

Retracing the Text: Francisco Brines'
Poemas Excluidos

Judith Nantell
University of Arizona

Francisco Brines' *Poemas excluidos* (Excluded Poems) of 1985 is a unique work because it demonstrates, as does no other Brinesean collection, the play of texts and play of meaning that constitute the complex object the literary critic seeks to describe.¹ In *Poemas excluidos*, the poem is a symbiont not only of other poems of the collection but also of earlier and later poems of Brines' other collections. From this symbiosis arises, as will be shown in this study, the interplay of texts and the indeterminacy of meaning of *Poemas excluidos*.

The texts of *Poemas excluidos* move within what Geoffrey Hartman calls an "intertextual sphere." In his description of deconstructive criticism, Hartman observes:

Each text is shown to imbed other texts by a most cunning assimilation whose form is the subject both of psychoanalytic and of purely rhetorical criticism. Everything we thought of as spirit, or meaning separable from the letter of the text, remains within an 'intertextual' sphere; it is commentary that reminds us of this curious and forgettable fact.²

As critics invade this intertextual sphere, they discover what J. Hillis Miller describes as "a long chain of parasitical presences—echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts. These are present within the domicile of the poem in that curious phantasmal way, affirmed, negated, sublimated, twisted, straightened out, travestied. . . ."³

When critics become more involved in the intertextual fabric of *Poemas excluidos* and more aware of the ever-expanding "chain of parasitical presences" they come to realize that instead of moving closer to a definitive interpretation of the text, they are moving further

away from such an interpretation. Rather than disorienting the critic, however, this knowledge has a liberating effect. Free to roam the intertextual maze of Brines' poetry, critics can now incorporate the previously excluded texts constituting *Poemas excluidos* into the totality of Brines' poetic production while simultaneously interrelating the thematic content of all of Brines' poetry.

Since the text under consideration forever points to other connections, contexts, and correlations awaiting textual reconstruction, critical commentary receives an added dimension. As critics attempt to untangle the tangle of texts, they become more and more caught up in the snare of texts and the play of meaning of the object scrutinized. The result of their task, curiously, itself will become yet one other thread in the complex and intricate weave of *Poemas excluidos*.⁴

At the outset of *Poemas excluidos*, in the "Nota a manera de prólogo" (Note in the manner of a prologue, 7-8), Francisco Brines stipulates the role readers are to have as they interact with the poems and appended notes constituting his collection. He writes,

Mucho he dudado antes de dar este pequeño volumen a la imprenta, pero a instancias de la amistad y por considerar que algunos de los textos no tienen inferiores méritos que otros recogidos en colecciones, he decidido darles su segunda y más poderosa vida: aquella que tiene su nacimiento en los ojos del lector. (7)

(Before publishing this small book of poetry I had great doubts, but at the urgings of friends and upon considering that some of the texts were not inferior to others already gathered in collections, I decided to give these poems their second and more powerful life: that which would have its origin in the eyes of the reader).

Readers of Brines' poetry, especially of *Insistencias en Luzbel*, are already well aware of the active, collaborative role they are to assume. For example, readers come to realize that throughout this collection concerning the meaning of Being they will be called upon repeatedly to provide a new life for the anguished, mortal, personalized speaker of the poems by means of the resurrective process of clarifying the potential of the text in the activity of reading. This task is, perhaps, most apparent in the poem "Al lector" (To the Reader, P, 215). Reviewing Brines' collections published prior to

Insistencias en Luzbel, readers come to realize that, as they relate and interrelate the pervasive theme of Being in the intertextual sphere of Brines' poetry, they have always had this role. The mortal speakers of poems such as "El visitante me abrazó, de nuevo" (The visitor embraced me, again, P, 22-23), "Oscureciendo el bosque" (The darkening forest, P, 95-96), and "Extinción" (Extinction, P, 160), to name but a few, secure immortality through the reader's activity. The reader of *Poemas excluidos* merely continues, then, the life-extending process already initiated in earlier readings of Brines' other poems. This life-giving role is further described by Brines in the introduction to *Selección propia*. Directing himself to each new reader of his works, Brines writes: "Siempre será para mi motivo de hondo agradecimiento que un tiempo que no me pertenece, esa parte única de tu propia vida, hayas querido que cumpliera su acabamiento en el encuentro con mi ya perdida vida" (53). (My cause for deep gratitude will always be that you have desired that that unique part of your own life, a time which did not belong to me, should realize its completion in the encounter with my already lost life).⁵

In comparison to Brines' other works, *Poemas excluidos* seems to be a very strange collection, not only because explanatory notes written by the author accompany each of the poetic texts but also because thematically there is disparity among the texts. In his appended prose commentaries to the sixteen poems of the collection Brines informs the reader, in a familiar, conversational tone, that the poetic texts have an unusual history. He openly and honestly admits the reasons for their exclusion from his previously published collections. Brines explains, for example, that he believed some of the poems were inferior and therefore not worthy of publication. Another was a fragment he could not bring himself to finish. Another was lost. Another was judged to be too intimate in tone, while yet another did not fit in tone or theme with the collection he was writing at the time. Another was published in a magazine but never republished in one of Brines' collections, etc. The opening "Nota a manera de prólogo" establishes that Brines has decided to rescue (8) these poems from this state of exclusion, banishment, and abandonment and include them in a collection whose sole unifying thread is, curiously, exclusion.

No longer "excluded" (in this way Brines' title is contradictory), the poems of *Poemas excluidos* have now received new life through inclusion in this publication. There is, however, an additional form of life for these poems that Brines not only seeks but

also openly urges at the outset of *Poemas excluidos*: "Mas su salvación, si es que la tienen, será la que el lector les otorgue. Era preciso para ella que previamente yo les concediera la mía; sólo así podrá, acaso, cumplirse mi deseo" (8). (But their salvation, if that is what they are to have, will be that which the reader grants them. For this salvation it is necessary that I previously would have granted my own; only in this way, perhaps, will my desire be realized).

The reader of *Poemas excluidos* is asked not only to provide the poems with their "second birth" (7), thereby continuing their life and the personalized existence of the poetic speakers recorded by each poem, but also to provide their "salvation" (8). The reader has been asked to assume the role of reader-savior and to save the text.⁶ Baffled, the reader of *Poemas excluidos* might ask from what peril, from what evil, is the text to be saved? Etymological overtones of the word "salvación" might also prompt other questions. How is the text to be protected or guarded from damage, loss or destruction? How is the text to be preserved?

In many ways, the poet has already performed his own act of saving the text from the states of oblivion, exclusion, extinction, abandonment, and destruction. Also, the poet, by rescuing the poems from the temporal peril of their non-published state, now has preserved them in their newly published form. What, then, is left for the reader to do in this process of salvation? The reader must deliver new life to the text, as the poet urges. One way this could be accomplished is for the poetic text to gain new existence, new readings, new interpretations, new dimensions, when understood and read in the context of the intertextual sphere of Francisco Brines' poetry. In this way, the reader of *Poemas excluidos* delivers not merely the present text but also previous and even future texts from their perilous state of being unread into their new state of regenerated life contingent upon the activities of reading, interrelating, and reconstructing texts.

The "assimilation" of texts, to borrow Geoffrey Hartman's term (viii), occurring in *Poemas excluidos* is indeed complex because it involves a symbiotic relationship between numerous texts.⁷ For example, a symbiotic relationship exists between Brines' poetic text and the poet's prose commentary on that particular text. Further, within these now combined poem-prose texts are imbedded previous texts of Brines' published collections from which, by the poet's own doing (as the title indicates), such texts have been "excluded." Additionally, the texts of *Poemas excluidos* can be related to and viewed in

terms of more recent collections of Brines' poetry. Further, this now contextual-textual space of *Poemas excluidos* also includes Brines' reformulation of Heraclitean texts on time, Heideggerian and Sartrean texts on the nature of Being, Freudian texts on love, Proustian texts on memory, to name but a few. The reader is also caught attempting to untangle and interrelate the multi-faceted texts that are, at once, internal and external to *Poemas excluidos*. Finally, the critic's assimilative activity of textual commentary also infiltrates the intertextual sphere as the critical activity itself becomes entangled in the revolving and evolving concentric and eccentric texts of *Poemas excluidos*.

The critic's activity at once mimics that of the reader while at the same time providing commentary on and a furthering of the chain of intertextual relations constituting *Poemas excluidos*. As J. Hillis Miller explains in "The Critic as Host":

The critic's version of the pattern proliferated in this chain of repetitions is as follows. The critic's attempt to untwist the elements in the text he interprets only twists them up again in another place and leaves always a remnant of opacity, or an added opacity, as yet unraveled. The critic is caught up in his own version of the interminable repetitions which determine the poet's career. The critic experiences this as his failure to get his poet right in a final decisive formulation which will allow him to have done with the poet, once and for all. . . . The critic cannot unscramble the tangle of lines of meaning, comb its threads out so they shine clearly side by side. He can only retrace the text, set its elements in motion once more, in that experience of the failure of determinable reading which is decisive here. (247-48)

Since a "determinable" reading of *Poemas excluidos* is no longer sought, nor even possible, the reader as critic and the critic as reader are free to roam the collection's expanding intertextual space and ravel and unravel the poem's textual and intertextual strands. It is this act of retracing the text that both sheds light on the indeterminacy of meaning of the included-excluded and excluded-included texts of *Poemas excluidos* and also highlights the critic's role in the process of textual reconstruction.

Poemas excluidos continually underscores the poet's newly assumed and somewhat surprising task of providing his own textual

commentary, since to each poem Brines has appended personal observations regarding various aspects of the poetic text under scrutiny.⁸ In the commentary (38–39) accompanying “Encuentro urbano” (Urban encounter, 16–17), the poem that will serve as representative of the collection, the poet’s note reveals that he himself has fulfilled the expectations that he had placed on the reader at the outset of *Poemas excluidos*. Usurping the reader’s assigned role of saving the text, Brines, the note informs us, has rescued the lost poem from oblivion and thereby has assisted in the desired “second birth” not only sought but also mandated by the poet in his opening prologue (7). In the appended commentary Brines writes: “Este poema pertenecía a la última parte (*Otras vidas*) de *Las brasas* . . . Cuando apareció la segunda en Hontanar quise incorporarlo, pero no lo encontré el texto. Recobrado ahora, lo incluyo aquí” (38–39). (This poem pertained to the last section [*Other lives*] of *The Live Coals*. . . . When the second edition appeared with Hontanar I wanted to incorporate the poem, but I could not find the text. Now recovered, I include it here). The reader, having read this poem and its commentary, immediately realizes that there is a difference, even a contradiction, between the poet’s expectations of the reader, as set forth in the prologue, and the poet’s own actions, as recorded in the appended note. Since “Encuentro urbano” and its accompanying explanatory text have been placed fourth in the collection, the reader is aware of this opposition in the early stages of reading *Poemas excluidos*. Skeptical of his assigned role of the savior of the text, the reader might turn to the traditional task of assembling the poem’s meaning. Here too, however, as will be shown, the reader of “Encuentro urbano,” and the reader-critic commenting on the poem, encounter a series of irreconcilable differences.⁹

The content of “Encuentro urbano,” as the explanatory note reveals, itself mimics the poet’s act of recovering the lost text. The author of this poem, in engaging in the activity of writing, seeks to recover and recollect an amorous experience that has since been lost to the past in the course of living. The verbal recounting of this amorous “encounter” resuscitates the past. When the poet rescues the lost poetic text from oblivion, he is able to reclaim a part of his past that is both present and absent in the poem’s text of Being.

Está el cuerpo desnudo. La penumbra
me rodea la cama mientras miro

1
2

un impasible cielo liso, lleno	3
de sol, hasta dormirme.	4
Es muy tarde	5
cuando despierto, los veloces faros	6
persiguen golondrinas, y a la casa	7
suben los gritos de la calle. Cubren	8
las cercanas montañas sus contornos	9
de un humo bajo; quedará este cielo	10
vivo de luz, un bosque de altas cuevas,	11
será bella esta noche. Mi piel siente	12
frescura súbita, la breve dicha	13
de un aire. Como ayer, para encontrarnos,	14
bajo hasta la ciudad y cuando llego	15
adivino de lejos tu postura.	16
Iniciamos los pasos, tantas cosas	17
no sabemos los dos que, con urgencia,	18
precipitamos nuestras vidas. Cuánto	19
me amarga lo que cuentas, te adivino	20
de poca edad, doblado en la ventana,	21
triste, viendo pasar los coches. Tardes	22
que hacían daño, te quedabas serio	23
como un mayor, con los distantes ojos	24
con que miras las cosas. Estos días,	25
en mi país salvaje, se han cruzado	26
dos corazones solos. Somos jóvenes,	27
con un secreto íntimo que a veces	28
alguien, con turbación, nos adivina.	29
Tienes suave la piel, y muy amigos	30
los ojos. En solícitos cuidados	31
me adviertes el amor, cuando en la vida	32
momentos hay en que, vencido el hombre,	33
deja pasar el aire del otoño.	34

The body is nude. The penumbra	1
surrounds my bed while I watch	2
an indifferent, clear sky, filled with	3
sun, until I fall asleep.	4

It is very late	5
when I awake, the swift headlights	6
pursue swallows, and toward the house	7

shouts from the street swell. The nearby	8
mountains cover their environs	9
with a faint smoke; this sky will remain	10
alive with light, a forest of high caves,	11
it will be beautiful tonight. My skin feels	12
the sudden coolness, the brief happiness	13
of a wind. Like yesterday, in order to meet each other,	14
I walk down to the city and when I arrive	15
I guess afar your posture.	16
We begin our steps, so many things	17
the two of us don't know that, with urgency,	18
we hasten our lives. How much	19
pain it gives me what you say, I guess	20
that you are very young, bent out toward the window,	21
sad, seeing the passing cars. Afternoons	22
harmed you, you remained serious	23
like someone older, with distant eyes	24
with which you watch things. These days,	25
in my barbarous country, two lonely hearts	26
have crossed. We are young,	27
with an intimate secret that at times	28
someone, with confused embarrassment, guesses about us.	29
Your skin is soft, and your eyes	30
very friendly. With anxious apprehension	31
you guess my love, when in life	32
there are moments in which, the worn-out man,	33
allows the autumnal air to advance.	34

Preoccupied by the transitory nature of human existence, the speaker of Brines' "Encuentro urbano" and the commentator of the accompanying note fully comprehend that in life the experiences of youth, pleasure, love, and intimate communication between men are ephemeral. In remembering the past and recording this memory in the poem, the poet is able, in a sense, to recover what might have been lost forever. The creative act, however, as an act of recovery, itself underscores that within the flow of time the recollection of the past is as fleeting as the experience recollected. Both the amorous experience recounted and the poetic experience of recounting are merely, as the title of the poem indicates, a brief "encuentro."

"Encuentro urbano" and its appended note are more than a

restatement of the fundamental ontological theme of Brines' poetry.¹⁰ The poet's commentary reveals that the poem has undergone various readings by the poet himself. In these readings and re-readings, the poet has approached the poetic text from new perspectives, new perspectives which, curiously, subvert the poet's initial reading. Brines observes:

No sé por acentuarse en él excesivamente la anécdota, en contraste con la mayoría de los poemas del libro, o por la especial indole tan íntima, de aquella, lo excluí . . . La duda estriba en que advierto en él una leve autocompasión que incomoda en mi sensibilidad actual, y quizás una exposición de inocencia que he dejado de valorar. Pero nosotros, y los hechos, éramos entonces así. (38–39)

(I do not know if it is because the poem is excessively anecdotal, in contrast to the majority of the poems of the book, or because of the special, intimate nature of that anecdote that I excluded it. . . . The doubt is based on the fact that I perceive in the poem a faint sense of self-pity that troubles my present sensibilities, and perhaps an exhibition of innocence that I now no longer value. But we, and the deeds, were like that then).

These incompatible readings given by the poet to his own poetic text warn the reader, and ultimately the critic, of the possibility of unsynthesizable readings that might be furnished as the text is read and reread. For example, a first reading of "Encuentro urbano" might focus on the poetic speaker's recollection of a heterosexual amorous experience since the repeated object pronouns "nos" (ll. 14, 29), "me" (ll. 20, 32), and "te" (ll. 20, 23) are ambiguous with respect to gender and also since the speaker's observation "doblado en la ventana" (l. 21) follows the description "adivino de lejos tu postura" (l. 16). A new reading, however, might focus on the phrases "doblado en la ventana" (l. 21), "te quedabas serio" (l. 23), "en mi país salvaje" (l. 26), and "Tienes suave la piel, y muy amigos / los ojos" (ll. 30–31), which could point to a homosexual amorous experience if the first person speaker of the poem is viewed as male. Brines himself suggests such a reading in the appended note: "Más pormenores anecdóticos podría aún añadir: el lugar era un Madrid entonces entrañable, a aquel aire joven, dorado y romano. El país

semeja ahora, respecto al clima moral al aquel aquí se hace referencia, mucho menos salvaje" (39). ("I could even add more anecdotal details: the place was a Madrid that was then most affectionate, in that youthful, gilded and roman atmosphere. At present the country seems, with respect to the moral climate that is referred to here, much less barbarous").

Further incompatible readings are apparent when the author's prose analysis of the romantic encounter is contrasted to his poetic speaker's recollection of the same event. The first-person speaker of the poem is not as self-pitying as the author's note suggests. Instead, the reader witnesses what appears to be an irreconcilable difference between the speaker's compassionate view of the amorous encounter of the two youths (ll. 17-22; 25-29) and the harsher, even less sympathetic view of the effects of this incident on the now more knowledgeable poetic voice of the closing moment (ll. 31-34). Such differences are intensified further when the air of innocence displayed by the lovers (ll. 17-19; 20-21; 27) is contrasted to the wisdom and maturity also exhibited by both the lover (ll. 22-25) and the speaker-lover (ll. 32-34). Despite their youth, the protagonists of "Encuentro urbano," due to previously acquired knowledge (ll. 23-25; 31-34), now approach both life and love with "anxious apprehension" (l. 31). This interplay of innocence/knowledge, youth/age and ignorance/wisdom, on the part of the lovers within the scene of the poem, points to one further play of forces occurring between the poem and the appended note. The poem's protagonists seem to know more than the author of the note intimates. Their behavior, thus, not only contradicts but also undermines the poet's analysis of this behavior in his prose commentary.

"Encuentro urbano" shares certain similarities with many of the poems of the collection from which originally it had been excluded. A narrative tone, anecdotal scenes, interplay of first, second and third person protagonists, the contemplative stance adopted by the speaker, the symbolic motif of the waning afternoon, metaphoric tensions between youth/old age and ignorance/knowledge, and, finally, the speaker's ability to distance himself from the event recounted and thereby gain understanding from this new perspective, all place the poem within the context of *Las brasas*.

Symbiotic relationships between the excluded poem and the texts of *Las brasas* are numerous. As critics have observed, the central theme of this collection is the passing of time.¹¹ "Encuentro

urbano," however, does more than manifest thematic, situational, and tonal similarities to other poems of Brines' 1960 collection. In "Encuentro urbano" knowledge of the temporality of existence is attained when the poem's speaker learns that the fleeting amorous "encounter" recounted merely predicts the possible and inevitable dissolution of both love and life. In the poem "Ladridos jadeantes en el césped" (Barking, panting in the yard, P, 24-25), from *Las brasas*, the poem's speaker also comes to know the temporal nature of love. However, unlike his intertextual counterpart in "Encuentro urbano," the former speaker claims both defeat and victory while witnessing the fleeting moments of existence:

En el amor era veloz el tiempo,
 iba pronto a morir, y en vano el joven
 pensaba detenerlo, se soñaba
 vencido en la vejez y desamado.
 Entonces su victoria
 era querer aún más, con mayor fuerza. (ll. 16-21)

(In love time was swift,
 soon he was going to die, and in vain the youth
 considered detaining it, dreaming
 he was vanquished by old age and hatred.
 His victory then
 was to desire even more, with greater strength).

This seemingly triumphant attitude in the face of the inexorable flow of time echoes the poem's final observation:

. . . La casa, oscurecida,
 se ha perdido en los árboles, y él oye
 el dulce nacimiento del amor,
 escucha su secreto. Ya de nuevo
 vive su corazón, y el hombre tiembla,
 siente cargado el pecho, y apresura
 un llanto fervoroso. (ll. 28-34)

(. . . The house, darkened,
 has been lost among the trees, and he hears
 the sweet birth of love,

he listens to its secret. His heart now
lives again, and the man trembles,
he feels his heavy chest, and hastens
fervent weeping).

The closing moment of the last poem of *Las brasas*, "No es en vano andar por el camino incierto" (It is not in vain to walk along the uncertain path, P, 39) also serves as a contrastive intertextual context for "Encuentro urbano." Unlike the disillusioned lover of Brines' excluded text, the speaker of this final poem describes the positive results of love: ". . . Sueña / que hay Dios, y que hay amor en el camino, / y que tus hijos crecerán hermosos." (ll. 21-23) (Dream / that there is a God, and that there is love along the path, / and that your children will grow up to be beautiful).

Within the intertextual sphere of "Encuentro urbano" also is imbedded the recent *Poemas a D. K.* in which the poet has regrouped, for the most part, previously published poems "de temática amorosa" ("Razón de una antología," [Reason for an anthology], 7).¹² The poems of this collection reflect the central concern evident in "Encuentro urbano," in particular, and Brines' love poetry, in general. The poet of these texts forever seeks to remember and resuscitate lost, past existence and lost, past love. Each time this is done, however, he comes to know in a new way the transitory nature of both. Brines describes this discovery in the introduction to *Poemas a D. K.*:

Somos más, y al tiempo somos más humildes, más pequeños. De la misma manera el encuentro con el poema puede desvelarnos un hondo conocimiento, crear una nueva realidad, mas al mismo tiempo nos asedia con ignorados enigmas, y nos coloca ante un vasto secreto que a partir de entonces no haremos sino arañar con torpeza. (9-10)

(We are more, and before time we are more humble, more minute. In the same way the encounter with the poem can make us attentive to a profound knowledge, create a new reality, but at the same time it besieges us with unknown enigmas, and we find ourselves facing an immense secret that up until then we could only but scratch at sluggishly).

The epigraph introducing the third part of *Las brasas*, the section to which "Encuentro urbano" would have pertained had it not been lost and thereby excluded from the collection, forms another thread of the complex contextual and intertextual fabric of the poem. The epigraph reads: "Unos construyen sus casas y otros andan por los bosques; porque el destino del hombre es el amor, y cada uno tiene su propia lucha y su propio destino" (P, 33). (Some build their houses and others wander through the forests; because the destiny of man is love, and everyone has his/her own struggle and his/her own fate). Perhaps, as the epigraph suggests, it will be the destiny of some lovers to love and to have that love continue to be, as is revealed by the speakers of such previously published Brinesean love poems as: "No es vano andar por el camino incierto" and "Recuerdo de la belleza humana" (Remembrance of human beauty, P, 234). Or, perhaps, as the epigraph also suggests, since each lover has a specific destiny, some lovers may experience the dissolution of love as do the majority of the protagonists of Brines' love poems. The speakers of "Encuentro urbano," "Amor en Agrigento" (Love at Agrigento, P, 116), "Las noches del abandono" (Nights of debauchery, P, 192), "El triunfo del amor" (The triumph of love, P, 157), and "La realidad no permanece" (Reality does not last, P, 233), for example, come to comprehend that the essence of love is at once inseparable from and a further reflection of man's temporality. This knowledge is as evident in Brines' earliest poetry as it is in his latest collection. In *Las brasas*, for example, the pensive, aging speaker of "Junto a la mesa se ha quedado solo" (Next to the table he has remained alone, P, 23-24) affirms: "Ay, se muere todo, / pasa la luz, la flor, los sentimientos / se marchitan, las fuerzas van perdiéndose" (ll. 20-22). (Alas, all dies, / the light and the flower pass, sentiments / wither, forces continue to be lost). It is, perhaps, only through the persistence of memory and the acts of remembering and retelling both the past and the experiences of past love that man can extend time and thereby relive the "Tiempo y espacio del amor" (The Time and Space of Love, 33), as indicated by the title of one poem from *El otoño de las rosas*.¹³ This poem's speaker affirms:

. . . Lejanos,
 nos poblará el recuerdo del amor,
 me llegará en el sueño tu mágica visita,
 y aún te amaré más. Hasta un día que mueras,

o yo me muera, o muramos los dos,
y así será, aunque sigamos vivos. (ll. 10-15)

(. . . Far away,
the memory of love will fill us,
your magical visit will come to me in the dream,
and yet I shall love you more. Until one day you may die,
or I may die, or the two of us may die,
and in that way it will be, although we may continue alive).

The observations of the speakers of poems such as "Encuentro urbano," "Lamento del distinto" (Lament of the different one, 13) "Desposesión del joven" (The ousting of the youth, 19), "Madrigal a D. K." (20), and "Posesión de la sonrisa (Fragmento)" (Possessing the smile [Fragment], 26-27) from *Poemas excluidos* allude not only to other Brinesean love poems but also to the poet's testimonial introducing *Selección propia* of 1984. Brines explains:

En mi poesía es más vasta y rica la temática temporal que la estrictamente amorosa. El tiempo es mi cuerpo y mi enigma, y también el fracaso definitivo; el amor es mi inserción en el tiempo con la intensidad máxima, el deseo de mi mejor realización posible, y es también un fracaso que, aunque no tan absoluto como el de la mortalidad, puede ser más doloroso. (20)

(In my poetry temporal themes are more vast and abundant than those which are strictly about love. Time is my body and my enigma, and also the definite destruction; love is my insertion into time with the maximum intensity, the desire of my best possible realization, it is also a destruction that, although not as absolute as that of mortality, could be more painful).

Ultimately, the reader and the critic of "Encuentro urbano" are left with the ghostly presence of Brines' other poetic texts that both affirm the positive, lasting results of love and lament the effects of love's caducity. This interplay mimics not only the contradictions of love but also of Being, contradictions which are succinctly summarized in the question asked in the epigraph introducing the third section of *Aún no*:

¿Dime, cuando ya tantos años se han perdido
 y nos quedan tan pocos por vivir,
 si no fue lo más consolador de nuestra vida
 esta tristeza honda de imaginar un mundo
 más perfecto que el mundo tan amado,
 haber ardientemente deseado un imposible? (P, 181)

(Tell me, when now so many years have been lost
 and so few remain for us to live,
 if the most consoling thing about our life
 was not that deep sadness we felt when we imagined a world
 more perfect than that world we so loved,
 ardently having desired something impossible?)

In retracing "Encuentro urbano," the critic makes a unique discovery. Within the entanglement that is, simultaneously, the poetic text and the poet's commentary on that text, the poetic text and the poet's, reader's, and critic's readings and re-readings of it and its appended note, the poetic text viewed in terms of the boundless context of Brines' poetry, the poetic text and the critic's interpretation of it, the critic learns that the scrutinized text has been "transformed into a difference between the text and the critical interpretation of it," to borrow Jonathan Culler's observation in his discussion of deconstructive criticism.¹⁴ The critic's retracing of Brines' text(s) is an act of identifying the differences, the incompatible readings, and the expanding and entangled intertextual web of his poetry. The critics, like the text they retrace, are not excluded from the text observed, but rather remain caught up within the activity of setting the textual elements in motion. This reconstructive activity is profitable because by it the critic gains insight not into a definitive interpretation of *Poemas excluidos* but rather into the chain of differences that make up the collection, the differences that expose the perplexing existential enigmas coiled and uncoiled, only to be coiled again, in the critical activity of interpreting Francisco Brines' poetry.

The critic, after having retraced the differences, the play of texts, and the play of meaning that are *Poemas excluidos*, might return to the request for salvation asked of the reader at the outset of the collection. Is such salvation possible? Yes and no. Parasitism among the texts of *Poemas excluidos*, and also among the texts of this collection

and Brines' earlier and later collections, points to a never-ending chain of texts that is continuously delivered from oblivion, read and reread, studied and interpreted, thought about and commented on, saved and savored, all within the intertextual sphere of Brines' poetry. Criticism and parasitism, however, also point to a never-ending chain of texts that continually consumes and destroys earlier and even later texts so that the new text itself can become "its own ground." J. Hillis Miller writes:

The previous text is both the ground of the new one and something the new poem must annihilate by incorporating it, turning it into ghostly insubstantiality, so that the new poem may perform the possible-impossible task of becoming its own ground. The new poem both needs the old texts and must destroy them. It is both parasitical on them, feeding ungraciously on their substance, and at the same time it is the sinister host which unmans them by inviting them into its home, as the Green Knight invites Gawain. (225)

The new poem then, in Miller's accurate and clever descriptive phrase, is a "cannibal consumer of earlier poems" (225), and as such engages in an act of destruction that is not the salvation requested by the poet. At the same time, the critic consumes the new poem and also the earlier and later poems that form the chain of parasitical texts at once included in and excluded from *Poemas excluidos*. As a consumer the critic does not save the text, as Brines had hoped, but rather engages in the activity of destruction that is, curiously, the reconstruction of the text by means of critical commentary. Miller's observations aptly describe this process. "The poem," he writes, "in my figure, is that ambiguous gift, food, host in the sense of victim, sacrifice. It is broken, divided, passed around, consumed by the critics canny and uncanny who are in that odd relation to one another of host and parasite" (225).

The critic's activity of retracing the text within the intertextual sphere of Francisco Brines' poetry itself becomes a part of the indeterminate activity of saving-destroying-reconstructing the text. Such an activity serves to underscore further the critic's task of identifying differences, play of texts, and play of meaning within the intertextual entanglement that is Brines' poetry. Such an activity also emphasizes what Miller refers to as the critic's task of identifying "an act of decon-

struction which has always already, in each case differently, been performed by the text on itself."¹⁵ Finally, by retracing the text the critic not only becomes aware of but also learns more about the indeterminate nature of the activity of critical commentary.

NOTES

1. Francisco Brines, *Poemas excluidos* [*Excluded Poems*] (Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 1985). Further references to this collection and its introduction will be given in the text. All translations are by the author. Brines' poetic works include, *Las brasas* [*The Live Coals*] (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1960); *El Santo inocente* [*The Innocent Saint*] (Madrid: Poesía para todos, 1965; *Palabras a la oscuridad* [*Words to Darkness*] (Madrid: Insula, 1966); *Aún no* [*Not Yet*] (Barcelona: Ocnos-Editorial Llibres de Sindera, 1971). These were subsequently published in *Poesía 1969-1970. Ensayo de una despedida* [*Poetry 1960-1970. A Farewell Essay*] (Barcelona-Madrid: Plaza y Janés, 1974), where *El Santo inocente* appeared with the new title *Materia narrativa inexacta* [*Inexact Narrative Matter*]. In 1977 Brines published *Insistencias en Luzbel* [*Affirmations of Lucifer*] (Madrid: Visor, 1977). The aforementioned works were later published in *Poesía 1960-1981. Ensayo de una despedida* (Madrid: Visor, 1984). Hereafter, references to this latter collection, abbreviated *P*, will be given in the text. In addition to *Poemas excluidos*, other recent works include *Selección propia* [*My Own Selection*] (Madrid: Cátedra, 1984); *Poemas a D. K.* [*Poems to D. K.*] (Sevilla: El mágico íntimo, 1986); and *El otoño de las rosas* [*The Autumn of the Roses*] (Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 1986). References to these recent collections will be given in the text. Important studies of Brines' poetry include: Alejandro Amusco, "Algunos aspectos de la obra poética de Francisco Brines," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 346 (1979): 52-74; Amusco, "Francisco Brines: estética de la nada y del sufrimiento," *Insula*, 376 (1978): 1 and 12; Douglas K. Benson, "Convenciones de lenguaje y alusiones literarias en la poesía de Francisco Brines: *Insistencias en Luzbel*," *Hispania*, 69.1 (1986): 1-11; Benson, "Memory, Tradition and the Reader in the poetry of Francisco Brines," *MLN*, 99 (1984): 308-26; Carlos Bousoño, "Situación y características de la poesía de Francisco Brines," in Brines' *Poesía* (1974), pp. 11-94; Carole A. Bradford, "The Dialectic of Nothingness in the Poetry of Francisco Brines," *Taller Literario*, 1 (1980): 1-12; Bradford, "Francisco Brines and Claudio Rodríguez: Two Recent Approaches to Poetic Creation," *Crítica Hispánica*, 2 (1980): 29-40; Andrew P. Debicki, "Fran-

cisco Brines: Text and Reader", *Poetry of Discovery. The Spanish Generation of 1956-1971* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982) 20-39; José Olivio Jiménez, "La poesía de Francisco Brines," *Cinco poetas del tiempo [Five Poets of Time]* (Madrid: Insula, 1972) 175-204; Judith Nantell, "Francisco Brines' *Aún no*: Poetry as Knowledge," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 31.4 (1984): 413-24; Nantell, "Modes of Being in Francisco Brines' *Insistencias en Luzbel*," *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 12.1 (Fall 1987): 33-55; Nantell, "Writing and Reading: Dialectical Correlatives in Francisco Brines' *Insistencias en Luzbel*," *After the War. Essays on Recent Spanish Poetry*, eds. John C. Wilcox and Salvador Jiménez-Fajardo (Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1988) 83-97; Margaret H. Persin, "Francisco Brines' *Insistencias en Luzbel*: Toward the Limits of Language and Being," *Recent Spanish Poetry and the Role of the Reader* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1987) 45-67, also published in Persin, *Poesía como proceso: Poesía española de los Años 50 y 60*, (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1986) 49-78; Alfonso Sanz Echeverría, "La insistencia de Francisco Brines," *Jugar con fuego: poesía y crítica*, 3-4 (1977): 32-49; César Simón, "Algunos aspectos lingüísticos en la sátira de Francisco Brines," *Cuadernos de Filología* (June 1971): 63-70; Luis Antonio de Villena, "Sobre *Insistencias en Luzbel* y la poesía de Francisco Brines," *Papeles de Son Armadans* 89 (1978): 213-22.

2. Geoffrey Hartman, preface *Deconstruction and Criticism*, by Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Continuum, 1979, 1985), p. viii. Further references to this essay will be cited in the text.

3. J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, p. 225. Further references to this essay will be cited in the text. Margaret Persin, in her paper "Francisco Brines' *Poemas excluidos*: (Pre)text and Context," delivered at the Mountain Interstate Conference on Language and Literature, October 3-5, 1985, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina, briefly discusses this parasitical relationship among texts as she examines artistic creativity and Brines' work.

4. Commentary, as deconstructive readings reveal, can itself disclose that critics are often "caught up in the play of forces," to use Jonathan Culler's description, of the text that they seek to describe. Culler explains:

The demonstration that critics attempting to stand above or outside a literary domain in order to master it are caught up in the play of forces of the object they seek to describe—its tropological and transferential ruses—does not imply that deconstructive readings can escape these intractable forces. Demonstrations of complicities between language and metalanguage, observed and observer, question the possibility of attaining a principled mastery of a domain but do not suggest that deconstruction has either achieved a mastery of its own or can ignore the whole problem of mastery from a secure position of externality. The effect of deconstructive analyses, as numerous readers can attest, is knowledge and feelings of mastery. In reading

particular works and readings of those works, deconstruction attempts to understand these phenomena of textuality—the relations of language and metalanguage, for example, or effects of externality and internality, or the possible interaction of conflicting logics. And if the formulations produced by these analyses are themselves open to question because of their involvement with the forces and ruses they claim to understand, this acknowledgment of inadequacy is also an opening to criticism, analysis, and displacement.

(*On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* [Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982, p. 225).

5. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader. Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1974) and Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1978), especially pp. 107–34, regarding the interplay between text and reader. For notable studies of the reader in Brines' poetry see Benson, Debicki, Nantell and Persin. In addition, for two excellent studies on the reader's evolving participation in textual reconstruction see Debicki, "Claudio Rodríguez: Language Codes and Their Effects," *Poetry of Discovery*, 40–58 and "José Angel Valente: Reading and Rereading," *Poetry of Discovery*, 102–22.

6. Brines' request immediately calls to mind the title of Geoffrey Hartman's study *Saving the Text. Literature/ Derrida/ Philosophy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1981, 1985), where he discusses Jacques Derrida's *Glas* and the possibilities of commentary.

7. For an excellent discussion of criticism and parasitism see J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," 217–53.

8. Brines' commentary, although different in design, recalls that of Thomas Watson in the *Hekatompathia* and also T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*. I wish to thank Professor Susan Jeffords for sharing these observations with me.

9. For a discussion of Jacques Derrida's notion of "*différance*" see Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp. 95–97. Culler explains: "The term *différance* . . . alludes to this undecidable, nonsynthetic alternation between the perspectives of structure and event. The verb *différer* means to differ and to defer. *Différance* sounds exactly the same as *différence*, but the ending *ance*, which is used to produce verbal nouns, makes it a new form meaning 'difference-differing-defering.' *Différance* thus designates both a 'passive' difference already in place as the condition of signification and an act of differing which produces differences" (97).

10. The theme of Being is not new to Brines' poetry. It underlies all of his published collections to date. Notable studies of various aspects of this theme include: Bradford (Dialectic); Debicki; Jiménez; Nantell, (Modes; Writing); and Persin.

11. Jiménez affirms that the "centro espiritual desde el cual se ha conformado el libro de Brines parece ser *la serenidad resignada con que se contempla y medita el paso del*

tiempo, pero siempre desde y a lo largo de una existencia humana intransferible (*Cinco poetas*, p. 419). (The underlining is Jiménez's.) In his analysis of *Las brasas*, Debicki states that "Brines often presents a speaker whose situation reveals some aspect of temporality, or describes a scene or event which reflects an attitude in the face of time's passing" (21).

12. One poem, "Madrigal a D. K.," (34) first appeared in *Poemas excluidos* (20). Three other poems, "Un hueco de intensidad" (57), "Las campanas de St. Peter in the East" (58), and "Desde Bassai y el mar de Oliva" (59) also are published in *El otoño de las rosas* (pp. 77, 82 and 95, respectively).

13. For a study of the role of memory in Brines' poetry see Benson (*Memory*).

14. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 268.

15. J. Hillis Miller, "Deconstructing the Deconstructors," *Diacritics* 5.2 (1975): 31. I wish to thank Professor J. Christopher Maloney for discussing with me the critics' role in saving-destroying the text.