

INTRODUCCIÓN A UNA PRIMERA EDICIÓN DE
“EL NACIMIENTO DEL YO”
de Tótila Álbort

On his 75th year—after an apoplexy from which he never recovered the full use of the right side of his body—Tótila Albert managed to write with a trembling hand (in a piece of silver lined paper taken from a cigarette pack):

“I have been a sculptor, poet and musician
of myself
for the glory of God.”

Since he had in fact dedicated many of his days to sculpture and at least as many of his nights to poetry, the first of his statements requires no further commentary. Yet the phrase “of myself” does, for what he meant by being a poet of oneself went beyond Whitman’s meaning in “songs of myself”, for the Spanish word *de* that I have approximately translated as “of” is more ambiguous, and T also meant with it something equivalent to the German *aus*: “out of”. And just as in Spanish “de” is used in reference to the material out of which something is constituted (as in saying that something is made *out of* wood), the title of Tótila’s epic not only indicates that its subject is the birth *of* selfhood (litterally, “the birth of the I”) but that the birth in question constitutes the expression or *manifestation* of a deep identity, and thus saying that he has been a “poet of himself” refers not only to his having taken himself as subject, but to a process through which singing his experience of the word has involved a sort of emanation and cristalization of such deep identity.

Though T’s work glorifies individual experience, the depth of experience that it expresses is one where the voice of the individual becomes the voice of all. Also, T’s experience of surrender to inspiration led him after the time of his epic—when his poetry seemed to flow directly from Beethoven’s music (and later that of other German composers) to one where he no longer felt its author. It is to this that he referred with his expression “musician of myself”: a process of spontaneous music decodification that was certainly the outcome of his “inner journey” and involved a special grasp of musical language, but was experienced by him as a *dictation* from the music of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and others—and in which every syllable was in correspondence to a note. The last of his poem cycles—Der Schreiber Gottes—addresses specifically this experience of permeability to inspiration, but already in his epic it may be said that the birth of I-hood, in the foreground of the poem, arises from a background of continuing psychological death.

I imagine that when T wrote “for the glory of God” he was greeting Bach across the centuries, for he was aware of how Bach in signing his works added the words *solí Deo gloria*. If for Bach composing was devotionla activity, not only was for T the writing of poetry a sacred process, but he thought of his epic as a sacred extension of his body.

It is not of many artists that it may be said, as of Bach or T., that their art was a form of divine service. To such poets who, rising above the condition of mere writers of

verse, became men of knowledge, the romans gave the name of *vates*, and the celts *bards*.

Yet T, who had descended into hell and completed the great “journey of the soul”, was not only invisible to his contemporaries as a sage or mystic, but even unknown as a poet. For when he began writing, in Berlin, during the early thirties, his intense dedication to his work involved a spontaneous retreat into a sort of alchemical incubation tower, during which his activity was only known to a few friends. Later, after his return to his native Chile upon the onset of WWII, he needed to return to sculpture as a means of survival; and when, after recovering from the traumatic impact of his sudden uprooting and the interruption of his work, he turned to poetry again, this continued to be written in German, a language foreign to his country of birth and even hated for its present association with the Nazis.

For his contemporaries, then, both in Germany and in Chile, T. was only known as a sculptor; though he used to say that sculpture was his profession and poetry his vocation.

I remember T as a frequent guest in my mother’s musical soirées during my childhood, but I never had a personal conversation with him till, during my last school year, our paths literally crossed in Santiago’s beautiful Parque Forestal, next to which he lived—on the top floor of a seven storey building. We became friends on that very day, and after a year or two his wife Ruth proposed that I joined them for dinner every Tuesday in the small apartment, which included a terrace in which T had placed many trees.

Though in view of our age difference T might have been my grandfather and he related to me as a friend, T became a spiritual father to me, and some days before his death he said to me: “now you will be T, and I leave.” To my response, to the effect that I had hardly understood his “message of the Three” and had not experienced that death/rebirth of which he spoke, he replied in turn that it was just a matter of time. He undoubtedly knew that the his seed was in me, and that my mind was a good soil.

Since he regarded me his closest friend and his main spiritual sucesor, he decided to make me the legal inheritor of his poetry, and asked me to bring a lawyer to him for this purpose. When I brought Mr Hernán Vera to him, already in his last year of life, T explained to us that he had often wondered what still remained for him to do in life, since he continued among the living after his paralysis at the age of 72 had put an end to his work. Now the answer had become clear to him: he had neglected to think about the future of his work.

It was appropriate for Beethoven to have said that his work “would take care of itself”—he explained—for Beethoven knew full well how it had triumphed already in his lifetime (and his funeral, only comparable to that of an Emperor, would demonstrate how right he was); but T felt that his own work needed to be protected, since it would not be appreciated before a very long time. He had even toyed with doing as Goethe had imagined he might do with his second Faust manuscript: wrapping it up and writing over the package: “open a hundred years after my death”. Seemingly, however, T’s “hundred years”—more metaphoric than literal—have turned out to be 37; a very appropriate number, by the way, since it turns out to be that of his age when he was

seized by poetic inspiration and entered the illuminative stage of his path. It is also fitting—and I hope auspicious—that as I write this, 37 years after his death, I happen to be 72—the age at which T had expected to die and at which his writing ended.

I never hastened to embark on the divulgation of T's work, trusting that when the time came I would know it. During the three years after his death in 1967 it was clear that the time was *not* right, for I was absorbed by a new life in a new country after becoming a California resident. Then came the time of my pilgrimage, when nothing seemed as important as my spiritual quest, and there followed the years of what I may call my personal odyssey, when after a spiritual awakening I continued to navigate the tempestuous waters of an ongoing transformation. Lastly, I was distracted by an intense dedication to teaching what I had learnt during such transformation—at a time that coincided with the ripeness of my own life's fruit.

In the meantime, however, I have improved on my German and learnt to understand T much better through my own development and experience. Also, I have spoken about T in my books, thus opening the way to the eventual reception of his published work. I first explained his social philosophy in *The End of Patriarchy* (about to reappear now in an edition updated to our global age), and then I dedicated to his epic the last chapter in *Songs of Enlightenment*".

Already during the seventies I conceived of publishig (with the support of Dr Lola Hoffman and Lama Govinda) an anthology that would have included some cantos of the epic—in spite of T's refusal, when he was invited to publish in magazines or othe anthologies, to separate these from the integral context of the whole work. The project never came to materialize, and I am glad about it.

Later my German friend and colleague Sebastian Elsaesser became interested in the project and offered me his help, but after years of not hearing from him I learned that the rapid deterioration of his eyesight had become a serious obstacle to his intention. Later, a Brazilian healer was able to do for him what German eye doctors could not, yet problems with his spine became an additional distraction. Only twenty years later he asked his secretary—Cristina Riedel—to create an electronic file of the text, and this was the first stege in the production of the book that now appears. Since the authors hanwritten original of the Epos was lost in Germany during the war, errors were apparent in the existing typescripts and also minor discrepancies between those in possession of T and at the Basel University library, a revision of the text seemed imperative, and some five further years elapsed before this was accomplished, only recently, by Cristina Bruno.

After meeting Cristina on occasion of a talk that her husband invited me to give under the auspices of Fundación Tomillo, in Madrid, we felt a kinship that was stimulated, among other things, by our common enthusiasm for Celibidache—her friend and teacher—and I gave her a copy of my book *Songs of Enlightenment*. After reading about T in its last chapter she wrote me to offer her help toward the publication of *Die Geburt aus dem Ich*, and to make a long story short I'll just say that I cannot help imagining T to be very happy with the gift of of her dedicated work, carried out in loving communion with his poetry and his spirit.

Aside from expressing my own gratefulness to Cristina Riedel and to Cristina Bruno for the re-typing and correction of T's five volumes, and for Sebastian Elsaesser for having set the process in motion, I think that this is the right place for expressing my

gratitude to the late Dr. Lola Hoffman Jacobi, who in her old age and near blindness dedicated innumerable hours to helping me understand T's German.

Just as a blessing is given to a sea-vessel when it is launched, I would like to bring blessings on this Epos as it sets out on its journey into the "noosphere". Yet at the same time I feel assured that blessings will be there, for what a waste of creation it would be for life to engender such a magnificent fruit and then to abandon it to the forces of destruction! And I cannot fail to see in Totila's heritage a blessing to mankind that stretching way beyond his life – as he himself never doubted.

T. lived an ordinary bourgeois life with his family during the daytime, when he also taught a few students or sculpted at his private academy. Then, after returning home to a time of warm sharing with his wife and daughter over dinner, he would retire to his room and spend the whole night writing. He would lose any sense of time there, and when he finished he sometimes felt as if he were returning to earth from a different world. His zeal in devoting himself to his inspiration -night after night, year after year even to the very limits of his physical endurance seemed to me a miracle of energy only explainable through the intervention of higher power.

T saw himself as the bearer of an ancient epic heritage and as an inheritor of Goethe, Hoelderlin and Nietzsche; but also as a forerunner whose time had not quite yet come—a new age which, notwithstanding much talk, has still not begun. I imagine that he day will come when he comes to be seen as somebody comparable to Dante—who was at the same time the late flower of the the Middle Ages and the seed of the future Renaissance.

While the prophets of the Judeo-Christian world spoke of "The Kingdom of God," Totila spoke of "Das Dreimal Unser"—*The Kingdom of the Three*, we might translate, innovating on the biblical expression in light of his vision.

I have often said that the Zeitgeist of the "new age" is shamanic, and that a new shamanism has been at the core of the Human Potential movement and its academic cristalizations—such as humanistic and trans-personal psychologies. It is fitting, then, that Totila was a shaman of that most refined sort that we call a bard or prophet-- who through his inspired Cantos not only healed himself but came to make the healing of the world his main concern. I pray that it may be with him as with King Totila of the Ostrogoths (after whom he was called), whose armies triumphed in battle because they were aware of his presence riding his amongst them—though it was only his dead body, still erect on the saddle, that they saw. And I hope that in spite of having been condemned by his contemporaries to seeming social uselessness, Totila Albert's influence may yet bring us victory in what, far from being any longer his lonely battle against patriarchy, is coming into public view as a necessary struggle of humankind at a time of deep crisis.

We live in a stormy age, and one does not often read poetry in such bad weather. Bringing Totila's work into the world just now feels to me a bit like placing it in a fragile basket in a stream—while hoping that Providence will deliver its precious and vulnerable content into good hands. And yet, I feel that the time for publishing is right—not only because I trust in the organic deveopment of things but because I feel that discharging the responsabiity vested upon me as an inheritor of T's poetry is

something like a tangible echo of a greater but subtler responsibility that I am only beginning to assume—of carrying forward his mission.

Fortunately, the distribution of texts today no longer makes it necessary that a thick book be purchased in a bookstore at the considerable cost necessary to finance its publishing expenditure; for a new means of communication—involving the computer and the internet—now makes it possible to reach many more people than those who visit the poetry sections of bookstores. Because of this, only a limited paper edition of this book will be printed, mainly for subscribers and libraries, while it will be soon possible for anybody to download the text from a web-page

To the images of blessing an ocean liner or a fragile basket in a stream, then, it would be appropriate to mentally superimpose—as an analogy to travel in cyberspace—the science-fiction image of a spaceship that might move in innumerable directions at the same time; an image conveying none of the precariousness of publishing poetry at the turn of the millennium. Thus, though I continue to think that this publication, like Totila's life itself, is ahead of its time, I cannot help appreciating how the new technology is serendipitously coming to its assistance—for the benefit of future readers and of the very evolution of culture.

I finish this introduction, then, by appealing to the heavenly and earthly powers so that their magic may bring *Die Geburt aus dem Ich* to those who can receive Totila's spirit, so that the transmission of his work be assured and his influence can come into the world.