

Images of Death in Antonio Colinas's “Sepulcro en Tarquinia” Rewritten into Life in *Larga carta a Francesca*

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Death has been, and likely always will be, one of poetry's most prevalent themes. The blend of emotion, mystery, beauty, and the macabre that the subject invokes lends itself well to such a visually expressive art. This idea holds for poets of Spain, and particularly for those who were producing poetry in the 1970s, just before the Transition to democracy (late 1970s). This group includes such diverse poets as Guillermo Carnero, Clara Janés, Olvido García Valdés, and Antonio Colinas. In his 2004 study introducing the Cátedra edition of Colinas's poetry, José E. Martínez Fernández briefly mentions links between the poem “Sepulcro en Tarquinia” (1975, book of the same title) and Colinas's novel *Larga carta a Francesca* (1986) (80). His footnote calls for a closer look at the poem and novel in a detailed comparative study. Antonio Colinas, the writer whose aforementioned works are explored below, was born in La Bañeza (León), Spain in 1946. He has published works as a poet, novelist, essayist, journalist, translator, and literary critic over the course of an almost fifty-year literary career,¹ though his most prolific genre is poetry. As a translator, he has close ties with Italian literature and from 1970–74 Colinas taught at the Universities of Milan and Bergamo. Those years

1. Siruela published his *Obra poética completa* in 2011; his most recent book of poetry is *Canciones para una música silente* (2014).

resulted in several works that integrated Italian geography, history, and culture into his literary works, most notably the two analyzed here.

In Colinas's early poetic career (he wrote his first *poemario* in 1967), death and life often appear together as major juxtaposing themes. In the following pages I carry out a close reading of the poem "Sepulcro en Tarquinia" (1975) employing an image-centered analysis of illness and death in the text, then compare this imagery to that of *Larga carta a Francesca*, and conclude by explaining how and why Colinas rewrote a version of this poem into a later novel. This study argues that "Sepulcro" is an abstract version of *Larga carta* in which the language and poetic images are condensed and presented without a coherent narrative context. Over a decade later, Colinas takes essential elements from his poem and expands them into a novel, a tangible narrative format. The two works often coincide in key images and words while their endings differ significantly: "Sepulcro" ends with images of death and solitude (repeatedly portrayed through elements of nature) while *Larga carta* ends with the promise of life and knowledge (symbolized by light). This change reflects Colinas's desire to express an altered philosophy and to breathe new life into his most beloved poem by transforming it into a new work of art.

The strongest elements in the long poem "Sepulcro en Tarquinia" (1975) are its vivid imagery and cultural references. The images at first may seem to have little unity, however, according to Martínez Fernández:

El hilo que recorre el poema es, por lo tanto, una historia de amor que . . . el poeta no narra, sino que sugiere, a la vez que la disemina a lo largo del poema. De esta diseminación o fragmentación de la historia amorosa, así como de los cambios

temporales proceden, en parte, las dificultades de interpretación del poema. (80)

The “fragmentación” that Martínez Fernández describes is the lack of a logical order of events within “Sepulcro.” Juan Manuel Rozas asserts that the poem comprises three parts, separated by the two stanzas between parentheses (2). According to his reading, the three parts include: “una primera, donde se habla del recuerdo insistente de ella enferma . . . Más tarde, viene la segunda parte, . . . el momento de la muerte . . . Y, por fin, una tercera parte, que sería la apoteosis de la muerte, del júbilo, de la entrega” (2). For Rozas, these three parts do not follow a logical temporal order either—death should come last. But logic and order are not important elements in this work. The poem may arguably be separated into three parts, however, in my interpretation, the poetic narrative opens with memories of the late part of the relationship between the speaker and his *amada* (beloved), followed by her death. The last part is a fantasy in which the speaker attempts to imagine her alive and the two of them together again.

The entire poem is nostalgic in tone—the speaker is remembering his beloved—and the majority is written in past tense. He directs his voice to her, *tú*. The first two stanzas begin with the same couplet: “se abrieron las cancelas de la noche, / salieron los caballos a la noche” (vv. 1–2). The second stanza continues: “se agitaron las zarzas del recuerdo, / pasó un desierto (el mar) por mi recuerdo” (vv. 30–33). In agreement with Rozas’s interpretation, these metaphors symbolize the process of remembering the past, opening the floodgates of memory (2). The natural symbols appearing in these opening lines prepare readers for the abundance of natural imagery that will follow. The stanza continues with

images related to autumn, the season that symbolizes the *amada's* illness and the breakdown of their relationship:

después del sueño lento de otoño,
 después del largo sorbo de otoño . . .
 del otoño con árboles dorados . . .
 con los muros cubiertos de rosales
 tardíos
 y tú en aquel tranvía . . .
 aquel rostro otoñal que no vería
 nunca más, amor mío, nunca más. (vv. 6–7, 9, 11–13, 17–18)

In "Sepulcro" autumn foreshadows death, later symbolized by snow and winter. "Sueño lento" and "largo sorbo" suggest that the lovers' last season together seemed unending for their mutual suffering: the *amada's* physical/mental illness and the speaker's emotional pain. Her "rostro otoñal" is a face aged by this illness—a face that the speaker will contemplate further as the poem continues.

At the end of stanza one, we observe several symbols of life—"con un sueño de potros . . . / un hato de ciervos . . . / un nido de tigres en los ojos" (vv. 20–22)—in immediate contrast with those of death:

y con la bruma de los cementerios,
 y con los hierros de los cementerios,
 y con las *nubes rojas* allá arriba
 (encima de *cipreses* y *aves muertas*,
 del *tomillo* y los *búcaros* fragantes)
de los cementerios
navegando en tus ojos . (vv. 23–29, emphasis mine)

The last time he saw his lover, life and death were conflicting in her eyes. At this point, early in the poem, she has already

been ill for some time and their relationship has become impossible to maintain. Funereal imagery dominates these verses—cypresses, vases of flowers, and cemeteries foreshadow the *amada's* fate. The *tomillo* (thyme), an herb associated with treating pulmonary diseases, alludes to her ailment, tuberculosis (Lehner 124). The “nubes rojas” foreshadow the impending storm, their redness suggesting the blood and impending violence associated with symptoms of the illness. After stanza one, the speaker presents himself as the writer of this poem:

si me vieras junto a esta mesa oscura
 con la manta y los vidrios de colores,
 con el fuego apagado, sin más fuego
 que éste de aquí del pecho, de aquel otro
 de tus días pasando apresurada
 hacia el lago y la noche y los jardines,
 si me vieras,
 si supieras. (vv. 36–38)

It is at his writing table, the “*mesa oscura*,” that the speaker begins to remember or relive the past. The “*fuego apagado*” represents his memories and ability to write, repressed until the moment in which he begins to unlock them—when he begins to write, he feels the fire burning again in his chest. This fire also symbolizes the passion of his relationship, smothered by his lover’s illness and death, yet rekindled in memory. In the third stanza we find images of repression and death: chained lions, ruined fountains, poison, dead leaves, dead suns, and frozen moons (vv. 44–56). These images of destroyed nature and beauty symbolize the repressive and devastating character of the woman’s illness.

The fourth stanza introduces us to art and music, two vital

elements of this poem (and of Colinas's poetry in general), recounting a scene that takes place in an ancient church. Here art reflects, duplicates, or immortalizes a woman's beauty. The music represents, in part, the passion of this relationship. Exemplifying this passion, the following verses also illustrate Colinas's tendency to describe in a rapid flow of images:

había una música
 y una luz en ojivas y arquitrabes,
 Lentz, Scarlatti, Telemann, Vivaldi,
 techos llenos de frescos, los sagrarios,
 las ancianas maderas aromadas,
 carcomidas, lustrosas, de los coros,
 el retablo, las losas, las trompetas,
 el tropel de los ángeles, a veces
 un son de mandolino, aquella virgen
 de Botticelli con tu rostro, violas
 temblando en nuestras venas y un gran coro
 tronando enfurecido con el órgano,
 con el corazón. (vv. 65–77)

The rhythm of these verses increases with fewer end stops in the last lines, representing a mounting energy. The music enters the lovers' bodies: it runs through their veins and hearts. In this passage we also have a physical description of the *amada*: she looks like Botticelli's virgin. This alludes to Sandro Botticelli's portraits of the Florentine noblewoman Simonetta Vespucci² (Martínez Fernández 167). He notes that she was "una joven hermosa [quien] murió de tuberculosis a los veintitrés años" (151). Both Simonetta and the *amada*,

2. The cover image of Colinas's *Obra poética completa* is a profile portrait of Simonetta Vespucci by S. Botticelli.

beautiful Italian women, died young. Later there are other images implying that the *amada* dies of tuberculosis as well, reinforcing the parallels between them.³ One stanza in particular offers an image that suggests one of the more apparent symptoms of tuberculosis, coughing blood:

el grito de los cisnes en el lago
 les anunciaba el paso de la muerte,
 la enfermedad y el Arte y el deseo
 y el no poder besar aquellos labios
 sin pensar en *las flores de la sangre*. (vv. 214–18, emphasis mine)

Later in the poem, there is an allusion to another Italian noblewoman who died at the age of twenty-two, emphasizing the dying *amada*'s youth: "¿de qué te quejas, Beatrice d'Este / si tienes un vestido hecho de oro?" (vv. 250–51). The image of Beatrice's golden dress may come from the painting *Pala Sforzesca* (c. 1495), in which she wears a dark dress ribboned with gold (Tinagli 61–62). Martínez Fernández also mentions that as Duchess of Milan, her portrait had been painted by Leonardo da Vinci (173)—this allusion strengthens the poem's Italian Renaissance aesthetic.

The following verses continue the motif of music, suggesting that the *amada* has performed in concerts ("todos te miraban," v. 103). At this point, however, not even music can bring her out of the depression caused by illness. Here the speaker describes his beloved as a musical instrument:

3. Colinas was translating the works of Italian Romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi during this period and some elements from the life of Leopardi are reflected in Colinas's poem: Leopardi's fiancée died of tuberculosis at a young age (like Simonetta Vespucci and the *amada*) and the poet himself had both physical and psychological problems ("Leopardi, G."). Like Colinas, Leopardi was both a poet and translator.

no eras feliz entonces, yo diría,
 después de los conciertos, yo diría
 que tu piel era suave como un cetro,
 como un cetro preciada y dura y firme,
 qué caja de viola todo el vientre . . .
 yo diría
 que un órgano sonaba por tus venas. (vv. 96–102)

Music, a representation of passion and life, loses its power just like the *amada*. Here the phrase “si llorabas” is repeated six times, dominating and negating any positive connotations from the music. This sorrowful refrain reminds us repeatedly of the pain that the lovers have suffered. “Si llorabas” also demonstrates the *amada*'s fragile mental state. The next stanza, written between parentheses, reinforces this idea with the image of a swan, “bulbo de nieve y lluvia y música,” whose head has been shattered (v. 152). Woman and music are connected in the images of the instruments above; yet she is also linked to the swan through shared beauty and a tragic death: “cisne mío, mi juventud dichosa / expirando a los pies de Donizetti” (vv. 156–57). The reference to Gaetano Donizetti alludes to the main setting of the love story, the northern Italian city of Bergamo (*Gaetano*).

According to Rozas, the first stanza appearing between parentheses (eight) marks the turning point from illness to death (2). The intense storm described in this stanza symbolizes the last agony before the calm of death takes over:

(mil ramas tronchó el viento en la espesura,
 ramas de pinos, de manzanos, de álamos,
 mórbidos frutos, mazos de rosales,
 tronchó estatuas dejando cada fuente
 repleta de agua verde y azufrosa,
 arrancó campanillas y parterres,

el viento abrió ventanas en lo negro
 y un torbellino de perfumes agrios,
 un huracán de flores machacadas, . . .
 y después de la lluvia violenta, . . .
 se llenaron de estrellas los tejados,
 tembló la fría luna en cada charca,
 un violín amordazó la noche,
 en Bérnago, después de la tormenta. (vv. 122–30, 134, 139–42)

The *tormenta* destroys Bergamo's natural beauty, and the sound of a violin, likely a funereal melody, covers the town afterwards as if to protect it. In addition to marking the transition from illness to death, the storm also symbolizes the speaker's psychological anguish at knowing that he will lose his beloved. A symbol of destructive force, the storm additionally represents the violence that the disease has done to the *amada's* body through images of foul water and bitter clouds, of broken statues and crushed flowers. This storm of emotion and pain ends with a sad and profound calm, the "fría luna" trembling, traumatized, above.

The first person speaker continues, and references to the seasons re-emerge as he refers to his own present environment:

si me vieras ahora junto al fuego,
 penetrado de ti, de tu memoria,
 hay tanta nieve fuera y sin embargo
 aún pasa por mi mente. (vv. 158–161)

This reference to winter is multi-faceted, referring to the speaker's old age and his depressed emotional state. In spite of this, the speaker finds himself pierced by happy memories, "cuando la flor llegaba a los almendros" (v. 175). The *flor de*

almendro represents the love and life shared by the young couple (spring). At the beginning of their relationship, the flower is blooming, but ends when: "llamaron a la puerta, cuando abrí / sobre la escarcha había una flor de almendro, / la enterraron bajo un manzano enorme" (vv. 264–66). Rozas suggests that this is the point when the speaker learns of the *amada's* death (27).

The verses between the blossoming and the death of the flower (the *amada*), contain images of increased violence. These images clearly portray the illness:

hay tanta nieve fuera y sin embargo
 no me distraen . . .
 ni la gallina muerta en el sendero
 esta noche pasada, ni los cerdos,
 ni sus entrañas rojas goteando
 sobre la nieve, sangre tan violenta,
 pero me llega otro recuerdo, tengo
 un recuerdo de sangre más valioso,
 y qué dulce y qué triste recordarlo (vv. 179, 186–92)

"Esta noche pasada" and the use of the present tense in this stanza indicate that the speaker is not remembering the past in this stanza, but considering his present surroundings. These images, the "gallina muerta" and the "entrañas rojas" dripping on the snow, remind him of the past and will lead him back to recounting memories in the past tense. The past haunts him in the present, affecting the perception of his surroundings—yet they do not "distract" him from his task of remembering. These last images of nature slaughtered lead us to the last days of the *amada's* life ("un recuerdo de sangre más valioso") which, according to Rozas's reading, take place in "un sanatorio de jóvenes tuberculosos [. . . en el que las]

muchachas, en vez de tomar champagne y de divertirse, lo que hacen es “beber” las notas de Chopin. (Recuerden que Chopin fue tuberculoso)” (27). They listen to music while waiting for death, a frequent visitor: “cada noche llegaba la visita / de la Muerte con rostros diferentes” (vv. 221–22). Finally, the stanza ends with an image of the *amada*’s funeral: “ataúd blanco para una dama triste” (v. 231).

The *amada* is irremediably “triste” as her physical health deteriorates—as mentioned above, she is in a state of depression from which she will never recover. Stanza eleven illustrates her state of mind and the speaker’s last attempts to reach her (again, the order of events is not linear because they are memories):

ven, pájaro enjaulado, veo un poco
de mí posado en tus dos ojos mínimos,
ven pájaro llegado con la lluvia,
déjame que me mire, casi dos
negrísimas cabezas de alfileres
son tus ojos y quiero verme en ellos,
hecho para la Muerte cantas menos
mientras me entregas tardes abrasadas,
quisiera apresurarme, tienes todo
lo que perdí en tus ojos, concentrado,
lucha el sueño y la muerte en esta estancia,
luchan quince estaciones en mis ojos,
mis últimos recuerdos, mis ensueños. (vv. 234–45)

Here the speaker refers to his *amada* as a “pájaro enjaulado” in the sanatorium. He attempts to communicate with her one last time before she dies, but she is mentally too far gone. A spark of recognition—“veo un poco de mí posado en tus dos ojos”—offers one last hope, but he knows that her destiny is

to die: she is "hech[a] para la Muerte" (v. 239). His bird sings less because she knows her fate—music represents life and passion, but these have slipped away. Finally, the speaker's "últimos recuerdos" ("la muerte") and his "ensueños" struggle to dominate his thoughts—ultimately the fantasies prevail.

The speaker's fantasies manifest in the last stanza of the second section of the poem (twelve), from which the poem and its book take their shared name:

¿recuerdas aún la historia del sepulcro?
 entre el mar y las selvas de Tarquinia
 alguien abrió el sepulcro de un guerrero
 oculto desde el día de su muerte . . .
 entraba el aire y todo se mutaba
 en polvo negro y sacro que no hedía,
 se derrumbó la curva de aquel pecho,
 el cerco de la boca, la alta frente,
 la enlutecida noche de los ojos, . . .
 (primavera en Tarquinia sepultada). (vv. 271–74, 281–85, 292)

This story is the central metaphor for the death of the *amada* and for death in general. The story of the *guerrero* (warrior) is symbolic of the process of decay and ruin, and the fragility of memory faced with death and time. Disintegrating when exposed to the air, the warrior's remains are proof that time will not preserve anyone's memory. The following stanza describes how grave robbers violate the sanctity of the tomb, searching for gold. Rozas comments:

Si este hermoso guerrero ha muerto hace tiempo (y su tumba ha sido profanada y expoliada . . .); si la naturaleza también rompe con sus tormentas a la naturaleza; si la iglesia está saqueada y destrozada; si las fuentes están maniatadas y amordazadas;

si naturaleza, vida, historia, belleza; si todo muere; si todo es preceder . . . ¿qué mejor contexto existe para que el poeta comprenda que la muerte de su amor, que la muerte de ella es normal, y que todo es así de preceder? (28)

But Rozas's theory is not entirely accurate—for the speaker, even in this destructive world, his *amada's* death is a great tragedy. Her death is the *culmination* of all the destruction in his world, not merely a “normal” occurrence within it. While time can promote healing, in this poem Colinas characterizes it as a factor that contributes to the eternal destruction of beauty and life.

The story of the warrior's tomb leads into the last part of the poem, which Rozas describes as a flashback in time, but which I believe to be the speaker's fantasies—after her death all he has are memories and fantasies of what might have been. Unfortunately, his daydreams, like his memories, are permeated with similar images of death and destruction, and the same sense of inevitability. The most realistic couplet in perhaps the entire poem is: “estás allí, remota y entrevista, / enterrada en la tarde de septiembre” (vv. 322–23). Following this statement, the speaker begins his fantasy, “te recuerdo . . .” (v. 326), imagining that she is alive: “si posara en tus venas una mano / sentiría la noche y sus campanas”; and in this fantasy, the lovers will die *together*:

si me sueñas, si esperas, te hallaré . . .
 morir contigo en esta tarde única
 cantando en las murallas sonrosadas
 por las luces más frías del invierno. (vv. 333, 336–38)

The last three stanzas, all part of the fantasy, are mini-narrative within the poem: the two lovers arrive on Torcello,

a Venetian island. Here the *amada* speaks for the first and only time, in parentheses: "(antes de que se hundan estas islas / —dijiste—has de cantar su pesadumbre, / su belleza, sus sueños enterrados)" (vv. 376–78). She, an illusion, commands him to write, "cantar" as a poet, the *historia* of this sinking island. The island is a symbol, like the story of the warrior, of death, ruin, and the infirmity of memory. The inevitable flood that will take over the island represents the process of time, which has the power to erase all recollection. The story of the island is also *their* story, the story of a ruined relationship, the *amada's* failed health and mind, and his "sueños enterrados," the dreams that he had to bury with her. On the island, the lovers watch the last boat leave, never to return: "vimos partir la última nave, / era el nuestro un suicidio acariciante" (vv. 390–91). In his fantasy, they decide to die together, waiting for the water to finally flood the entire island, "toda la isla nuestra" (v. 404). At first, this fantasy is "un infinito gozo," their world surrounded by "una música / hecha con silencio de la mar" (vv. 400–401). In the last stanza, however, perhaps due to the lack of music (associated with the *amada*), the speaker realizes that he is alone on the island (in the world), and must ultimately face the reality of his sorrow and solitude:

aquí nos trae el mar los peces muertos
 y no hay más vida que la de las olas
 estallando en la noche de las grutas, . . .
 el huracán arrancará geranios,
 jamás llegará nadie a este lugar,
 jamás llegará nadie a este lugar
 y las gaviotas me darán tristeza. (vv. 4411–13, 4423–26)

Colinas's novel *Larga carta a Francesca* was published in 1986, eleven years after *Sepulcro en Tarquinia*. The plot has

two courses: a third-person omniscient narrative in which the protagonist, Jano, lives the events that occur at a resort in the Balkans, and, within that plot, the first-person narrative related through a letter, the “*larga carta a Francesca*,” in which the narrator-protagonist writes his and Francesca’s history from meeting to separation. The novel tells the story of Jano, a Spaniard who was living in exile for political reasons, and who continues to live outside of his country even though his reason for leaving is no longer valid. “*La muerte del tirano*”—referring to Francisco Franco, though no name is mentioned—has nullified the threat (10). He had lived in Italy during the exile, where he met Francesca, but was obliged to leave her and is staying at the resort, with uncertain plans for the future. At the resort, he knows the owners’ daughter, Betina, who symbolizes Francesca as Jano begins to fall in love with her. His devotion to Francesca and his desire to travel east to Greece, however, terminate this relationship at its start. Jano ultimately resolves his emotional conflicts by writing the long letter to Francesca, and begins his journey toward Greece, *la luz*, and knowledge.

Both *Larga carta* and “*Sepulcro en Tarquinia*” are narrated from the perspective of a man telling, or remembering, the story of himself and his lover. While the novel relates a clear narrative, it is difficult to perceive this clearly within the poem. I propose that the third-person narrative course of the novel, in which Jano is only a character and not a narrator, serves as the framework for the “*larga carta*,” and that the content of this letter—the love story between Jano and Francesca—is the narrative that parallels that of “*Sepulcro en Tarquinia*.” More simply, the letter written by the protagonist within *Larga carta a Francesca* is based on the same love story that the speaker and his *amada* share in “*Sepulcro*.” Both

the poem and the *carta* within the novel are written in first person, directed to the speaker's (or writer's) lover, *tú*. We can connect many elements between the poem and novel, giving poetic elements context in the narrative—reading *Larga carta* virtually obliges readers to consider "Sepulcro" in the context of the novel. The following paragraphs will show how *Larga carta* parallels "Sepulcro"—how Colinas rewrites his poem into a novel with a different ending.

The difference in genre between the two works does not divide them significantly. Colinas is above all a poet, and this is often apparent in his prose. The prose he uses to carry forward the third-person course of the plot is simple, direct, and practical—it relates events. His descriptive prose, however, is poetry. Many verses from "Sepulcro en Tarquinia" can be directly related to phrases from the novel, and within these there often exist similar or identical images. Linking the two works linguistically and aesthetically (with images), is another way in which Colinas communicates his intention to rewrite the story within "Sepulcro." For example, in the novel Jano stays in a resort by a lake, described in this passage: "Las aguas del lago estaban inmóviles, como muertas . . . y tres cisnes hundían sus picos en ellas" (*Larga carta* 14). Its corresponding image in "Sepulcro" connects the scenery of the two works: "un cisne flota en música de Liszt, / hunde su pico rojo en agua oscura" (vv. 143–44). We will explore more of these images in relation to several coinciding themes in the following pages, but first a few words on structure.

Larga carta a Francesca is made up of ten chapters divided into three sections entitled "El arte," "El deseo," and "La enfermedad," its three essential themes. These three elements also form a verse of "Sepulcro" found in a stanza that,

according to J. M. Rozas, describes the institution for those sick with tuberculosis, where the ill *amada* is staying (2):

ellos tenían libros en las manos
 que nunca terminaban de leer,
 les inquietaban las estrellas húmedas
 y el grito de los cisnes en el lago
 les anunciaba el paso de la muerte,
la enfermedad y el Arte y el deseo. (v. 211–16, emphasis mine)

These three terms will appear together again in the novel, when the protagonist describes a poem that he is trying to finish. Though both works are united by a love story, love is not one of these central themes because the lovers separate very early in “Sepulcro,” and even before the narrative begins in *Larga carta*. Rozas believes that the love story is of minor importance compared to Colinas’s references to art and ruin (2). It can be argued, however, that the love story is essential because it is the *single uniting factor* within a poem that Rozas has labeled “irracional” (2). The story gives context to the rapid and intense succession of images and allusions in the poem.

The women introduced in both “Sepulcro en Tarquinia” and *Larga carta a Francesca* share numerous characteristics—both are directly connected with *la enfermedad, el arte, y el deseo*, for example. Colinas unites them both through language and images, making it probable, if not certain, that the central feminine figures in the two works are one and the same woman. In addition, Colinas does not develop the personalities of these two women, but presents them as abstract figures defined by the world around them. First let us mention the physical or aesthetic attributes given to each woman, their most apparent characteristics, to which Colinas

dedicates ample attention. We discussed above how the speaker describes the *amada* of "Sepulcro" through a reference to one of Botticelli's portraits of Simonetta Vespucci. In *Larga carta*, Jano compares Francesca to this same figure and several other paintings: one by the Lorenzetti brothers (21), da Vinci's portrait of Isabel d'Este (54, the poem references Beatrice d'Este, Isabel's sister), and several other works mentioned in the passage below. Near the beginning of the letter, he writes: "Te identifico, Francesca, con rasgos, colores, notas musicales, con los ojos, bocas, cinturas o manos de otras muchachas" (*Larga carta* 22). This passage exemplifies how the author abstracts this character through exterior elements. Later, Jano remembers how he contemplated her face before they met:

Pronto me olvidé del cartel de Leonardo [da Vinci] y solamente me interesé por tu perfil. A veces, difícilmente podía verte el rostro, aquel rostro que más tarde, al contemplarlo con precisión, nada tenía que ver con el de Isabel d'Este, sino más bien con un rostro de Botticelli. El juego continuaba. ¿Se asemejaba tu rostro al de algunas de las mujeres de *La Primavera*? ¿No era quizá el de *La nascita de Venere* . . .? Acabé convenciéndome . . . de que tu rostro asemejaba enormemente a una de las jóvenes de *Venere e le tre Grazie* . . . aquella Gracia que ladeaba levemente su cabeza hacia la izquierda con la misma y delicada inclinación que la Venus que surgía del mar verdoso . . . Entonces quedó establecido que eras un personaje de Botticelli y no de Leonardo. (*Larga carta* 54–55)

In this passage, Jano contemplates only Francesca's face, just as the speaker does in the poem—this identical manner of examining her connects the male characters and also recalls the verse: "aquella virgen / de Botticelli con tu rostro" (v. 73–74). The *amada* is definitively associated with the figure

of Botticelli's portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, the woman who inspired Botticelli's portrayals of Venus and other feminine figures in his paintings. Francesca is therefore physically similar to the *amada*, for both are compared to the same image of Simonetta, and both are "personaje[s] de Botticelli."

"La enfermedad," the title of the third part of *Larga carta* and an essential element in the poem as well, is another key factor that ties the women, and the works, together. I mentioned earlier that the illness suffered by the *amada* in "Sepulcro" is likely tuberculosis. In the novel, however, it is Francesca's sister Patrizia who dies of a pulmonary disease, falling ill after a great storm during which she falls (or jumps) into the lake:

Quizá . . . ella había perdido el equilibrio [. . . pero] mientras transportábamos su cuerpo aterido y empapado, hubo una muchacha que señaló que tu hermana se había arrojado al agua de forma absolutamente premeditada. (*Larga carta* 38)

Jano writes that it is originally *pulmonía* (pneumonia) from which Patrizia suffers, however, pneumonia can potentially cause the onset of tuberculosis (*Larga carta* 39; "Pneumonia"). Later Patrizia's illness becomes more serious: "Una noche la sangre brotó de sus labios. No tardamos en saber que la sangre provenía de sus dos pulmones" (*Larga carta* 116). This passage coincides with the image of the "flores de la sangre" on the lips of the *amada* in the poem (v. 218). Coughing blood is a symptom of tuberculosis, not of pneumonia—we know that Patrizia's illness has worsened ("Tuberculosis"). It is with this narrative difference, attributing the fatal illness not to Jano's beloved but to her sister, that Colinas begins to craft a different ending for his novel.

Furthermore, the passage that Rozas describes in "Sepulcro" as a scene in a sanatorium, an institution for those with tuberculosis, repeats itself in the novel. In the following two passages, the coinciding images are italicized:

las coronas de *rosas* se pudrían
 sobre sus *frentes de marfil y fiebre*,
 ellos tenían *libros en las manos*
 que *nunca terminaban de leer*,
 les inquietaban las estrellas húmedas
 y el grito de los cisnes en el lago
 les anunciaba el paso de la muerte, . . .
 cada noche *llegaba la visita*
de la Muerte con rostros diferentes, . . .
ataúd blanco para una dama triste.
 (vv. 209–15, 221–22, 231; emphasis mine)

No volvió la sangre a los labios de Patrizia, pero *la muerte comenzó a empapar* . . . a través de *una fiebre intensa* y constante, cada objeto de la habitación del sanatorio: *la novela recién aparecida* . . . *que ella no logró abrir*, un *ramo de flores* que no llegamos a cambiar . . . Allí . . . *dejamos sepultada a Patrizia.* (*Larga carta* 117, emphasis mine)

The many similarities in these passages link the narratives of the two works. Colinas, however, shifts the fatal illness to Francesca's sister so that the novel may end with the contrast between Francesca's mental (not physical) illness, *la sinrazón*, and Jano's choice to follow the path of *la razón* (reason). Francesca's death by tuberculosis would not permit this important contrast. Both the *amada* of the poem and Francesca's sister show signs of physical *and mental* illness. Tuberculosis is nonetheless a uniting factor between the two works, and it is significant that Patrizia's illness initiates the

mental illness that Francesca suffers after her sister's death. Jano writes to Francesca: "Tus melodías parecían luchar una y mil veces –de forma obsesiva– con la enfermedad de Patrizia" (39). The decline in Francesca's desire to sing (she is a student of "el Canto") throughout the novel coincides with her mental decline and the decline in the harmony of her music (as in the verse: "hecho para la Muerte cantas menos," v. 240). Colinas utilizes music as a symbol of harmony and happiness, but it, too, breaks down as Jano and Francesca's relationship deteriorates.

The destructive image of the *tormenta* (storm) is another symbol that unites the poem and novel. There are frequent storms in the third-person narrative and the letter in *Larga carta*. Their descriptions often coincide quite closely to the description of the great storm in "Sepulcro": "mil ramas tronchó el viento en la espesura," the first verse of the stanza describing the storm, is followed by images of broken trees, destroyed statues and fountains, crushed flowers, and intense rains (see excerpt above, vv. 122–34). In his *carta*, Jano describes the storm during which Patrizia falls into the water and its aftereffects, which are similar to the imagery in the poem:

Llovió con fuerza [. . . y después . . .] El suelo del jardín estaba sembrado de hojas y de *ramas tronchadas* por la tormenta. Al acercarme al banco observé [que alguien] *había cercenado la cabeza de la Venus*, que descansaba sobre las losas del suelo *destrozada*, pero conservando aún no sé qué dolorido y bello rictus en sus labios borrosos. (*Larga carta* 38–39, emphasis mine)

Just before the stanza describing the storm in the poem appears the image of "sangre en aquel busto destrozado"

(another reference to tuberculosis, v. 116); in a later stanza, there is also a reference to "la Venus mutilada del jardín," an image identical to the one above (v. 194). All the destroyed statues, in both works, especially those associated with Venus, signify the destruction of art and beauty—parallel to the decline of Francesca's music and also to her death.

Jano, who sees Francesca as a work of art—a statue, a painting, a melody—naturally creates metaphors for her death through the destruction of art; the speaker of "Sepulcro" makes the same comparisons. The storm in the poem then leads to an aftermath of death and hopelessness, while the storms in *Larga carta* ultimately lead Jano to long for the opposite of what they signify. For example, the storm signifies the anguish that the *amada's* illness causes them both—it is the storm before the calm of death and the aftermath of destruction. In the novel, the storm symbolizes a similar emotional torment before Patrizia's death. It also coincides with Jano's inner struggle—his desire to travel East versus his attachment to Francesca and their past in Italy (and his relationship with Betina, who is for Jano a symbol of Francesca). The very image of the storm carries connotations of violence, darkness, and danger. This is the opposite of *la luz* (light, Jano's ultimate goal), which for him means knowledge, safety, and harmony.

In "Sepulcro," the tragic illness of the *amada* ultimately results in her death. The novel, however, alters this ending: it ends with the mental illness and confinement of Francesca, but not her death. The protagonist then, after a long process of grief and conflicting desires (to stay faithful to Francesca's memory and go to Greece, or to stay and pursue a relationship with Betina), chooses to travel to Greece, to take the path of *la luz*, the symbol of knowledge. Colinas writes a different

ending for *Larga carta* because, at the time he wrote it (1985), he had been studying early Eastern thought and integrating it into his own philosophy and writing, as confirmed in this excerpt from an interview between Colinas and a group of students in 1991:

A partir de los últimos diez años . . . me he aproximado al pensamiento primitivo oriental. El interés que siempre he sentido hacia la mística se ha desbordado al contacto con ese pensamiento, y también al contacto con la mística originaria, la que llega del Oriente. (Trabanco 53)

I propose that it was this new philosophical perspective that caused Colinas to rewrite the story of “Sepulcro” with a new ending, a hopeful conclusion in which the protagonist chooses knowledge over pain and uncertainty. As Colinas himself writes: “Hay momentos decisivos en la vida, como aquéllos en los que el ser humano se *inicia*, en que el ser *re-nace* a otro conocimiento y a otra *luz*” (*Anthropos* 4, emphasis is the author’s). Both Colinas and his semi-autobiographical character Jano have experienced this rebirth to another way of thinking.

Colinas rewrote “Sepulcro” as a *novel* because he could not destroy (by re-writing) or discredit (by changing the ending) the exquisite poem that he had perfected. This re-write took place because with *Larga carta* Colinas has moved on from a previous philosophy (though he does integrate earlier aesthetics into this later work in order to connect them). We see his shift to Eastern thought reflected in the novel’s ending, when Jano decides to follow “la luz del conocimiento,” instead of the path of love which holds doubt and pain. “Sepulcro” concludes without light, nor any symbol of hope; its very title conveys the finality of death, the darkness of a tomb: “vimos

partir sin luz la última nave, / era el nuestro un suicidio acariciante" (vv. 390–91). In *Larga carta*, sending the letter originally meant for Francesca to Betina is symbolic of Jano's decision to continue to Greece, and of his (and Colinas's) changed vision for the future. "Sepulcro en Tarquinia," on the other hand, offers a future filled with isolation and sorrow; the poem's last word is *tristeza* (sadness or sorrow): "nadie llegará a este lugar / y las gaviotas me darán tristeza" (vv. 425–26). Colinas's change in philosophy caused him to reconsider the melancholy love story found in "Sepulcro." He reshaped it so that there was no need for a tragic ending. The path of *la luz* that Jano elects emphasizes a self-love that will lead to knowledge, fulfillment, and contentment:

Había sabido por fin quién era la verdadera destinataria de la larga carta. Ahora también conocía cuál era la ruta que tenía que elegir: la ruta de la luz del conocimiento, la única luz que podía dar plenitud sin fin, sin amenazas, a su recién segado amor por Betina: la única luz que podía seguir dando sentido y razón a la sinrazón de Francesca. Echó a andar de prisa hacia donde el sol —un resplandor blanco en un cielo blanco— se esforzaba por salir, hacia Grecia. (*Larga carta* 188–89)

In the above passage we can "see" how darkness and despair have turned to light. Colinas's interest in Taoism (starting in the early 1980s) began to lead him toward this new philosophy. Taoism (*el taoísmo*) was developed from the teachings of Lao Tzu and his disciple Chuang Tzu starting in the 6th century, B.C. (Jensen 220). In his article "Rhetorical Emphases of Taoism," J. Jensen writes:

The Tao, 'the Way,' seeks that simple, inner peace and contentment which comes from sensing the higher realities behind life,

from entering into a harmonious relationship with not only other people but also with Nature and Heaven, with the eternal and infinite origin and end of life. (220)

Larga carta is a work that demonstrates an evolution, in which we see the author juxtaposing his previous philosophy with one developing in that moment. As Taoism is “the Way” for its followers, Jano allegorically chooses to follow *el camino de la luz*, the path of light. He decides to leave the anguish of his past for a peaceful future. Again, it is due to this new way of contemplating the world that Colinas rewrites the ending of “Sepulcro en Tarquinia” in *Larga carta a Francesca*. *La luz* is a symbol of this new-found knowledge, one that will lead to a harmonic, peaceful existence—ideas frequently emphasized Colinas’s later works. In *Cerca de la Montaña Kumgang* (2007), for example, Colinas shows us that his journey toward *la luz* continues:

Al fondo de nuestras vidas –en Oriente o en Salamanca . . .–, siempre hay un único afán, un deseo de ser y de estar en el mundo . . ., un afán de escribir siendo y de ser escribiendo. Al final siempre la misma meta para los humanos: el mismo afán de *conocer*. (7)

He comments on the obligation of the poet to write “[para] ir más allá,” and that the essential humanism of poetry allows it to be a saving art, one that may “testimoniar en favor de un tipo de vida más pacífica y plena, más favorable para una paz universal y duradera” (*Kumgang* 12). The idea of harmony, *la armonía*, has characterized much of Colinas’s poetry and other works from the 1980s through the present. The transformations (from poem to novel) of death into life, darkness into light, and of sadness into a quest for knowledge

offer us the hope of change. As a writer not just of Spanish poetry, but of universal literature in an increasingly globalized world, Antonio Colinas's works exemplify the potential for a peace that currently escapes us.

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