

From German Romanticism to Surrealism: The Modern Esoteric Tradition in Chile's *Mandrágora* Melanie Nicholson

Introduction: "black acts, enthusiasm, purity, dreams, madness"

Soon after the appearance in France of journals such as *La révolution surréaliste* in the 1920s, little magazines directly or indirectly aligned with surrealism began to appear in Latin America. These publications served as an important platform for avant-garde manifestoes, experimental poetry, and poetic prose, as well as for the dissemination of works by other Latin American and European writers. In Chile in the late 1930s, a group of young poets — Braulio Arenas (1913-1988), Teófilo Cid (1914-1964), and Enrique Gómez-Correa (1915-1995) — banded together under the name "Mandrágora." As students in the provincial city of Talca, they had become passionate readers and translators of German romantic literature; after relocating to Santiago — where they were joined by Jorge Cáceres (1923-1949) — these young poets integrated their interest in romanticism into the fundamental precepts of early surrealism. The primary objective of the group was to protest — using both the written and the spoken word — the reigning attitudes toward literature in Chile, in particular the turn toward the so-called humanization of art and the aesthetics of social realism. Finding themselves "en una posición de absoluta hostilidad frente al mundo nacional que les rodeaba" 'in a position of absolute hostility toward the national world that surrounded them,' the group sought ways to disrupt the status quo (Meyer-Minnemann 60).¹ The target at which most of their anathema was directed was the Alianza de Intelectuales de Chile and its most prominent representative, Pablo Neruda, whose ties to the cultural establishment compromised in their view his ethical and aesthetic independence as a poet.

As was the case in many Latin American capitals in the decade of the 1930s, Santiago de Chile found itself in the midst of structural, political, social, and economic change. The primarily agricultural economy was rapidly

¹ Translations are provided by the author unless otherwise noted.

industrializing, bringing to the urban centers increased opportunity and prosperity for some, but overcrowding, overwork, and poverty for many. Travel to and from Europe for the educated class became more frequent, allowing for an influx of contemporary books, journals, and newspapers.² A mass migration to the capital from the countryside and provincial cities turned Santiago into a mecca for creative energies: cafés stayed open late into the night, public and private libraries opened, universities expanded, and cultural events proliferated. It is in these years, as the cultural historian Luis Gueneau de Mussy observes, that Santiago “dejó — casi definitivamente — su carga de ser una ciudad decimonónica y se transformó en un polo de atracción de intelectuales y artistas ávidos de bohemia” ‘threw off almost completely the burden of its nineteenth-century character and transformed itself into a magnetic pole for intellectuals and artists eager for the bohemian life’ (*Mandrágora* 40). Ironically though, as I will argue in the following pages, the Mandrágora group formulated its avant-garde poetics in terms that recalled certain strains of nineteenth-century romanticism and the older esoteric ideas it had incorporated.

Mandrágora saw the light in seven issues over the brief period from 1938 to 1943. Marta Contreras, identifying the journal’s main thrust as “un discurso de saber” ‘a discourse of knowledge’ (33) divides its eclectic assortment of texts into two primary types: the polemical-aggressive and the programmatic-prophetic (32); it is the second type, manifested in rather extensive manifestoes whose language was “prophetic” — i.e., mysterious, enigmatic, or esoteric — that is the concern of the present essay. On the opening page of the journal’s first issue, in fact, Arenas speaks of “la llama arrebatadora del dictado profético, es decir, de la poesía” ‘the dazzling flame of the prophetic dictate, that is, of poetry’ (124).³ Taken collectively, *Mandrágora*’s texts touch on themes including “la poesía negra, el automatismo, los tópicos ocultos, lo prohibido, los sueños, el inconsciente, el azar, la libertad, el sexo, la violencia física y moral, el amor, la locura, la intelectualidad y los intelectuales, las religiones exóticas; en pocas palabras, todos aquellos temas poco conocidos y que en general no habían sido mayormente incorporados al

² Luis G. de Mussy underscores the significance of the intercontinental travel between the Americas and Europe that began to occur with frequency in the early twentieth century: “Dicho contacto fue de radical importancia para la formación de lo que fue el conjunto de jóvenes intelectuales que en años posteriores —treintas— criticaron y transformaron la realidad chilena” ‘Such contact was of radical importance for the formation of that group of young intellectuals who in later years — in the 1930s — would critique and transform Chilean reality’ (Mussy, *Mandrágora* 48). I am grateful to Mussy for his extensive research into the Mandrágora group and its historical context, as well as for his careful reading of and generous feedback on the present essay.

³ The majority of *Mandrágora*’s seven issues were not paginated. In this essay, passages quoted from the journal correspond to page numbers as they appear in facsimile reproduction in Luis G. de Mussy’s *Mandrágora: La raíz de la protesta o el refugio inconcluso*.

conocimiento del ser humano de la época ni en Chile ni en el mundo” ‘black poetry, automatism, occult topics, the forbidden, dreams, the unconscious, chance, liberty, sex, physical and moral violence, love, madness, intellectuality and intellectuals, exotic religions; in short, all those little-known themes that had in general not been incorporated into the knowledge base of the era, neither in Chile nor in the wider world’ (Mussy, *Mandrágora* 76).

Although most critics agree that *Mandrágora* exercised a negligible influence on Chilean literature beyond the years of its immediate circulation, the long-running critical dialogue that has developed around its broader import points to a significant afterlife.⁴ Key questions continue to arise: Did the journal represent a throwback to outdated worldviews, and if so, did that anachronistic perspective merely marginalize it from Chilean cultural and intellectual life? Or did *Mandrágora* participate meaningfully in that development, albeit in idiosyncratic ways? To what degree did the *Mandrágora* group’s strict adherence to the principles of French surrealism and its romantic antecedents limit its ability to navigate a complex political and literary environment? It seems reasonable to assert that as a forum for radical pronouncements about the place of poetry in the world and as a site for the dissemination of international surrealist poetry, *Mandrágora* succeeded, if for a short period, in breathing new life into the Chilean literary body. Sergio Vergara notes that *Mandrágora* was a journal “del que se ha escrito bastante sin haber estudiado para nada los documentos que en verdad dan cuenta de su real alcance y significación” ‘about which a good deal has been written without [the critics] having studied the documents that give a true accounting of its reach and significance’ (21). Taking this relative lack into account,

⁴ Enrique Lihn’s seminal article “El surrealismo en Chile” (1970) reflected a critical attitude toward *Mandrágora*’s standing in Chilean literary history that became relatively common. Lihn laments the group’s close adherence to European surrealism and its hermetic language, which ultimately had “escasa o ninguna resonancia cultural aún en el medio ambiente literario” ‘little or no cultural resonance in our country, not even in the literary environment’ (95). This largely negative assessment also characterizes Jason Wilson’s “Surrealismo en Chile: ¿Colonialismo cultural?” from the same year. In 1990, Klaus Meyer-Minnemann’s explanation of the group’s stance takes a broader view. Contrasting the social-realist orientation of Chile’s literary establishment in the “Generation of 1938” with what he considers *Mandrágora*’s more ambitious principles, he notes that “El acento está puesto en el anhelo de conciliar lo aparentemente antagónico (lo real, lo imaginario, lo onírico, etc.). La postulada anulación de los principios dicotómicos será la forma de abordar la realidad para transformarla no solamente en lo social, sino también en todas las demás manifestaciones de la existencia” ‘The accent is placed on the desire to reconcile apparent oppositions (the real, the imaginary, the oneiric, etc.). The proposed resolution of dichotomous principles will become their way of approaching reality to transform it, not only in the social sphere, but in all other manifestations of existence’ (65-66). Meyer-Minnemann’s critical stance, emphasizing *Mandrágora*’s focus on the resolution of opposites as a way of thinking and living, coincides with the esoteric principles that I explore in this essay.

the present essay proposes to locate *Mandrágora* in its historical context, but more importantly, to offer an extended analysis of the rhetoric of those documents. This analysis will show that by turning toward early surrealism, and from there toward romanticism and its esoteric tenets, the Mandrágora poets found a language of great intensity and a worldview of imaginative dynamism that effectively countered the rigidity they perceived in their cultural environs.

Although they have garnered sustained critical attention in the Chilean and broader Latin American context, the individual trajectories of Arenas, Cáceres, Cid, and Gómez-Correa that extended beyond the activities of the Mandrágora group fall outside the scope of the present essay; my focus here is on the moment of youthful effervescence that characterized the group between 1938 and 1943.⁵ Of particular interest is the paradoxical relationship between certain aspects of traditional esoteric thought embraced by the young poets and the radical changes they sought to bring about in their contemporary cultural context. Recalling the genesis of the group in explicitly surrealist terms, Gómez-Correa explains how “Junto con Braulio Arenas me uní a Teófilo Cid para crear en vida el mito de la Mandrágora; nos unimos para cambiar la vida, para hacerla resplandeciente, para transformar ese territorio desolado en un mundo alucinante donde ya no se sabría más de frontera entre sueño y vigilia, entre vida y muerte” ‘Alongside Braulio Arenas, I joined forces with Teófilo Cid to create the living myth of the Mandrágora: we banded together to change life, to make it radiant, to transform that desolate territory into a beguiling world in which the difference between dream and wakefulness, life and death, would disappear from view’ (*Frágil memoria* 31). The “living myth” of the mandrake, which I consider in further detail below, served to ground the group in older strains of thought even as they sought – echoing the famous words of Rimbaud – to *change life* in their immediate context.

The Esoteric Tradition in Literature⁶

The terms *esoteric* and *occult* are often used interchangeably, and indeed, their meanings frequently overlap. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will refer almost exclusively to *esotericism*, which can be loosely defined as a set of traditional beliefs reflecting a world view that privileges the unseen, the irrational, and the magical. It is important to clarify that the esoteric tradition in literature involves a set of tropes that allude metaphorically or narratively to occult beliefs and

⁵ For further information on the four Mandrágora poets, Luis de Mussy’s *Mandrágora: Raíz de la protesta* includes bio-bibliographical sketches (63-68), as does Nain Nómez’s *La Mandrágora: Surrealismo chileno* (133-80). See also Mussy, *Cáceres: El mediodía eterno y la tira de pruebas* and Parada, *Arquitectura del escritor Enrique Gómez-Correa*.

⁶ For a somewhat more detailed overview of this topic, see Nicholson, “The Esoteric Tradition in Literature” (*Evil, Madness, and the Occult* 1-13).

practices, rather than documenting or advocating directly for such practices. In an essay-manifesto called “Yo hablo desde Mandrágora” ‘I speak from Mandrágora,’ Gómez-Correa declares that “[a]l poeta ‘negro’ le estará permitido la consumación de toda clase de actos — aun los más abominables para las leyes y la moral establecida: desde luego, empezando por la realización de ‘misas negras’ hasta el parricidio y pasando por el incesto — con la única condición de que ellos sirvan de estímulo a su instinto poético” ‘The “black” poet will be permitted to commit every sort of act — even the most abominable according to laws and established morality: from performing “black masses” to parricide, passing through incest — on the sole condition that they serve to promote his poetic instinct’ (144). In spite of this audacious rhetoric, there is no evidence to suggest that the Chilean “black poets” pursued activities more popularly (and often pejoratively) associated with occultism, such as witchcraft, black magic, or alchemy. Theirs was an intellectual esotericism, practiced through reading and writing. That said, I would argue that their inventive use of themes and motifs deriving from esoteric thought is what sets Mandrágora apart from other avant-garde groups of the period, creating a unique profile for the journal.

To speak of the esoteric tradition in literature is to allude to Western currents of thought that date back to pre-Christian Europe, and from there to ancient Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations. Such a vast category will obviously contain variances and contradictions, but a certain set of shared notions emerges with some consistency. The grounding principle of esoteric thought from which the philosophical-cultural traditions of Hermeticism, Gnosticism, the Kabbalah, and other neo-Platonic currents all spring, is that of the original unity of cosmos. The perceived shattering of this primordial unity gives rise to divinatory practices, initiatory rites, acts of magic, alchemical operations, prophetic visions, and so forth. Taken collectively, these practices enact attempts to recreate the primordial unity, to gain access to hidden (i.e., occult) knowledge, or to reestablish contact with the forbidden “other side” of reality. Such practices extend from ancient times into our own: this is why Octavio Paz, in his eulogy for Breton, suggests that “Toda su búsqueda, tanto o más que la exploración de territorios psíquicos desconocidos, fue la reconquista de un reino perdido: la palabra del principio, el hombre anterior a los hombres y las civilizaciones” ‘Perhaps even more than an exploration of unknown psychic territories, his lifelong quest represented the regaining of a lost kingdom: the original Word, man before men and civilizations’ (“André Breton o la búsqueda” 165; “André Breton, or the Search” 47). The esoteric tradition, then, encompasses literary works and other forms of artistic expression that seek to represent those attempts to “regain the lost kingdom” or to cross the threshold into the unknown — and it is in this context that we can locate and interrogate the language of certain *Mandrágora* texts.

The French literary historian Albert Béguin, tracing the modern history of esotericism, highlights the notion of cosmic unity as it informed the European Renaissance:

Pour Kepler, Paracelse, Nicolas de Cusa, ou Agrippa de Nettesheim, aussi bien que pour Giordano Bruno, l'univers est un être vivant, pourvu d'une âme; une identité essentielle relie tous les êtres particuliers, qui ne sont que des émanations du Tout. Une relation d'universelle *sympathie* régit toutes les manifestations de la vie et explique la croyance de tous les penseurs de la Renaissance à la *magie*: aucun geste, aucun acte n'est isolé, ses répercussions efficaces s'étendent à la création entière, et l'opération magique atteint tout naturellement les choses ou les êtres les plus lointains.

For Kepler, Paracelsus, Nicholas of Cusa, or Agrippa of Nettesheim, as for Giordano Bruno, the universe is a living being, endowed with a soul; an essential unity gathers together all the separate beings, which are merely emanations from the All. A relationship of universal *sympathy* governs all manifestations of life, and explains the belief in *magic* held in common by Renaissance thinkers: no gesture, no act, appears in isolation; rather, their effective repercussions are heard throughout all of creation, and the operations of magic naturally reach even the most distant things and beings. (67)

Such beliefs, surviving mostly underground in the occult doctrines and Illuminist creeds of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, reemerged powerfully with the nineteenth-century German romantics. The Renaissance strain of magico-analogical thought would in fact become, according to Paz, "la verdadera religión de la poesía moderna, del romanticismo al surrealismo" 'the true religion of modern poetry, from Romanticism to Surrealism' (*Hijos* 85; *Children* 55). German romantics such as Novalis, Achim von Arnim, and Hölderlin, as well as William Blake and the French *poètes maudits* such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, linked the ancient belief in *logos* as power to the practice of poetry, placing the poet in the role of occult initiate or *magus*. This precise notion is echoed by Gómez-Correa in his characterization of poetic practice as a potentially dangerous limit-situation: "Pero yo prevengo a los que por primera vez se inician en el juego desenfrenado de la palabra, a los iniciados en el misterio de la palabra, a los 'amateurs' en su uso, de los peligros a que ella arrastra. Al menor descuido ella se transforma de pronto en un nudo corredizo alrededor de las gargantas, y entonces todo está perdido" 'But I warn those first attempting the unbridled game of the word, those being initiated into the mystery of the word, those who are amateurs in its use, of the dangers it brings. At the slightest misstep it turns into a noose around the neck, and then all is lost' (157).

"La concepción de la poesía como magia implica una estética activa," suggests Paz; "el arte deja de ser exclusivamente representación y contemplación: también es intervención sobre la realidad" 'The conception of poetry as magic implies an aesthetic of action. Art ceases to be exclusively representation and contemplation; it becomes also an intervention in reality' (*Hijos* 94; *Children* 60). Such an

intervention in reality by way of the poetic word lies at the heart of the Mandrágora project. In fact, Gómez-Correa uses this precise language in a prose piece titled “Intervención de la poesía,” whose final paragraph reads: “Era necesario que una luz terriblemente dura penetrara en la zona de las tinieblas, en la encrucijada; digo, que era necesario la intervención de la mano cargada de Rayos X, para encontrar no solo la raíz de nosotros mismos, sino el don del poema, como el supremo envenenador” ‘It was necessary for a terribly hard light to penetrate in the zone of darkness, at the crossroads; that is, the intervention of a hand bearing x-rays was needed to find not only ourselves, but also the gift of the poem, as the supreme poisoner’ (131). Notable in this passage is the trope of the crossroads as a border between two worlds, potentially a site of supernatural encounter. A contemporary note is introduced with the mention of x-rays, referencing the ability to see into the interior of things. Such *in-sight* allows for a revelation of the self, but also of the poem, which holds the power to “poison” — that is, to contaminate or even destroy. Gómez-Correa may be alluding here to the mandrake plant with its hallucinogenic properties; in a broader symbolic sense, he hints at a dark, potentially dangerous energy that the romantics associated with the poetic word.

More than any other avant-garde movement of the early-to-mid twentieth century, surrealism drew deeply from the well of esoteric thought. The Hermetic premise of macrocosmic and microcosmic correspondences, encapsulated in the dictum “As above, so below,” led the occult adept to seek the *coniunctio oppositorum* or reconciliation of opposites. It is not difficult to locate one of the fundamental principles of surrealism within this paradigm:

Tout porte à croire qu’il existe un certain point de l’esprit d’où la vie et la mort, le réel et l’imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d’être perçus contradictoirement. Or, c’est en vain qu’on chercherait à l’activité surréaliste un autre mobile que l’espoir de détermination de ce point.

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point. (“Second Manifeste” 781, *Manifestoes* 123-24)⁷

⁷ Breton’s 1953 essay “Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives” (“On Surrealism and its Living Works”) makes an even more direct allusion to the *coniunctio oppositorum*: “Il vérifie alors, fragmentairement il est vrai, du moins *par lui-même*, que ‘tout ce qui est en haut est comme ce qui est en bas’ et tout ce qui est en dedans comme ce qui est en dehors” ‘The mind then

The second surrealist manifesto contains not only references to astrology, alchemy, and magic, but also a direct appeal for “the VERITABLE occultation of surrealism” (*Manifestoes* 178). In a later radio interview with André Parinaud, Breton explained this phrase as an “invitation à confronter dans son devenir le message surréaliste avec le message ésotérique” ‘an invitation to compare the evolution of the Surrealist message with the message of esotericism’ (*Entretiens* 152; *Conversations* 118). Numerous surrealists in the period after the Second World War approached esotericism as a serious field of study, primarily by means of written sources. “Interestingly,” observes Tessel M. Bauduin, “many of the scholarly studies the Surrealists read in the 1950s and 60s dealt with the esotericism of the Romantic poets, which may have inspired them to reread their cherished poems of Rimbaud or Baudelaire with fresh eyes” (14). Mentioning Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Comte de Lautréamont, and Alfred Jarry, Breton reiterates his desire to know “si les œuvres qui continuent à nous influencer entretiennent avec cette tradition, même impure, des rapports appréciables ou non” ‘whether the works that continue to influence us maintain appreciable – even if impure – ties with this tradition’ (*Entretiens* 260; *Conversations* 218).

The Mandrake’s Dark Magic

Although for Breton and many European surrealists a deeper interest in esoteric thought would not develop until the post-war period, it is clear that these notions had already been articulated in the earliest iterations of the movement. As they encountered allusions to esoteric or occult thought in the surrealist manifestoes, the Mandrágora group no doubt discovered points of contact with their previous grounding in this tradition. Describing the adolescent passions he had shared with Gómez-Correa, Arenas recalls: “habíamos intercambiado las primeras ideas en cuanto a una organización terrorista: terror, sentido amenazante de la existencia, amor, poesía, libertad, revolución, videncia, automatismo, actos negros, entusiasmo, pureza, sueños, delirio . . .” ‘we had exchanged ideas about a terrorist organization: terror, a threatening sense of existence, love, poetry, liberty, revolution, clairvoyance, automatism, black acts, enthusiasm, purity, dreams, madness . . .’ (*Escritos* 230-31). The references to love, poetry, revolution, and automatism reveal the young Chileans’ familiarity with the fundamental tenets of surrealism. But the phrase *actos negros* (black acts) – along with *videncia* (clairvoyance) and *delirio* ‘madness’ – suggests a distinct orientation within surrealism, one that would evolve over the next decades. The seed of German romanticism had been planted during the Mandrágora group’s early years in Talca by Braulio Arenas’s older brother Alberto, who introduced them to a reading list that would prove formative: Goethe, Achim von Arnim, Nietzsche, Baudelaire,

proves to itself, fragmentarily of course, but at least *by itself*, that ‘everything above is like everything below’ and everything inside is like everything outside’ (*Manifestes* 171; *Manifestoes* 302-03).

Rimbaud, and Blake, among others (Mussy, *Mandrágora* 60). Such affinities were not unusual for the period, as Hernán Parada notes: “Muchos de nuestros poetas chilenos iniciados en el cismático período de entreguerras conocieron en lecturas, y admiraron, a los congéneres patriarcales del llamado Romanticismo Alemán. Y se constituyeron en fieles divulgadores suyos, citándolos en sus ensayos periodísticos, en sus conversaciones o en sus conferencias” “Through their reading, many of our Chilean poets who got their start in the interwar period came to know — and admire — the like-minded fathers of German Romanticism. And they became faithful disseminators, citing them in journalistic essays, in conversations, or in lectures’ (93).

Arenas goes on to explain that once they were joined by Cid and Cáceres, “todo calzaría perfectamente: el manojito de llaves con la puerta secreta, el amor con la mujer, el misterio con la vida, la mandrágora con el mundo material” ‘everything would fit perfectly: the keys with the secret door, love with woman, mystery with life, the mandrake with the material world (*Escritos* 231).’ The symbolic value of the mandrake lies in its visual similarity to humans, along with its narcotic, soporific, and aphrodisiac qualities, all of which caused the root to be traditionally associated with the cult of Aphrodite, with witchcraft, and with magic. By adopting the mandrake as its symbol and central image, the group looked back in time beyond surrealism to Mediterranean myth and folklore, to medieval superstitions and beliefs, and in particular to nineteenth-century Europe. Several stories have circulated about how the name *Mandrágora* was decided upon, but it is Teófilo Cid who ties the name to German romanticism, and in doing so, helps to explain the group’s orientation. According to Cid, the companions had all been “seduced” by a pre-fascist German film called *Alraune*, that is, “Mandrágora en la lengua de Goethe” ‘Mandrágora in the language of Goethe’ (16). He goes on to say that the film — and its name — aligned well with their collective desire: “Nosotros también estábamos dispuestos a emprender una romántica aventura en busca del poder, el poder supremo, el que concede el don de la palabra. . . . Fue la lectura del relato escrito por Achim Von Arnim, uno de los grandes del romanticismo alemán, lo que nos decidió, por último, a adoptar definitivamente la extraña designación” ‘We were likewise willing to embark on a romantic adventure in search of power, the supreme power, that which grants the gift of the word It was the reading of a story written by Achim von Arnim, one of the greats of German romanticism, that convinced us, finally, to definitively adopt the strange designation.’ What is striking in this recollection is the line Cid draws from romantic adventure to a sense of “supreme” power, and from there to “the word.” As we have seen, the belief in language, particularly as non-rational expression — poetry, prophecy, verbal delirium — is one of the principle threads running from ancient esoteric thought through romanticism and into surrealism. For the Mandrágora group, poetry promised power — but only in its irrational, mysteriously evocative functions.

The above-cited tale by Arnim becomes a thematic knot tying together the romantics, the European surrealists, and the adherents of Mandrágora. In “Isabelle of Egypt,” a version of which is included in Pierre Mabille’s 1940 anthology *Mirror of the Marvelous*, the adolescent protagonist must search for and extract a mandrake root, facing mortal danger in the process:

Chez cette jeune fille doit couvrir un courage surhumain.

Il faut au milieu de la nuit emmener un chien noir, aller sous un gibet où un pendu innocent a laissé tomber ses larmes. . . . arrivé là, on doit se boucher les oreilles avec du coton, et promener ses mains par terre jusqu’à ce qu’on trouve la racine; et, malgré les cris de cette racine qui n’est pas un végétal, mais qui est née des pleurs d’un malheureux, on se dépouille la tête, on fait de ses cheveux une corde dont on entoure la racine; on attache le chien noir à l’autre extrémité.

Then such a young girl must at the same time gather a courage hardy enough to venture out in the middle of the night, at which time it is necessary to bring a black dog beneath a gallows from which an innocent victim must have shed his tears Once there she must plug her ears with cotton and grope with her hands through the dirt until she finds the root. Then despite the cries of this root, which is not a plant but is born, rather, from the innocent tears of the hanged man, she must attach a rope made from her own hair and to which the black dog is tied at the other end. (Arnim qtd. in Mabille, *Miroir* 104; *Mirror* 82-83)

Struck almost dead by a lightning bolt as she tears the root from the ground, Bella nevertheless survives to nurture the mandrake until it assumes the form of a human child. This 1856 narrative offered the young Mandrágora poets the tropes that would come to characterize the journal’s “programmatic and prophetic” line of discourse: the night, the initiate, crime and death, terror, magic, and the supernatural.

Public polemics — including, most famously, the violent disruption of a reading by Neruda at the Universidad de Chile — were important to the Mandrágora group.⁸ Their creative energy, nevertheless, was primarily funneled into the journal, whose first issue carried the full title *Mandrágora: Poesía, filosofía, pintura, ciencia, documentos*. Following the model of other avant-garde journals, the editors sought to expand their purview beyond lyric poetry to other forms of contemporary thought and expression. Printed and disseminated on a shoestring

⁸ The entire fourth issue of *Mandrágora* is dedicated to relating this incident, which gained the Mandrágora group a certain notoriety. In July of 1940, days before his departure on a diplomatic mission to Mexico, Neruda was in the midst of a farewell speech at the national university in Santiago when Arenas ran onstage, snatched the speech from Neruda’s hands, and tore it to pieces.

budget, the journal is presented in a double-column newspaper format that, in spite of the promise of painting suggested by the subtitle, contains only the printed word. The first six issues include prose manifestoes, shorter pieces of highly poetic prose, lyric poetry, verbal collages, reviews, and announcements about related publications. Until the fourth issue, when the Second World War no doubt impeded their efforts to acquire work by European writers, the international reach of *Mandrágora* is patent. Alongside their own work and pieces by other Chilean writers — including those with surrealist tendencies such as Gonzalo Rojas and Pablo de Rokha — there are texts by writers as disparate as Friedrich Hölderlin, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and Jonathan Swift. The surrealist orientation of the journal, most evident in the manifestoes or programmatic essays, is reinforced with translated texts by Jarry (a poem titled “The Cry of the Mandrake”), Paul Éluard, and Breton, as well as reviews of Breton’s *L’amour fou* and Éluard’s *Cours naturel*.

In the pages that follow, I examine two essay-manifestoes that I consider to be particularly germane to the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings of the group: “Mandrágora, poesía negra” by Braulio Arenas (no. 1, 1938) and “Notas sobre la poesía negra en Chile” by Enrique Gómez-Correa (no. 3, 1940).⁹ Placing the manifestoes by Arenas and Gómez-Correa in dialogue with the principles of esotericism, as well as with Breton’s stance with regard to esoteric ideas, we can situate the thought of the Mandrágora poets both on the margins of their own culture and in the heart of an ancient but periodically reinvigorated tradition.

Braulio Arenas: “Mandrágora, poesía negra”

“Poesía negra” in the Chilean context alludes to blackness exclusively in the symbolic sense championed by the romantics, in which the “dark” powers of the nocturnal imagination are exalted, and with them the anti-bourgeois values of crime, violence, blasphemy, suicide, and madness.¹⁰ For the Mandrágora poets, black poetry emerges from the depths of human psyche, stands in direct opposition to the light of rational thought, and can act as a powerful means of approaching, understanding, and even changing reality.

Arenas, who signs the programmatic essay that opens the first issue, directs his commentary to those readers who find themselves “en el nudo de las antinomias precisas de realidad y poesía” “in the knot of the exact antinomies of

⁹ *Mandrágora* was edited by poets who exalted the role of poetry in the world, but the lyric poems that appear in the journal read as examples of automatic writing that resist explication, and thus contribute little to our understanding of the group’s positions.

¹⁰ Julio Noriega argues that the rubric of “black poetry” responds to the genre of the “black novel” that was popularized in the 1920s by North American writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. This hypothesis seems highly unlikely, given that no such antecedents are named in the pages of *Mandrágora*, whereas the names of romantic poets and surrealists abound.

reality and poetry.’ Recalling the legendary figure of the mandrake, he explains that his purpose is

la de desenterrar con el propio esfuerzo, con la propia imaginación, esa ave marina, esa planta nupcial que da la muerte al que se apodera de ella, la fascinante hada de los suburbios, la que canta canciones de infancia a la puerta de los prostíbulos y al pie de las horcas, y que sin embargo sabe, con un gesto, apartar esa mediocre realidad que la rodea, para dar la vida, la poesía, y el amor a los que cojan con verdadera desesperación frenética un útil de labranza o un cuaderno para arrancarla o describirla, y es con ustedes que puedo exhibir y hacer girar — riesgo y fascinación aparte — esa planta nupcial, símbolo eterno de la poesía negra, la planta de la MANDRÁGORA.

to unearth by my own effort, with my own imagination, that sea bird, the nuptial plant that brings death to the one who seizes hold of it, the fascinating fairy of the slums, the one who sings children’s songs at the door of brothels and at the foot of gallows, and who nevertheless knows how, with a single gesture, to push aside the mediocre reality that surrounds her, in order to give life, poetry, and love to those who take up a spade or a notebook with true frenetic desperation, in order to tear it out or to describe it, and I turn round in my hands to show you all — risk and fascination aside — that nuptial plant, eternal symbol of black poetry, the plant called the MANDRÁGORA. (124)

Readers will recognize in this passage several elements that appear in “Isabelle of Egypt,” the von Arnim story cited above: the fairy-girl with magical powers, fascination, madness, and the enchanted plant torn from the earth at the foot of a gallows, even at the risk of death. But beyond these romantic literary borrowings, we note certain concepts more precisely associated with surrealism. First and foremost, Arenas addresses himself to readers situated in the antinomic space between reality and poetry — that is, a space of surreality. For these readers, he chooses not to represent the disinterring of the mandrake as the stuff of legend, but rather as an act of the imagination, and more precisely, of *writing*. We might recall here Paz’s observation, in his study of the romantic roots of modern poetry, that “[t]rátense de fórmulas mágicas, letanías, plegarias o mitos, estamos ante objetos verbales análogos a lo que más tarde se llamarían poemas” ‘[w]hether we are dealing with magic spells, litanies, myths, or prayers, the poetic imagination is there from the start’ (*Hijos* 80; *Children* 51). In clear alignment with the surrealists’ rejection of bourgeois existence, Arenas claims that the imagination is necessary to separate oneself from “mediocre reality” — which Sergio Vergara interprets as “mentirosa, falsa, decadente, en desintegración: en síntesis, como una farsa” (210) ‘lying, false, decadent, in disintegration: in sum, a farce.’ Taking all these allusions into account, Arenas proclaims the mandrake to be the “símbolo eterno de la poesía negra” ‘eternal symbol of black poetry’ (210).

For the romantics and their twentieth-century successors, the free exercise of the imagination becomes the primary mode of accessing — even for a single ecstatic moment — the state of original cosmic unity. Upholding the sovereignty of the imagination, the Mandrágora poets found it necessary to critique what they saw in their society as “la adulteración y la masacre de la imaginación” ‘the adulteration and the massacre of the imagination’ (125). The prophetic mode of discourse is employed once again as Arenas ends his lyrical enumeration of the roles of the imagination — which is represented in the classical guise of a female muse — with the poet, the one capable of capturing her “dictates” with precise images.

If the cosmos is viewed as a reality separated from itself, lost to ordinary perception, then it follows that only certain individuals have the ability to cross the threshold to the mythic “other side.” In the esoteric tradition, those individuals fall outside the social categories framed by the rational (typically male) adult: they include occult initiates, children, the insane, criminals, in some cases women, and of course, poets. They are beings with access to a unique *vision*, the capacity for clairvoyance, although that vision may be psychically unsustainable. From the idea of extra-sensorial sight springs the romantic “myth of the artist as an inspired, mad genius, preyed upon by unseen conflicts” (Choucha 8). This is why Balakian observes that across the arc of the nineteenth century, the romantic poet “saw himself more and more as a visionary and felt himself increasingly at home among the occult forces of the universe” (27). For the surrealists, correspondingly, the hope of seeing the world through different eyes is omnipresent: Éluard speaks of very function of poem with regard to the reader is *donner à voir* — to give sight. Picking up this thread, Arenas describes the task of the poet in directly visionary terms: “Pero el poeta trabaja ahí sitiado por el hielo y el fuego — con sus instintos de especie, con sus visiones sobrenaturales y afrodisíacas. Tantos siglos de trabajo congelado le dieron la orientación y la videncia” ‘But there the poet works, besieged by ice and fire — with his primordial instincts, with his supernatural and aphrodisiac visions. So many centuries of frozen work have given him direction and clairvoyance’ (126).

In addition to an enhanced or supernatural sense of sight, the occult initiate has access to a particular language, and in voicing that language becomes a prophet or *vates*. Employing unusual images to establish a surreal antinomy, Arenas speaks of the desire for the unknown: “He aquí una estrella boreal y un demonio tóxico que tratan de fusionarse, de mirar al pasado y al porvenir con la boca llena de profecías. Es la fábula constante de Tirésias. La poesía es nictálope, ya se recuerda” ‘Behold a north star and a toxic demon that try to merge into one, to look toward the past and the future with a mouth full of prophecies. It’s the eternal story of Tiresias. Poetry, let us remember, has night vision’ (125). The term *nictálope*, meaning “able to see at night,” connects prophetic language to vision and simultaneously to the romantic trope of nocturnal inspiration. The allusion to Tiresias, who was both blind and a soothsayer, suggests that the kind of vision

sought by the Mandrágora poets was strictly an inner one — that of the imagination, possible only within the darkness shrouding the external world.

Within the esoteric traditions it is the exceptional figure who possesses the powers of clairvoyance and prophetic speech: these are the sibyls, the sorcerers and sorceresses, the mystics, the shamans, the prophets, and madmen who populate the worlds of myth, legend, and spiritual rituals. In the nineteenth century, the notion of access to otherworldly knowledge was broadened to include ordinary humans, although these were often associated with madness or with the “artificial paradise” of hallucinogenic substances. The surrealists, following the dictum of Lautréamont that “[l]a poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un” ‘[p]oetry must be made by all. Not by one’ (*Chants* 391; *Maldoror* 244) revolutionized this tradition by acknowledging that *everyone* has the means to access the unconscious and therefore to the deepest wells of poetic thought, although trance states and actual insanity occupied privileged positions in this schema. In this twentieth-century formulation, crossing the threshold into non-rational states depended not on supernatural forces but simply on the full affirmation of subjective experience. Finally, the work of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century psychoanalysts, most notably Sigmund Freud, gave the surrealists a scientific basis on which to construct their ideas surrounding “dreamwork” and the practices of automatism. This is why Breton insists that “l’idée de surréalisme tend simplement à la récupération totale de notre force psychique par un moyen qui n’est autre que la descente vertigineuse en nous, l’illumination systématique des lieux caches et l’obscurcissement progressif des autres lieux, la promenade perpétuelle en pleine zone interdite . . .” ‘the idea of Surrealism aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic forces by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory . . .’ (“Second Manifeste” 791; *Manifestoes* 136-37).

For Arenas, Gómez-Corraea, Cid, and Cáceres, these were compelling ideas, perhaps because they suggested ties to *Mandrágora*’s grounding in older esoteric traditions. Breton’s very diction here — ‘dizzying descent,’ ‘hidden places,’ ‘forbidden territory’ — echoes the idea of the occult as that which is hidden, kept secret, potentially dangerous. This is why in his manifesto, Arenas demands “[q]ue el impulso de la sumersión en el hondo sueño sea la voz de partida, la voz de alarma” ‘That the impulse toward submersion in the deep dream be the voice of departure, the voice of alarm’ (125). The practice of automatic writing is more directly evoked in another passage from “Mandrágora, poesía negra”: “Que vuestra mano de medianoche tome convulsamente el lápiz veloz y no haya alivio para vuestros sentidos durante esa faena manual de la poesía” (126) ‘May your hand at midnight convulsively grasp the swift pencil, may there be no relief for your senses for as long as that manual task of writing lasts.’ Arenas reaffirms his commitment to automatism in a later passage, rich in the rhetoric of surrealism:

Un semejante grado de voluntad sin voluntad, una resolución franca y feroz, que arrastra todas las leyes convencionales de los hombres y anula estas de la naturaleza, lleva a la poesía negra a su más alto límite, donde lo moral y lo inmoral, el crimen y la vida honesta, son palabras sin ideas, juego eterno, dualismo tenebroso y automatismo sin control.

A similar degree of willing without willing, a frank and ferocious sense of resolution that sweeps along with it all the conventional laws of men, annulling those of nature, carrying black poetry to the highest limit where morality and immorality, crime and the honest life, are words without ideas, an eternal game, dark dualism, and automatism without control. (126)

It is difficult to imagine a clearer testimony to the poet's power to access the unconscious — or, in esoteric terms, the hidden or magical sources of knowledge — and in doing so, to resolve the contradictions inherent in conscious life.

Enrique Gómez-Correa: “Notas sobre la poesía negra en Chile”

As we have seen, Arenas's “Mandrágora, poesía negra” presents its ideas largely through poetic prose that suggests a degree of automatic writing; Gómez-Correa's manifesto-essay “Notas sobre la poesía negra en Chile,” which opens the third issue of the journal, adopts a rhetoric more closely aligned with rational argument. While reiterating and expanding upon the esoteric-romantic tropes introduced by Arenas, Gómez-Correa addresses himself more directly to the social and political problems facing Chile's youth at the start of the decade of the 1940s. What he proposes is not a social program or a certain political affiliation, but rather, the very practice of poetry:

Hoy como nunca, el juego de las afirmaciones y negaciones desempeña un papel preponderante y fundamental, dentro de la trayectoria del pensamiento. Y es particularmente la poesía donde esta lucha adquiere tonalidades de la más alta violencia, porque siendo ella la expresión total y repentina de la realidad, pone en movimiento todas las fuerzas — aun las más ocultas y deleznable — que determinan en su conjunto los actos del hombre.

Today more than ever, the game of affirmations and negations plays a powerful and fundamental role within the trajectory of thought. And it is poetry in particular where this struggle acquires its most violent tones, because being the total and sudden expression of reality, it sets in motion all the forces — even the most hidden and weakest ones — that together determine the acts of man. (153)

Arguing that young writers in Latin America do not have a strong autochthonous tradition of writing upon which to draw, Gómez-Correa explains

that the *mandragóricos* found themselves “totalmente desvinculados de la poesía de nuestro país, y en general, de la poesía de las naciones americanas, para encontrar, al contrario, un nexo de continuidad con otras literaturas, especialmente europeas” ‘totally detached from the poetry of our country, and in general, from the poetry of the Americas, finding on the contrary a nexus of continuity with other, especially European, literatures’ (154). In contrast to the reigning avant-garde spirit of the age, the Mandrágora group undertook what Gómez-Correa calls a total review of universal poetic values across the ages, an act that would respond to “la necesidad palpitante que siente todo ser de constatar hasta qué punto el pasado vive en nosotros, hasta qué punto ciertos valores nos transmiten sus ideas y actitudes, haciéndose sangre en nosotros” ‘the fervent necessity felt by every being to affirm to what degree the past lives in us, to what degree certain values transmit their ideas and attitudes to us, becoming our very blood.’

Given this openness to the values of the past, it is no surprise that the poetic methods offered by Gómez-Correa draw explicitly on romantic tropes. Eschewing reason or “cordura” ‘wisdom’ in favor of various modes of the irrational, he insists that:

Por el contrario, es esta zona circundada por espantosos peligros, en ella, donde los problemas alucinatorios, el amor, la locura, el sueño, el mundo sobrenatural, giran en un torbellino horrendo, y que en último término van a constituir la médula misma de la vida. No dejo yo de recordar las páginas inolvidables de “Aurélia” de Gérard de Nerval, cuyo parentesco en la línea de lo maravilloso y alucinatorio va estrechamente enlazada a “Ligeia” de Poe y a dos cuentos de Achim von Arnim. . . .

On the contrary, it is in this zone surrounded by terrifying dangers where dazzling problems, love, madness, dreams, and the supernatural world spin in a dreadful whirlwind, all of which will ultimately constitute the very marrow of life. I cannot help but recall the unforgettable pages of “Aurélia” by Gérard de Nerval, whose kinship in the line of the marvelous and the hallucinatory is closely intertwined with Poe’s “Ligeia” and with two stories by Achim von Arnim. (155)

After alluding to the above-cited passage from von Arnim’s “Isabelle of Egypt” about the mandrake root plucked from its place beneath the gallows, Gómez-Correa enters into a long dissertation on poetry’s darkest powers. It is by this means, interestingly, that he returns to an oblique but impassioned commentary on present-day life in Chile. Citing a phrase made famous by Rimbaud — “But the problem is to make the soul into a monster” — he exalts those elements considered anathema to a well-ordered and moral society: “Puesto que la crueldad, el vicio, el crimen, el mal congénito, la violencia, sirven para poner en evidencia la vida, es señal que ellos no son sus contrarios. Por la inversa, la práctica de estos actos implica una intensificación de vitalidad. . . .” ‘Given that cruelty, vice, crime,

inborn evil, [and] violence all serve to reveal life itself, this proves that they are not its opposites. To the contrary, the practice of these acts implies an intensification of vitality. . . .’

Gómez-Correa’s essay continues with a paragraph structured around the anaphoric phrase “Yo amo” ‘I love’ in which he cites his love not only for women — including the surrealists’ young heroine Violette Nozière — but also for criminals and wise old men who invent methods of madness. “En fin,” he concludes, “amo a la gente que odia a los burgueses, a los policías, y a los cristianos. Yo afirmo la libertad absoluta de todos los instintos del género humano” ‘In the end, I love those who hate the bourgeoisie, the police, and Christians. I affirm the absolute liberty of every instinct of the human species.’ Echoing the rhetoric of the surrealist manifestoes, Gómez-Correa exalts violence, crime, and other forms of rebellion against the moral order in the name of total human liberty.

Toward the end of “Notas sobre la poesía negra en Chile,” Gómez-Correa draws his rhetoric down from romantic heights to the realities of a world now fully embroiled in the Second World War. The contemporary *poeta negro* sees no solution for individual conflicts short of total social revolution:

Por lo tanto, él estará al lado de todo acto que implique el desmoronamiento de los principios básicos de la sociedad presente hasta llegar al completo derrumbe de todo el sistema institucional vigente. Por eso estamos contra la burguesía, contra el fascismo — mientras este sirva de protección a las instituciones eternizadas por el régimen capitalista — contra la familia, contra las leyes, contra la religión, contra la moral y contra los revolucionarios de pacotilla.

He will therefore be in favor of any act that implies the breakdown of the basic principles of the present society, until we arrive at the total collapse of the existing institutional system. This is why we are against the bourgeoisie, against fascism — to the extent that it serves to protect those institutions eternalized by the capitalist regime — against family, against laws, against religion, against morality and against petty revolutionaries. (157)

In their moment of youthful enthusiasm, the adherents of Mandrágora — much as the European dadaists and surrealists that preceded them — were determined to change the whole of a social and economic order that had left the West in vast *disorder* as the mid-point of the twentieth century drew near. The Chilean poet and critic Orlando Jimeno-Grendi describes in these terms the reality that faced the group:

Próximo ascenso al gobierno del Frente Popular en Chile, la Guerra Civil española conmueve al mundo, fascismo y nazismo hacen vacilar los valores narcisísticamente establecidos por las burguesías occidentales

bajo formas de la democracia tradicional. Parece cumplirse la profética pesadilla de Spengler: Occidente asiste al crepúsculo de su cultura. Los jóvenes mandrágora que en ese entorno leen a Ortega y Gasset y forjan su pensamiento al calor de los "ismos" de entre las dos guerras serán brutalmente enfrentados por estas intensas contradicciones. . . . A juicio de los mandrágoras es natural que se sientan convulsionados, por lo que Jaspers ha denominado situaciones-límite, y que busquen una expresión convulsiva.

Imminent ascent to the government of the Popular Front in Chile; the Spanish Civil War shakes the world; fascism and Nazism undermine the values narcissistically established by the Western bourgeoisie in the forms of traditional democracy. Spengler's prophetic nightmare appears to be fulfilling itself: the West is witnessing the twilight of its culture. The young writers of Mandrágora, who in that climate are reading Ortega y Gasset and forging their thought in the heat of the "isms" of the inter-war period, will be brutally confronted by those intense contradictions. . . . It was natural, in the judgment of the Mandrágora group, to feel convulsed by what Jaspers has called limit-situations, and to seek a convulsive form of expression. (110-11)

As the programmatic texts of *Mandrágora* show, that form of expression was rooted in the past — in the form of a symbolic root, if we consider the mandrake and its centuries-old esoteric meanings — but was also acutely aware of, and determined to change, the distressed present.

Beyond *Mandrágora*

In 1942, not long before the seventh and final issue of *Mandrágora* saw the light, Arenas began a correspondence with Breton and Benjamin Péret that would prove crucial to what we might call the afterlife of the journal. In his "Letter from Chile," published in *VVV* in March of 1943, Arenas declares:

A la hora presente, superados todos los propósitos que dieron vida al grupo Mandrágora, nosotros superamos también nuestra posición nacional y adherimos con entusiasmo a la posición internacional del surrealismo. Al efecto, terminada la trayectoria gloriosa de la Mandrágora, comienza para nosotros otra no menos importante: la trayectoria surrealista.

At the present time, having reached all the goals that gave birth to the Mandrágora group, we move beyond our national position and affiliate ourselves enthusiastically with the international position of surrealism. To this end, with the glorious trajectory of *Mandrágora* having reached its

conclusion, another no less important trajectory begins: that of surrealism. (125)

The celebratory tone of this letter belies the fact that the group of young poets that had formed under the rubric of *poesía negra* had by this point largely disbanded. Given that the sole editor of the seventh issue was Gómez-Correa, critics such as Sergio Vergara see evidence of a “solipsismo” ‘solipicism’ into which the journal’s orientation had descended, proving the overall “inadecuación” ‘unsuitability’ of surrealism to the Chilean context (223). Referring to the seventh issue in particular, a more recent essay by Eduardo Becerra speculates in a similar vein that “los textos de Gómez Correa buscan mantenerse en actitudes de pureza, integridad y ortodoxia tales que acaban convertidos en poses grandilocuentes tan excesivas como vacías. Ello refleja cierto tono extremo que estuvo presente desde el comienzo de la revista que ayuda a explicar las limitaciones de su efecto” ‘the texts of Gómez-Correa attempt to maintain attitudes of such purity, integrity and orthodoxy that they become grandiloquent poses, as excessive as they are empty. This reflects a certain extreme tone that was present from the journal’s beginnings and that helps to explain its limited effects’ (260). It is perhaps ironic that even as Breton was beginning to explore esoteric topics with greater interest, this particular orientation was largely discarded by the Mandrágora group. While Gómez-Correa was penning his final extensive essay in the spirit of a poetic *apología*, Arenas turned his sights toward another publication, *Leitmotiv: Boletín de hechos & ideas* (Leitmotif: Bulletin of Facts and Ideas), which was published in three issues in 1942 (no. 1) and 1943 (nos. 2-3). Notably, the majority of *Leitmotiv*’s Chilean contributors are precisely the members of the Mandrágora group. Though still clearly dedicated to surrealist principles, *Leitmotiv* broadens its scope and drops almost entirely the esoteric-romantic rhetoric of *poesía negra*. Although the present essay does not allow for an extensive analysis, the following points about *Leitmotiv* will serve as a coda to our consideration of the language of *Mandrágora*.

According to the unsigned “Justificación” ‘Justification’ that opens the first issue, the theme that unites the texts published therein is protest — in particular, the protest “del hombre contra el mundo que lo ha oprimido” ‘of man against the world that has oppressed him’ (216).¹¹ Alongside this Marxist-inspired rhetoric, the author of this essay — presumably Arenas — echoes both the surrealist manifestos and the programmatic texts of *Mandrágora* when he declares that “sólo el pensamiento libertador . . . [puede] servir de fundamento a cualquier empresa destinada a interpretar los grandes destinos del presente” ‘only liberating thought . . . can serve as a foundation for any endeavor meant to interpret the great destinies of the present.’ The orientation toward the present seems a deliberate choice on his part, an open acknowledgement of the historical realities of the early

¹¹ Like *Mandrágora*, *Leitmotiv* is not paginated; quoted passages here refer to the facsimile reproductions in Mussy, *Mandrágora: Raíz de la protesta*.

1940s and the group's consequent need to act in ways that go beyond "la obscura finalidad de imprimir una revista más" 'the obscure goal of printing yet another journal.' In her article on *Leitmotiv*, Susan Foote argues that rather than closing in on itself, the Mandrágora group sought "casi desesperadamente un cambio táctico en respuesta a la nueva coyuntura histórica de la Segunda Guerra Mundial" 'almost desperately a tactical change in response to the new historical juncture represented by the Second World War' (44). Becerra, similarly, notes that "*Leitmotiv* supone un momento del surrealismo chileno que matiza algunos aspectos de su imagen negativa que la crítica vino a consagrar" "*Leitmotiv* reflects a moment in Chilean surrealism that qualifies certain aspects of the negative image that had become consecrated by critics' (260). The first issue of *Leitmotiv* includes a poem by Benjamin Péret and a translation into Spanish of Breton's *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not*, a text that had been published in a bilingual French-English version in *VVV* earlier in 1942. The second issue presents poems by a wide array of Chilean and international writers, including the Martinican surrealist Aimé Césaire. The presentation of the journal becomes more sophisticated than the rudimentary appearance of *Mandrágora* and the visual arts become prominent: in the combined second and third issues we see drawings, paintings, and collages by Roberto Matta, Jorge Cáceres, and Man Ray. In its brief life, then, *Leitmotiv* represented an innovative and artistically diversified alternative to the largely esoteric-romantic literary orientation of *Mandrágora*. What the two publications share, however, is an unbending commitment to undermining the current moral and political order — first of Chile, then of the Western world. Though the internal tensions of the group were made manifest in *Mandrágora's* final issue, *Leitmotiv* stands as testament to a certain solidarity of purpose that persisted despite personal or aesthetic differences.

The ongoing literary relationships of the Mandrágora group are visible, moreover, in publications such as *El AGC de la Mandrágora* (1957), an anthology of surrealist poetry by Arenas, Gómez-Correa, and Cáceres.¹² In 1974 Arenas published *Actas surrealistas*, a four-hundred-page anthology of English and French surrealist works translated into Spanish, ranging from stories by Leonora Carrington to Louis Aragon's *Le paysan de Paris* to texts by Salvador Dalí, Antonin Artaud, and Michel Leiris. Arenas's prologue to this collection suggests surrealist antecedents as varied as the mystic poet Teresa of Ávila, Franz Kafka, Horace Walpole, and Luis de Góngora. In a brief nod to the orientation of *Mandrágora*, Arenas places the German romantics Novalis and von Arnim at the head of this "línea genealógica de la imaginación" 'genealogical line of the imagination' (9).

The correspondence with Breton and Péret initiated by Arenas in 1942 led to further associations: Cáceres traveled to Paris in 1948, where he collaborated with Breton and the post-war surrealists; the following year Gómez-Correa also found

¹² Teófilo Cid was the first of the group to abandon surrealist principles; by the 1950s, he had become totally estranged from the Mandrágora group (Mussy, *Mandrágora* 60).

himself in Paris, working with René Magritte and Jacques Hérold. Gonzalo Rojas, who published poems with *Mandrágora* in his youth and went on to become one of Chile's most important poetic voices, commended the group for "esa apertura hacia un mundo extraaldeano, mucho más allá de toda esa trampa que era para nosotros el exceso de las criolleras de la época" 'that opening toward a world beyond the village, far beyond what we saw as the trap represented by the homegrown style of the period' (Piña 104). Within the Latin American context, the Mandrágora group was crucial in establishing ties with Aldo Pellegrini and Enrique Molina in Argentina, César Moro in Peru, and Octavio Paz in Mexico, all of whom worked to increase the visibility of surrealism in their countries and beyond.

I give the final word to the contemporary Chilean critic Naín Nómez, who speaks of *Mandrágora* by way of Paz's well-known claim that Latin American poetry is built on the tension between *tradición* and *ruptura*: "Como buena hija de la tradición y la ruptura, 'La Mandrágora' permanece viva y vital, para una genealogía poética que se alimenta de su pasado y se proyecta permanentemente desde el futuro hacia sus orígenes" 'Like the good daughter of tradition and rupture, "La Mandrágora" remains alive and vital for a poetic genealogy that takes sustenance from its past and projects itself permanently from the future toward its origins' (43). Such is the paradox of Mandrágora's embrace of ancient esoteric traditions, nineteenth-century romanticism, and early surrealism, all in the service of a very contemporary protest that raised the imagination and the poetic word to the status of cultural imperative.

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