prólogo" 28). The title pages of two of Lasso's other books, *Prestigios* and *Presencias*, seem to have been falsely dated to 1916 and 1918, respectively. These books work to construct a fiction situating Lasso poetically and personally at the center of the development of the earliest avant-garde poetry in Spanish (Bonet, "Prólogo" 34-42). Bonet's prologue to Lasso's collected poetry is particularly informative regarding Lasso's poetic development, his relationships, and his dubious claims about his whereabouts, friendships, and publication history. Lasso's practice of publishing his poetry in Spanish below the first few lines of the same piece in French was meant to suggest he composed his work in the latter language and then translated it into the former. Whether the complete poems ever existed in French and the degree to which Lasso controlled that language are questionable, as is his residency from 1909 to 1914 in Paris (see Gallego Roca 228-29; Anderson 45, 202; Bonet, *Diccionario* 369-70; Bonet, "Prólogo" 20-23, 32-33; Torre, *Historia* 554).

provocation aimed at a sick and cumbersome inheritance. I will complement my argument with further reference to the work of other ultraist poets as well. Finally, we shall see how Dada and ultraist writers reacted to the Spanish Civil War in perhaps surprising ways some twenty years after the advent of their movements.

World War I is usually understood to have been the catalyst for Dada because it seemed to the pacifist artists gathered in neutral Zurich to be the clearest sign of the failure of western nationalist logic. After the war, in Paris, Dada says it “n’a jamais raison” (which could also be read as “reason is never on its side”) because reason itself was untrustworthy in the context of such a calamity. In many ways anticipating the argument Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno would make in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* following World War II, the artists and writers who created Dada felt that industrial positivism, the economic doctrine of focused action and inevitable progress, had amounted ultimately to mechanized suffering and the commodification of human life. They were not, of course, the only artists to take issue with industrial modernity; as critics like Domingo Ródenas or Matei Calinescu have shown, the avant-garde at large and the Romantic and Symbolist traditions from which it grew were various rebellions against positivist bourgeois modernity (Ródenas 57-58; Calinescu 6).

While the First World War was a personal threat to many dadaists, who were drafted into military service or fled conscription by moving to neutral Switzerland, the war was cultural salvation for the young poets of Ultra, thirsty for news of the wider world from their vantage point in a dusty, disappointed Spain. In neutrality, Spain was isolated politically and culturally from the rest of Europe. The years leading to the war were marked by public questioning of national destiny after the momentous loss of most of Spain’s remaining colonial possessions in 1898. In art, the period was characterized by a spirit of “regeneration” (Calinescu 7-8) and by *modernista* poetry closely affiliated to Symbolism. The young artists of Ultra came to scorn these models. They viewed the vogue for “regeneration” as a clichéd redux of tired nationalism and the *modernista* poetry which served as a model for most of their first attempts at writing verse as hopelessly sentimental dross. By the end of the First World War, feeling out of step with the rest of a rapidly industrializing Europe, they sought something new.

World War I then, rather than the sign of the failure of the logic of modernity, as it was for the dadaists, was for many ultraists an engine of cosmopolitanism. The ultraists were eager to learn more about Dada, and many read and translated Dada works with verve and interest.³ But, despite certain assumptions characterizing what little treatment Ultra receives in criticism of Dada, Ultra never

³ In his prologue to *Poetas de la nada*, Pablo Rojas offers a concise survey of the first echoes of Dada in Spain, with specific reference to World War I (24-36). Since my essay focuses on ultraism, whose main locus of activity was Madrid, I do not touch on Dada’s first reverberations in Spain, which took place in fact in Barcelona. Rojas also sketches the relationship individual avant-gardists in Spain maintained with Dada (36-49).

was a version of Dada imported and repackaged in Spain. For example, the assertion that Guillermo de Torre was “the one-man band of Spanish Dadaism” (Sanouillet 226) is doubly inaccurate since Torre was not the only ultraist interested in dadaism and indeed there never was a “Spanish Dadaism.” Still, unfortunately, Torre’s name is often the only one from the Hispanic avant-gardes mentioned in connection to Dada. Aside from Judith Hossli’s brief overview of ultraism in *Dada global*, it is quite difficult to find criticism on Dada which takes Ultra into account. Even so, while Hossli’s exposition of Ultra notes its similarities to Dada (irony, iconoclasm, etc.) (84), she does not have the space to engage in meaningful comparative analysis. To a critic like Eddie Breuil, who has thought deeply on the relationship between the groups and their work, it is clear that “Ultra is not Dada” (22).

Dada loudly condemned prevailing reason and sought to agitate old categories and assumptions about what art ought to be. Ultraism, eager also to offload the detritus of what it considered a sappy and bombastic artistic past, enthusiastically aggregated all it could from cubism, Dada, German expressionism, futurism, and other tendencies. While Dada was “a shrill cry against mass slaughter” (Hentea, “Federating the Modern Spirit” 39), ultraism, in words Renée Silverman applies to Guillermo de Torre’s 1923 book of poems, *Hélices*, “pays homage not to World War I, but to the positive effect that the war had on Spain’s growth: the expansion of industry and trade, and the influx into the country of artists, writers, and musicians who wished to escape the hostilities” (90). “Simultanist” artists Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay Terk were key collaborators in Ultra, having waited out the war first in Portugal and then in Madrid. In 1918 the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro took advantage of the ease of movement that came with the de-escalation of hostilities to bring to Madrid the new poetics he had developed under the influence of cubism with Pierre Reverdy in France. The Polish artists Marjan Paszkiewicz and Wladyslaw Jahl were central members of the ultraist group, as were the Argentines Jorge Luis Borges and his sister Norah, a woodcut artist, who arrived in Madrid after spending the war in Geneva. A vibrant group of international artists coalesced in Madrid during and immediately following the war, often arriving in neutral Spain from much more dangerous places. As Miguel Gallego Roca notes, 1918, the year of the Armistice, marked an important shift in Spanish literary culture; an intense curiosity for foreign works, especially works composed in French, was the sign of Spanish intellectuals’ desire to modernize and internationalize their culture at home. Translation was their method for making that desire a reality (181).

To this point I have suggested that ultraism was interested in aggregating cultural forms while Dada sought to agitate them. Culture, then, is a fundamental concern of both groups. In the various languages in which it is cognate, the term “culture,” Raymond Williams notes, first referred to processes, like “agriculture,” but came to mean at times something like the set of behaviors common to a group or a record of human achievement (87-89). For the ultraists, culture might fit any

of these definitions. In an important contrast to the dadaists, Ultra was perfectly comfortable with viewing culture as the growing record of innovative artistic achievements which needed to be sought out and aggregated, with more or less discrimination, to their budding avant-garde project. Viewing the *esprit nouveau* in poetry and art from around Europe in generally positive terms, the ultraists approached their artistic moment with heady optimism. They translated poetry from abroad with a strong conviction in the salutary effects an eclectic mix of new works could have in Spain. Remembering his essential role in Ultra many years later, Guillermo de Torre would call Dada a

youthful adventure in whose episodes, while maintaining certain distances, I was mixed up, attracted perhaps by the opposite of what attracted Tzara and his people; that is, by its affirmative vitality, not the radical negativity of its principles; by the novelty of its literary procedures, not by its attempt at tearing them all down...And more than anything, what drew some of us to Dada like a magnet was the double mask of "humor" and "pathos" with which it presented itself. (*Historia de las literaturas de vanguardia* 320)

The ultraists, Torre tells us, were attracted to Dada for its jovial energy and the creative possibilities it offered. Poetry from beyond the Pyrenees, as Gallego Roca observes with respect to translations made by Lasso de la Vega and Guillermo de Torre, provided ultraist poets with new models of syntax, tone, and metaphor to overhaul their inherited Symbolist and *modernista* style (189-90, 230-1). Dada seemed to the poets of Ultra a blueprint to build, a raft to new cultural lands. Conversely, in the face of the senseless carnage of World War I, Dada was for the dadaists themselves a raucous, sarcastic torpedo zig-zagging towards the creaking hull of a sinking culture. They could only laugh darkly or jeer openly at any notion of the value of European civilization. Culture for Dada was simply a "dossier of human imbecility" (Tzara, "Note 14"). The Dada enterprise was, in Zurich and then in Paris, where Ribemont-Dessaigues lent his participation, a "nihilistic collective force levelled at the noblest ideals of advanced society" which carried "specific historical weight in relation to the recent war" (Mileaf and Witkovsky 349-50).

Ultra's attitude, owing to its own national politics and its relationship to the politics of Europe during World War I, was in general much more optimistic than Dada's (Martínez Pésico 110). This difference in attitude did not however prevent the poets of Ultra from pursuing Dada works, sometimes contributing to confusion as to their equivalence with or distance from Dada (Breuil 18-19, 187, 191; Martínez Pésico 111-12). Nonetheless, Breuil notes that despite Dada's persistent negativity, it was read in Spain in generally positive terms. For the ultraists, he writes, "nihilism and the will to destroy are not the leading points when they [the ultraists] talk about this movement [Dada]. Vitality and joy are the values regularly vaunted" by the artists of Ultra (20). Having had little to do with

the war personally, their quarrel was not with the veiled brutality of western logic and its culture, but with the specific dead and joyless literary past of Spain.

Guillermo de Torre wrote in 1925 that Ultra came together “[s]imultaneously with the explosion of the last mortar shell” (*Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* 65). Despite this timing, the young artists of Ultra

aspired to close a “successive” stage and open an “inaugural” stage. That is: to make clear their disagreement, their breaking from the roots of the gods, the creeds, and the particular habits of the 1898-1900 generation, also called the modernist or Novecentist generation, as well as with the waves of its servile epigones. (*Literaturas europeas* 65)

While Torre could speak of his hope that Ultra could “inaugurate” a new cultural modernity at the conclusion of the war, Dada’s fierce negativity was not inclined to set a new starting-point on the cultural timeline. Both movements were eager to reject the past, but Dada’s approach was nihilist while Ultra’s was optimistic.

A poem published by dadaist poet (as well as painter and musician) Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes a few months after the Armistice will afford us a textually grounded exploration of the affinities and distances between Ultra and Dada at the end of the First World War. Rafael Lasso de la Vega translated it into Spanish for publication in the ultraist magazine *Grecia* for the issue of 20 November 1919. The poem, “Trombone à coulisse” (“Slide Trombone”) appeared in the French edition of *Dada* 4/5 in May 1919.⁴ Lasso’s Spanish version, “Trombón de varas,” reads:

Trombón de varas

Tengo sobre la cabeza una alita que gira al viento
Y se me sube el agua a la boca
Y a los ojos
Para los apetitos y los éxtasis
Tengo en las orejas un cornetín lleno de olor de ajeno
Y sobre la nariz un loro verde que agita las alas
Y que grita: A las armas!
Cuando caen del cielo granos de sol
La ausencia de acero en el corazón
Al fondo de las viejas realidades desatadas y corrompidas

⁴ There were two editions of this number, a result of French government censorship and continuing nationalism. The “international” edition contained material in French and German, while the “French” edition substituted French texts for the German so that it could be exported to France (Brooker et. al. 1049; Biron)

Es parcial en las mareas lunáticas
Soy capitán y alsaciano en el cinema
Tengo en el vientre una pequeña máquina agrícola
Que siega y anuda cables eléctricos
Las nueces de coco que arroja el mono melancólico
Caen como esputos en el agua
Sobre la que florecen en petunios
Tengo en el estómago una ocarina y tengo el hígado virginal
Yo nutrí a mi poeta con los pies de una pianista
Cuyos dientes son pares e impares
Y la tarde de los tristes domingos
A las tórtolas que ríen como el infierno
Lanzo sueños morgánásticos (Lasso de la Vega, "Pequeña antología
'Dada'" 16)

It follows Ribemont-Dessaignes's original French text quite closely:

Trombone à coulisse

J'ai sur la tête une petite ailette qui tourne au vent
Et me monte l'eau à la bouche
Et dans les yeux
Pour les appétits et les extases
J'ai dans les oreilles un petit Cornet plein d'odeur d'absinthe
Et sur le nez un perroquet vert qui bat des ailes
Et crie: Aux Armes!
Quand il tombe du ciel des grains de soleil
L'absence d'acier au cœur
Au fond des vieilles réalités débossées et croupissantes
Est partiale aux marées lunatiques
Je suis capitaine et alsacienne au cinéma
J'ai dans le ventre une petite machine agricole
Qui fauche et lie des fils électriques
Les noix de coco que jette le singe mélancolie
Tombent comme crachats dans l'eau
Ou reflleurissent en pétunias
J'ai dans l'estomac une ocarina et j'ai le foie virginal
Je nourris mon poète avec les pieds d'une pianiste
Don't les dents sont paires et impaires

Et le soir des tristes dimanches
Aux tourterelles qui rient comme l'enfer
Je jette des rêves morgantiques (Ribemont-Dessaignes 60)

Slide Trombone⁵

I've got a little wing on my head that spins with the wind
And brings water to my mouth
And to my eyes
For appetites and ecstasies
In my ears I've got a little trumpet full of the smell of absinthe
And on my nose I've got a green parrot that flaps its wings
And yells: To your weapons!
When grains of sun drop from the sky
The absence of steel in one's heart
At the bottom of the old corrupt and loosed realities
Is partial at lunatic tides
I'm a captain and an Alsatian girl in the cinema
I've got a little agricultural machine in my stomach
Which reaps and knots up electric cables
Coconuts which the monkey melancholy throws
Fall like loogies in the water
Where they rebloom like petunias
I've got inside my stomach an ocarina and my liver is a virgin
I feed my poet with the feet of a woman at the piano
Whose teeth are even and odd
And at evening on sad Sundays
To the turtle doves who laugh like hell
I throw out morgantic dreams

There are a few moments where Lasso de la Vega's translation seems to misapprehend slightly the French original. The translation as it is printed in *Grecia* also includes a few typographical errors, which I have conserved.⁶ Most of these

⁵ This translation is my own. Willard Bohn has also translated "Slide Trombone" in *The Dada Market*.

⁶ "Alsaciano" is the masculine form. The original poem in French uses the feminine form: "Je suis capitaine et alsacienne au cinéma." I will comment on this point in the coming pages. A few other details merit mention. Lasso de la Vega's translation uses "petunios" rather than the correct form,

moments are relatively inconsequential, but one stands out as I think about Dada and its connections to Spain. Lasso's line, "Soy capitán y alsaciano en el cinema" (corresponding to my English, "I'm a captain and an Alsatian girl in the cinema") is translated from Ribemont-Dessaigues's "Je suis capitaine et alsacienne au cinéma." One plausible explanation for the shift from the French feminine "alsacienne" to the Spanish masculine "alsaciano" is that Lasso might have read the noun "trombone" as feminine in French, owing to its ending in "e."⁷ It is in fact a masculine noun in both languages, but Lasso might have figured it was feminine while "trombón" in Spanish is masculine.⁸ Since the musical instrument appears to be the speaker of the poem, Lasso might then have adjusted the adjective to fit the gender of the Spanish noun. Rather than follow Lasso in my English translation, I have opted for, "I am a captain and an Alsatian girl in the cinema" for reasons which ought to make clear how Dada agitation and ultraist aggregation operated after the November 1918 Armistice.

The poem may seem like an attack on logical discourse, something like the verbal version of the decontextualization of a cubist collage, but even more dissociative and cluttered. While the syntax of its lines generally reflects customary speech patterns, it seems this poem might pursue something like the aggressive nonsense of the poems recited at the Cabaret Voltaire. However, in the context of the recent Armistice, the mention of certain elements must make us think of the war: the disputed region of Alsace, occupied by French troops in mid-1918 and ceded officially to France by Germany in the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919; the line, "To your weapons!"; and the central subject of the trombone, a common instrument in military parades and patriotic celebrations. These elements help us to read this poem fruitfully with some confidence that its metaphors evince a discernible logic with reference to a world outside the text.⁹

The line, "I'm a captain and an Alsatian girl in the cinema," seems unmistakably linked to propaganda reels projected in French cinemas during and following the war. The *Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense* (ECPAD), the French military's audiovisual archive,

"petunias," as well as "morganáticos" instead of the correct form, "morganáticos." It also uses the past tense "Yo nutri" where Ribemont-Dessaigues uses the present, "Je nourris."

⁷ As Gallego Roca notes, Lasso's bilingualism is questionable (228; see also Bonet, "Prólogo" 22-23). His contemporary Torre also sows doubt on the topic (*Literaturas* 100).

⁸ A discrepancy in grammatical gender between the languages would not be so unusual. There are several nouns which, despite deriving from the same Latin root, possess different genders in French and Spanish. The words for planet, minute, blood, and milk are a few examples.

⁹ The fact that the poem's metaphors might be decipherable on some level should not be interpreted as any diminishment of its Dada credentials. The only reason that Dada nonsense is shocking or interesting is because it plays with the anticipated associations that the conventional, sedentary logic of its viewers and readers would have brought to it and which the dadaists also shared and understood by dint of sharing the very culture they attacked.

houses many films from World War I, including several showing French troops interacting with civilians in Alsace leading up to and after the Armistice. In one, young girls in typical Alsatian costume file through the street with smiling French soldiers looking on. A small boy in a captain's uniform stands with two girls in Alsatian dress and salutes the camera. This film, according to ECPAD, was made during the liberation of Alsace at the end of the war and shown in cinemas with other scenes of patriotic celebration from Bastille Day the following July, 1919 ("Alsace: fêtes patriotiques"). While Ribemont-Dessaigues's poem was published in May of 1919, before the Bastille Day scenes were filmed, it is possible that he could have seen the images in the first portion of the film made in Alsace, or perhaps other similar films.

One such similar film, "Mai 1918: Dans un village d'Alsace," was released some months before the Armistice and one year before the publication of Ribemont-Dessaigues's poem. It shows Alsatian villagers welcoming French troops tired from a long campaign. The short film follows two soldiers as they interact with locals. The uniformed men shake hands genially with schoolboys and warmly accept the hospitality of a local woman and her female servant. In very short time the two soldiers are "Déjà presque de la famille" 'Already practically like family' (3:07), and are shown chatting with the women, joking around with the boys, and observing with apparent surprise the traditional spinning wheels with which the Alsatians prepare their wool. "On file la laine...comme autrefois!..." 'Spinning wool...like back in the day!...', reads the intertitle (6:10).

Ribemont-Dessaigues's poem ends with the trombone blasting out "morganatic dreams." Morganatic marriages are those in which the spouses belong to different social strata. In films like these, which show impromptu fraternization between Alsatian locals and French soldiers, strange "morganatic dreams" would be suggested by the patriotic music of the trombone played, along with other instruments, in the cinema: a boy dressed as a French soldier is posed awkwardly next to Alsatian girls; members of the French military settle into something like family life, making themselves perhaps a little too quickly "presque de la famille" with their Alsatian hostesses. The French soldiers of these films, the poem's "capitaine," and the Alsatian women and girls, the poem's "alsacienne," are given life by the notes of the trombone, which conjure up these strange unions in the projection room. The link between film and musical instruments is strong in this period: almost all silent films were screened with musical accompaniment (Cooke 9, 18-20). It also merits mention here that the first Dada performances in Paris, the venue by which Ribemont-Dessaigues begins his collaboration with the group, took place in a rented room between two cinemas; the Dada poets and performers had to contend with the dueling orchestras of the movie-houses on either side (Mileaf and Witkovsky 351).

We could imagine that the trombone speaking this poem gives voice both to the captain and to the Alsatian woman or girl projected on the screen in these and other films celebrating French victory at the end of the war. Ribemont-

Dessaigues spent the war in Paris working for the Service de Renseignement aux Familles, the government office that provided information (and death notices) to soldiers' families, and thus would have had ample opportunity to see films of this sort (Hockensmith et. al. 481). In his poem, the trombone has "a little wing on my head that spins with the wind," which could be a metaphor for the musician's sheet music clipped to the instrument or perhaps a French flag attached to the end of the horn for a patriotic parade. The "water" moving up through the tube could be the condensation which forms inside the instrument as it is played or the air filling the musician's cheeks to satisfy the "appetites and ecstasies" of the cinematic audience or the parade crowd. The lines "And on my nose I've got a green parrot that flaps its wings / And yells: To your weapons!" seem to refer mockingly to an officer in a green uniform¹⁰ standing in front of the musician (on the trombone's nose), conducting the military band (he is a "parrot" who "flaps its wings") and yelling incongruously, "To your weapons!" Also evoking the war, the lines, "When grains of sun drop from the sky / The absence of steel in one's heart / At the bottom of the old corrupt and loosed realities," would make a man who had personal experience of the trenches think of flying shrapnel or falling bombs, burning "grains of sun" whose terrible potential for destruction reveals "the absence of steel" in even the bravest hearts.

Lasso de la Vega, reading Ribemont-Dessaigues's poem in neutral Spain, might not have assumed a military and patriotic framework for the metaphors surrounding the trombone image and the mentions of Alsace. Indeed, in the vein of many poems of the ultraist group, the poem's "grains of sun" might have conjured for him the idea of a new artistic dawn, an open and promising future. Lasso may even have assumed from Dada's association with neutral Switzerland that the war would have penetrated little into Dada poetry, despite the fact that many dadaists sought refuge from the war in Switzerland while others, like Ribemont-Dessaigues, spent the war in service on the home front. To Lasso's mind, the strange and jumbled metaphors operating on the trombone would have presented a totally new attitude of irreverence and whimsy. In "Slide Trombone," the cosmopolitan novelty of the absinthe,¹¹ the electric cables, the coconuts, the outlandish images of the poet nourished by the pianist's feet, or the small agricultural machine in the trombone's stomach, would certainly have whet the appetite of the Spanish poets who had been yearning for a tonic to their dry literary

¹⁰ The green jacket would be that of the officers of the French cavalry ("Feld-Uniformen unserer Feinde im Westen: Kriegsbilderbogen nr. 4").

¹¹ Absinthe, popularly associated with a number of societal ills in France and Switzerland, was banned in Switzerland before the war and in France on 4 March 1915 (Conrad 129-30). Its production and consumption were not made legal in France until long after the war. Following the ban, in 1918, Pernod fils, one of the most noteworthy producers of the beverage, moved its operations to Tarragona, in Spain (Conrad 137). At the time of Lasso's translation, the drink might have seemed a rather titillating novelty in Madrid.

scene, a scene which they viewed as melancholy, retrograde, and myopic. Indeed, in December of 1920, a year after the appearance of this translation in *Grecia*, three Ultraist poets – José Rivas Panedas, Humberto Rivas, and Tomás Luque – wrote to Vicente Huidobro in Paris to tell him about the new magazine they would be bringing out, *Ultra*, and to ask about the newest poetry from France. The only poet they mention by name, and whose work they request with enthusiasm, is Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes (Rivas Panedas 270-71).

Translation offered Lasso de la Vega a chance to distance himself from a tired national tradition (Gallego Roca 227). He had been writing poetry in French (or at least claimed to) since his teenage years, long before the avant-garde adventure of ultraism began. His own poetry made a major shift precisely in the moment that he learned of Dada and began translating Dada works. As Andrew A. Anderson documents, Lasso's poems up to November 1919 reproduced conventional forms well-worn by Symbolist and *modernista* poets. Even when incorporating modern cosmopolitan themes, his work found few original modes of expression (612-16). However, after 20 November 1919, when Lasso presents his "Pequeña antología 'Dada'" in which "Trombón de varas" appears, his poetry displays a completely new attitude, one of rapid-fire juxtaposition, modern excitement, and ludic irreverence (Anderson 616-17). In the context of this development, I should like to subscribe to Miguel Gallego Roca's view that "depending on the situation in which the receiving literature finds itself, and the code utilized by the translator, the translated literature will take on an innovative or conservative function" (18). For Lasso, and for Ultra more broadly, innovation was the most highly prized literary value. Translation, with its potential for internationalism and novelty, was a key strategy for pursuing innovation and cosmopolitan contemporaneity (Gallego Roca 229, 247).

Dada was unfamiliar and new enough that Lasso de la Vega attributes "Trombón de varas" to "A. Ribemont-Dessaignes," perhaps remembering artist Georges's physician father, Albin, whose treatise on obstetrics was published in translation in Spain in 1904.¹² The potential for novelty offered by this poem was more important than accurate attribution. The poets of Ultra were more interested in the ways foreign artists' work might help renew the Spanish artistic scene than in the ways European civilization had failed itself, as Silverman demonstrates with the probing questions – focused exclusively on aesthetics – she imagines Guillermo de Torre would have put to artists who had fled the war to Madrid (131). Since the ultraists were attracted to all things new and cosmopolitan, an equanimous appraisal of their movement demands a reading of the poem with greater regard to Lasso's own priorities of novelty and innovation in Spanish, a

¹² A printer's mistake, common in the little magazines of ultraism, is just as plausible an explanation for the erroneous first initial. It is, however, not entirely unlikely that Lasso would have knowledge of Albin Ribemont-Dessaignes or his professional work: Lasso's father was a physician (Caro Romero 10).

reading less concerned with the historic conditions of the poem's genesis in post-war Paris. In the performance of such a reading, Lasso might have run with the images of absinthe, music, and modern "ecstasies" to imagine an edgy café scene.

The trombone for the ultraists would evoke a jazz band in an urban café much more quickly than it would a military band or a cinema orchestra accompanying wartime propaganda reels. In this context, the opening lines,

I've got a little wing on my head that spins with the wind
And brings water to my mouth
And to my eyes
For appetites and ecstasies
In my ears I've got a little trumpet full of the smell of absinthe

suggest that the trombone, as well as operating as a literal element of a café scene, is also the metaphorical vehicle for a cocktail (a long, tubular glass) with a drinking straw, "a little wing on my head that spins in the wind / And brings water to my mouth."¹³ The result of the cocktails imbibed in this modern café is the satisfaction of "appetites and ecstasies" and the sensation of having "a little trumpet full of the smell of absinthe" in one's ears. Where Lasso writes about having "a small agricultural machine" or an "ocarina" in his stomach, we can imagine the digestive processes of the human organism working to convert the alcoholic drink, ultimately an agricultural product, into the musical feeling of a light drunkenness. By contrast, Ribemont-Dessaignes's imagination during the war, as evidenced by his 1915 painting *Silence* (Dickerman 397), appears to have viewed agricultural machinery as monstrously complex, inscrutable, and menacing. This painting includes a horn whose notes seem to be only the random byproduct of the bizarre mechanism of industrial labor.

Lasso writes about a "mono melancólico" (melancholic monkey) throwing coconuts into the water, but Ribemont-Dessaignes's original reads, "le singe mélancolie," uniting the two nouns, "monkey" and "melancholy," not the adjective, "melancholic." Perhaps Lasso is imagining the cocktail waiter as a sullen ape, tossing ingredients (the coconut) into the mix. For Ribemont-Dessaignes, it seems that melancholy itself is an actor in the scene, while for Lasso melancholy is a characteristic of the "monkey," who poisons the communal watering hole with his coconuts. While the image may seem whimsical and lighthearted, racist tropes representing black people as apes, common in European media of the period, spanning Jules Verne's novels (Ousselin 97-98) to avant-garde "primitivism" (Chave 606) and World War I-era advertising (L. Williams 121), also must be considered here. Both Ribemont-Dessaignes's original and Lasso's translation

¹³ The paper drinking straw would have been ubiquitous at the time. The kinked "bendy" straw was not yet a reality (Thompson). The "little wing" also could not yet be a cocktail umbrella, which was first popularized in the 1950s in Hawaii (Bilow).

could speak to white Europeans' racial anxieties and prejudices in a globalizing Europe. As Eva Woods Peiró observes in the specific case of Spain, internationally mobile jazz performers, many of whom were black, arrived from the United States and Latin America to confuse the once-powerful imperial center's already strained notion of its own modernity. The juxtaposition of talented and cosmopolitan colonial others within a culturally backwards metropole "fit . . . with the collective neurosis about Spain's status as both European and other to Europe" (102).

For Ribemont-Dessaigues in Paris, the closing lines of the poem,

And at evening on sad Sundays
To the turtle doves who laugh like hell
I throw out morgantic dreams

might speak to Sunday church bells tolling for fallen soldiers even while couples, "turtle doves," enjoy leisure time together. In films like "Mai 1918: Dans un village d'Alsace," Parisian audiences can already see how soldiers and Alsatian women, from very different backgrounds, are suddenly thrust into close contact in the new reality of post-war France. This film also includes a scene in which the whole village climbs the hill to the "old church" on Sunday (10:10), followed by a procession of young girls to the graves of their older brothers (10:24-11:10). The trombone tosses "morgantic dreams" their way because the future is beckoning. But the pairings for this future, with society turned on its head and so many young men lost, will be unusual. For Lasso de la Vega's version, however, the poetic voice of exuberant ultraism would not likely commiserate at all with Sunday's sadness. To this point, the little magazine *Ultra* declared in its fifth issue in 1921, "Ultraism has a great thing to accomplish: eliminating Sunday." In this context, Lasso's trombone would delight in loudly interrupting the pious tranquility of Sunday evenings and encouraging all the wildest fantasies of young lovers.

This irreverent but jocular attitude was characteristic of *Ultra*, which had little real inclination to histrionic or aggressive gestures. As Torre writes of the ultraists, "Though there was no one among their ranks endowed with the combative fists of a Marinetti or the impassivity of a Tristan Tzara, they were seduced by polemic and humoristic acts" (*Historia* 552). Seduction, with its attendant aggregation, rather than confrontation, with its attendant agitation, was the stronger force in *Ultra*.

Poems like Lasso de la Vega's "Cabaret," published in French and Spanish in *Grecia* in December 1919, can attest to this. The opening lines

Souper-tango folie Flanbeaux étincelles
Aube de la nuit Nus Danse des étoiles
Champagne Whisky and soda Guirlandes tulipes
Jet d'eau jeux de glaces Jour artificiel (*Poesía* 414)

are translated by “Juan de Carcex,” likely a pseudonym for Lasso de la Vega himself, as

Souper-tango locura antorchas centelleos
Alba de la noche. Desnudos Danza de las estrellas
Champagne Whisky and soda Guirnaldas tulipas
Surtidor juegos de espejos Día artificial (*Poesía* 415)

Super-tango madness torches flashes
Dawn of night Nudes Dance of the stars
Champagne Whisky and soda Garlands tulips
Water pump mirror games Artificial day

It is true that “Cabaret” may disrupt normal syntactical patterns, but it is much more a wide-eyed grab at all that’s new and cosmopolitan (“Whiskey and soda,” the tango, Billboards for “Nudes” and “Dance”) than an attack on calcified linguistic habits. Pablo Rojas’s characterization of Lasso’s influences as “ingredients” (42) gains full currency in a poem like this one. For Lasso de la Vega, culture in 1919 is growing. Ultra wants to take it all in and the very act of translation operates as a kind of curatorial advocacy for specific artifacts of culture from abroad. For Dada, however, culture was either the source of rot or, when growing, was worthy of being torn down and pilloried.

Many choice phrases attest to an overwhelming pessimism in Dada that manifested itself in relentless attacks on all categories of art and culture, even after the conclusion of the war. Hans Richter writes of the Dadaists in the international edition of *Dada* 4/5, published in Zurich in May 1919, “Our solidarity (unlike the solidarity of those groups which hold themselves in such high regard), is steeped in an acid bath of slightly pathetic or cruel desperation . . . this is a true position” (Ades 48). The end of the war and the arrival of Dada in Paris did not brighten the Dada view of European culture. Even fellow avant-gardists like the cubists, many of whom collaborated in Dada publications, were the targets of ruthless invectives. Francis Picabia shouts in March 1921, “Now they want to cube money!!! As for Dada it means nothing, nothing, nothing” (Ades 125). Jean Metzinger and Tristan Tzara eviscerate the cubist painter Albert Gleizes in a bogus interview in November 1920 in 391 (Ades 132-33). Meanwhile, Ribemont-Dessaignes, the poet in whose text we found a reeling pessimism aimed at the confusion of the war, performs a brutal takedown of accumulated culture, also in 391. This text, “Non – seul plaisir” (No – only pleasure) appears in the ultraist magazine *Grecia* in June 1920 in César A. Comet’s translation under the curious title, “No sólo placer” (Not only pleasure). The invective against institutional art and culture is unrelenting.

Just think about those grotesque people who make Art the same way as they go to their office, and fulfill a function at times mercenary, at times priestly: those catalogued artists, in short, are the best thing there is in the slime around us. ("No sólo placer" 7)

....

There's no solution. The solution would be a coating of gasoline set on fire. The civilized, and those who aspire to civilization, submitted to pure destruction. The trade winds would make a pretty pattern with the dust. This is a utopia. ("No sólo placer" 8)

Ultraism is rarely, perhaps never, so bitterly negative. Guillermo de Torre offers his Madrid readership a very measured appraisal of Dada in two articles in *Cosmópolis* in February and March of 1921. These pieces synthesize and comment on the previous coverage Torre had given the movement and offer rebuttals to what Torre considers uninformed reporting from other writers. The February piece, "Gestos y teorías del dadaísmo" (Gestures and Theories of Dadaism) tries to explain the rift between Dada and the cubists, Cocteau, Cendrars, Reverdy, Picasso, Gleizes, and Gris. Essentially, Torre concludes, the negative spirit of the young dadaists could not countenance the fact that the cubists "by then had an oeuvre on the verge of consolidation" (340). The cubists' "maturity of crystallization and persuasive irradiation" signaled the dawn of "a stage of constructive synthesis" (340). All this smacked of bourgeois complacency and snobby elitism to the dadaists, says Torre ("Gestos" 340-41).

Torre, unlike the acerbic dadaists cited above, presents himself as an even-handed chronicler, a passionate but fair-minded expert on culture. In the same text in which Torre speaks encomiastically of "powerful western civilization" ("Gestos" 350), he notes the "the dadaists' robust enthusiasm and energy, which cross borders and bring about a moment of worldwide curiosity" (343). He characterizes his own critical approach as writing not with "the red finger of malevolent criticism but with the dignified attitude of an equidistant commentator who works to illuminate evolutionary nebulae, without forgetting chronology. . ." (348). In his article "El vórtice dadaísta" (The Dadaist Vortex), Torre notes quite tellingly that not all ultraists could agree with the Dada project of absolute artistic destruction (431). Likewise, he continues, not all dadaists would be capable of moving on from a destructive phase to a constructive one. "All powerful artists must follow this trajectory," he writes, "after a destructive initiation, the great feat of creativity. Perhaps some – and there will be victims in DADA – will get stuck in the first stage" (439). Even so, Torre figures Dada is "justified" because the creative process "will continue in the next generation."

As Willard Bohn suggests, based on Torre's broad reading and the formal similarities between the two works, the young Spaniard's optimism might have been enough for him to take inspiration from Pierre Albert-Birot's war poem, "Les éclats," published in his own journal, *SIC*, in April 1918, to compose a joyful,

classically-themed poem on the night sky (Bohn 55). The jagged lines of Albert-Birot's "Les éclats" mimic the motion of the flying shrapnel of the poem's title. Each of the lines, which take on the poetic voice of individual pieces of deadly debris, makes a chilling comment on the ongoing war. One reads, "I want the heart of a virgin," while another declares, "I'll have an arm." Torre is content to take formal cues from Albert-Birot's "Les éclats" in his 1923 poem, "Cabellera," but the Spaniard's piece shifts referential gears to undertake a starry meditation on classical mythology, astrology, and the excitement of industrial modernity. The lines radiate out from a single point, evenly distributed to form the titular image of long hair spread wide. Torre's poem exudes delight in iconoclastic images: "The lascivious rockets kiss the blue torso of Urania"; "The Zodiac's long hair is an incendiary pump" (Bonet, *Las cosas* 519), but it avoids explicit violence. While Albert-Birot's poem radiates chaotically from a center and destroys, randomly, the objects of its ragged verses, the lines of Torre's poem radiate evenly from a fixed origin. This origin is not the source of destructive energy but rather the locus of creative thought, a center to which Torre aggregates his multifaceted metaphorical vision.

Despite Albert-Birot's explicit engagement with the war in "Les éclats," Torre valued most Albert-Birot's speculation "with the new electric and machinistic symbols of the radiant and modern world" in order to create "an autonomous beauty and an automatic emotion, beyond objective reality or verbal simulation" ("El nunismo"). Lasso, in a 1920 article on Dada and creationism, advocates for a similar abstract take on poetry, aspiring to "symbols outside of any time or any relation" in order to pursue "the absolute liberation of poetry itself" ("La sección de oro" 652-53). In answer to claims that Dada is chaotic, Lasso says that "Dada is maximum creation" (653). For both Torre and Lasso, the flexibility of Dada is liberating since "Dada is nothing" for Lasso ("La sección de oro" 666) while Torre echoes conversations with his friends Philippe Soupault and Tristan Tzara in saying "Dada never existed" and "The nothing that is Dada . . . will always transform itself" (*Literaturas* 255). Dada, Torre notes in 1921, was constantly reinvigorated by its "continual mutability" ("Gestos" 343). He quotes Tzara in a letter from Zurich in October of 1919 saying, "DADA changes and multiplies constantly" ("Gestos" 344). The neutrality in which Dada was born was a key factor in its self-conception as provisional, uncommitted and thus, in a way, hollow. In contrast, the neutrality in which Ultra was born offered a fertile landscape in which to aggregate disparate material.

Dada was always in flux, migrating from city to city while continuously cultivating contacts and polemics with international avant-garde groups beyond the Dada nodes. It was averse to all kinds of codification and officialdom. To the extent that the artists of Dada could have a commitment to "cultural politics" then, they were committed to the possibility of contradiction and the forceful rejection of any reigning paradigm (Erickson 10-11). As Marius Hentea argues, this characteristic of Dada can inform current terminological confusion in criticism on

"Modernism." Tristan Tzara and André Breton's row over the aborted Congrès de Paris of 1922 shows how overarching conceptualizations of "Modernism," like Breton's imagined federation or the flattening of the field often perpetrated by the term in current critical vocabulary, are antithetical to the unsettled, wily, and iconoclastic spirit of the various avant-gardes (Hentea, "Federating" 48-49). Tzara, long before the disagreement with Breton, espoused a distrust toward convenient schema, writing, "Logic no longer guides us, and its business, very comfortable, so impotent, a false glimmer, sowing the coin of sterile relativism, is for us forever done" ("Note 14"). Hentea notes that around the same time, in 1919, Breton's letter of introduction to Tzara misses the mark by listing the artists whom he admires. Hentea writes, "This enumeration of an intellectual tradition shows the distance that separated Breton from Dada's program of 'destruction'" ("Federating" 39). In the same vein, John D. Erickson imputes to "modernism" the establishment of aesthetic models or ideals in contrast to Dada's relentlessly ironic "counterdiscourses" (10). Thus, argues Erickson, "in its purest form, Dada premised its cultural agenda on the politics of warfare against authority and resisted appropriation with every means at its disposal" (28).

By this logic, movements like Ultra that did practice appropriation should be read as "Modernist" in opposition to "avant-garde" (Erickson 10) because their acts of appropriation imply reverence for established models. But authority can be rejected without "warfare" (Erickson 28), and appropriation can be undertaken without fawning reverence. Ultraist practices of translation and cultural aggregation were eclectic and spontaneous. It was precisely by way of their continued experimentation with a variety of forms that the ultraists resisted establishing models. Their work of aggregation purposed to revitalize their own writing in Spain, not to find foreign saints to canonize.

To this point, this essay has worked primarily to understand the difference between Dada and Ultra proposed by the movements themselves. The difference can be articulated in a set of neat oppositions; Dada operates as an avant-garde agitator while Ultra is an avant-garde aggregator. Dada, in these equations, stands for destruction and antagonism while Ultra stands for construction and heroism. Dada is a sustained attack on culture in the face of war while Ultra is a celebration of new cultural possibilities in an industrialized and newly international Europe. Ribemont-Dessaignes, personally disgusted with the society that gave itself over to murder, writes "*Trombone à coulisse*," a poem bursting with the strains of a culture at odds with itself. Lasso de la Vega translates this work as "*Trombón de varas*," a poem in love with the modern European moment. This binary model is, of course, too simple a structure to convey or contain the myriad realities between the poles. But it does illustrate an important distinction between Dada as it was conceived in Zurich and practiced in Paris and Ultra as it aggregated to Spain artistic subjects and techniques from Dada, cubism, futurism, and other manifestations of the avant-garde spirit.

While making hermeneutic use of the opposition I have delineated above, we ought also to recognize complications to the dialectic. For example, Tzara's line condemning "logic" and its "business," cited earlier, is followed immediately by words of a very different timbre: "Other productive forces cry out their liberty, blazing, indefinable and gigantic, on the mountains of glass and prayer. . . . Liberty Liberty: Not being a vegetarian I make no recipes" ("Note 14"). "Productive forces," cries of freedom, "indefinable and giant" possibilities: these are strongly positive projections for the cultural future. Tzara further tempers his "banales négations" with a joke about vegetarianism. The bleakness of Ribemont-Dessaignes's poem, too, is attenuated by the humorous parade of strange images, built playfully on internal rhyme ("tête/ailette," "oreilles/cornet," "nez/perroquet").¹⁴ Likewise, ultraism was also in practice a more ambiguous and ambivalent artistic enterprise than the optimistic mixing we have considered thus far. Like Dada, its artists and poets were more a loose network of creators, galvanized by the *esprit nouveau* common to all the avant-gardes, but with constantly shifting preferences and allegiances (Anderson 413-14). Many of its foreign participants, visual artists like Wladyslaw Jahl or the Delaunays, experienced the war as refugees in Madrid, much as the dadaists did in Zurich. The undisplaced Spanish poets of Ultra, meanwhile, were thrilled with the novelty of their technological moment, but the urban cosmopolitanism that they celebrated by flaunting the aesthetic norms of the past could also be deeply unsettling.

Lasso de la Vega's poetry, for example, with its ecstatic expositions of the modern cosmopolitan milieu, is also crisscrossed with troubled metaphors of urban alienation and targeted attacks on traditional culture. In one poem, "Balanza," published in *Ultra* in March 1921, the poetic voice is "Conveniently bundled up / to resist the fraternal temperatures" (*Poesía* 444). He finds contact with his fellow citizens to be uncomfortable, but their presence in shared spaces is unavoidable since they fill the city like air. He puts on his "antiseptic diving suit" to root through "sentimental merchandise." The modern poet voyages into the detritus of the past and the fresh trash of the present to look disdainfully on all those "snakes" and "rodents" who root about in the mire of Europe's exhausted culture. The poem closes with the speaker saying of his fellow city-dwellers:

Pero, buenos roedores,
cansados de la enorme tarea
devoran cuerdamente y se duermen tranquilos.

¹⁴ Lasso does not attempt to create a similar rhyming effect in Spanish, but he appears thoughtful enough to have noticed this aspect of the French text. In the same "Pequeña antología 'Dada'" in which he publishes "Trombón de varas" he includes a brief text by Jean Cocteau with a footnote: "In this composition by the ingenious and festive Cocteau there is untranslatable play and musicality in the words. Each line begins with the last syllable of the previous one" ("Pequeña antología 'Dada'" 14).

He aquí el mundo de los consumidores
de la materia y de la idea. (*Poesía* 444)

But, good rodents,
tired from their enormous task
they devour sensibly and go to sleep contented.

This is the world of the consumers
of matter and idea.

In this poem, the curators of culture look little different from rats sifting through garbage. The philistines who perform this work are deemed imminently level-headed by the dominant culture; they “devour sensibly and go to sleep contented.” These people are the inhabitants of a new consumer society that produces useless “matter” while honoring an accumulation of hackneyed ideas and repetitive artistic forms.

Other examples of the tension between some poets’ excitement about the modern metropolis and their horror at its banality can be found in a writer like ultraism’s only woman poet, Lucía Sánchez Saornil.¹⁵ Her work can swing from Dada-style iconoclasm to modern ennui, with many ambiguous shades between. In one poem Sánchez Saornil writes, “let’s erase all the roads, / let’s wreck all the bridges, / let’s tear up all the rosebushes” (88). But the optimistic strand we perceive in other ultraist writing which seems confident in the possibilities of new culture, as elucidated above, follows these anti-artistic lines immediately: “let everything be flat like a lake / to then draw up / the new city” (88). In another poem, in which the sounds of the modern city become a jazz band through a series of metaphors, the speaker’s euphoric immersion in the metropolis turns out to be only superficial. The “symphonic bands” produced by automobiles as they roll through the street contribute to the music, but they end up “tying up our feet” (102). The street becomes a dancefloor, but the music is strange and elusive. Voltaic arc street lights are an exciting new technology, but their music is eerily silent: “Mute bells / hang over the dancefloor” (102). Even when Sánchez Saornil’s speaker is able to enjoy a modern diversion for nearly the entire length of a poem

¹⁵ Sánchez Saornil published many of her poems, including those considered here, with a masculine pseudonym, “Luciano de San-Saor.”

without being undercut by doubts, as in "Fiesta," a celebration of a party in which revelers dance the tango, the poem ends by asking:

Tango.
Para qué?
Mañana
toda la noche
estará en un abanico entre la hierba. (101)

Tango.
What's it all for?
Tomorrow
the whole night
will be in a fan in the grass.

The celebration of an expanding culture, including the novelty of dances from abroad and the thrill of drinking champagne until dawn, feels futile in the end. A woman's folding fan, the symbol of a sensual and festive culture, is chintzy and insignificant here. Another poem in the same issue of *Ultra* in which Sánchez Saornil's "Fiesta" appears also weighs the same conflicting attitudes by utilizing a fan image. Rafael Cansinos-Assens's poem,¹⁶ "Mayo," weaves together metaphors for garden-party revelry, but concludes, "The water is full / of broken fans" (*Ultra*, no. 10). These poems of hip and carefree leisure end suddenly on melancholy notes, distilled in images of women's folding fans. The speakers, modern cosmopolitans, seem to express implicit doubts about living in the moment without consideration for the future or the cultural past.

Another ultraist poet, José Rivas Panedas, conveys a similar fascination with cosmopolitan modernity, also similarly mitigated by tremendous subjective uneasiness. In a poem focused on a jazz band and the cocktails and conversation of a cosmopolitan café, Rivas Panedas's subject notices that "Sailors in mourning drive their silver canoes," providing a metaphor for automobiles moving through city streets that totally upends the usual positivist chronology. The drivers of these cars are out of place, as they are simple sailors who ought to be on water. Their cars are confusingly reduced to canoes and their modern moment in the city is a sad state of affairs, a diminishment with respect to their imagined former glory, an existence worthy of "mourning" (Rivas Panedas 123).

Both Dada and Ultra lost much of their steam around 1922. The failed Congrès de Paris and the conflicting artistic visions revealed by the animosity

¹⁶ Cansinos published this and other poems under the pseudonym "Juan Las."

between Tzara and Breton marked a turning point in the history of Dada. A calmer aesthetic began to prevail across Europe as the *retour* (or *rappel*) à l'ordre or the "return (call) to order" exercised a notable influence over artists and poets throughout the 1920s. Despite Tzara's earlier condemnation of traditional rhythm in poetry, for example, many of the poems in his 1929 book, *De nos oiseaux*, offer playful rhyming quatrains. In Spain, some of the poets of Ultra took up traditional forms like the sonnet, the *romance*, or the *décima*. During this period, Torre, who began his correspondence with Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia in the summer and fall of 1919, continued to exchange letters and postcards with both, especially Tzara.

Without strident proclamations or snide remarks, both Tzara and Torre slid into this less aggressive artistic period. Torre, sensing Ultra's fading energy and frustrated at the lack of opportunities for publishing his critical work, began suggesting projects for a kind of avant-garde bureaucracy, including a committee for unifying international avant-garde youth at Breton's 1922 Congrès de Paris (Silverman 144-45). He published his *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* in 1925, making him one of the most respected contemporary critical voices in Spain, a standing which would serve him as the co-director of *La gaceta literaria* starting in 1927. In 1925 Torre also exchanged letters about prices in Madrid with Tzara, who was thinking of visiting the Spanish capital but was concerned about the expense (Breuil 224-25). Tzara made the trip later in the year to give a conference at the Residencia de Estudiantes, a speaking engagement arranged, it seems, by Torre (Breuil 224-27). This historical fact is significant of both Torre's and Tzara's view of their position as artists changing rapidly over the course of the 1920s. The Residencia de Estudiantes was the "Oxford of Madrid" (Bonet, *Diccionario* 515), an institution associated with a Spanish liberal pedagogical tradition promulgated by the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. The Residencia was the temple and archive of Spanish "culture"; it was a university residence for young gentlemen and it was dedicated to their preparation as artistic, political, and economic leaders in their society. That Tzara should speak there, and Louis Aragon as well (Bonet, *Diccionario* 516), evidences an important rapprochement between "culture" and the avant-gardists who had labored to break up the foundations of art.

Spain experienced a great deal of political turmoil in a short period in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite important economic gains ushered in by World War I, divisions and injustices laid bare in watershed events like the strike of 1917 continued to simmer beneath the surface of Spanish politics. Economic disparities, violent disagreements among the various labor unions, the 1921 military disaster in Annual, Morocco, and persistent regionalism and nationalism all contributed to a general sense of tension and frustration in the years after the war (Domínguez Ortiz 351-59). The revolving party system of the *turno* was scrapped in 1923 when Miguel Primo de Rivera, with the support of king Alfonso XIII, led a coup against a parliamentary government in "paralysis" (Domínguez Ortiz 359). Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, ending in 1930, was followed by an ambitious Republic,

eager to implement vast social reforms. The Republic was however beset by problems it inherited as well as new divisions unearthed and exacerbated by its progressive restructuring of society. The Civil War set into motion by the uprising of Francisco Franco and other military leaders would last from 1936 to 1939 and ultimately devastate the country. In the face of the destruction, many ultraists who had been largely quiet since the early 1920s returned to writing and, interestingly, to political action.

Lucía Sánchez Saornil and José Rivas Panedas, ultraist poets whose work has been considered in this study, were prominent anti-fascist activists. Sánchez Saornil broke with the CNT, an anarcho-syndicalist workers' group, to form *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) in 1936, just before the outbreak of war. She and her cofounders felt that, despite forceful language in defense of gender equality, the administration of the CNT was little interested in women's concerns and reproduced the patriarchal structures against which the anarcho-syndicalists were supposedly fighting. Sánchez Saornil's 1937 collection of war poems, *Romancero de Mujeres Libres*, is a fascinating document of the moment. She adopts an arch-traditional poetic form, the narrative and heroic *romance*, along with canonical tropes of Spanish heroism. The poems in this book decry the barbarity of the Nationalists and extoll the virtues of Sánchez Saornil's own progressive politics in an uneasy alliance with the more conservative Republican cause.

During the Civil War Rivas Panedas became the secretary of the *Alianza de Escritores Antifascistas* (Alliance of Antifascist Writers) in Madrid. In this capacity, he is likely to have had direct contact with Tristan Tzara, who worked as the director of the *Comité de soutien aux intellectuels espagnols* (Committee in Support of Spanish Intellectuals) from Paris and corresponded with Rivas's group (Hentea, *TaTa Dada* 246). Rivas's involvement in the Civil War went beyond intellectual activism; he was captured by the Nationalists and tortured in the infamous Yserías prison. He died exiled in Mexico a few years after the war, weakened by the treatment he received at the hands of his jailers. Tzara took up the position of secretary for the Committee for the Defense of Spanish Culture in the lead-up to the International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture, held in Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona in 1937. He travelled to Spain for this manifestation of international support for the protection of Spanish culture, as did Louis Aragon, another participant in the Congress (Bonet, *Diccionario* 57-58, 602; Hentea, *TaTa Dada* 247-48). In a poignant moment during his wartime trip to Spain, Tzara found a ragged copy of one of his own books in the wreckage of a Madrid library destroyed by Nationalist bombings (Hentea, *TaTa Dada* 247).

That former dadaists and ultraists would unite in "Committees" and "Congresses" to fight for "Culture" and lament the destruction of libraries during the Spanish Civil War is proof positive of a shift in their attitudes. The ironic agitation and ludic aggregation of the teens and early twenties became in the Spanish Civil War a much graver spirit of collaboration in defense of a shared cultural inheritance. If this change is "full of contradictions and hesitations"

(Hentea, *TaTa Dada* 241), the idea that poets had an obligation to intervene in public life was clear for Tzara and for many ultraists, even if the role of poetry itself as a tool of engagement was not (Hentea, *TaTa Dada* 242-3). The very real threat Fascism posed for “culture,” in all its manifold forms, was a bracing wake-up call to all the artists who had been as flippant with Europe’s artistic past as they had been, during World War I, with its contemporary socio-political situation. War, in the case of the Spanish conflagration, constituted a call to protect culture and declare its value to the avant-garde’s cosmopolitan ethos of artistic innovation.

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