

The Immigrant (not simply Spanish) Purview and Poetics of George Santayana

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They have all been uprooted from their several soils and ancestries and plunged together into one vortex, whirling irresistibly in a space otherwise quite empty. To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career.¹

Historians of philosophy are well aware of George Santayana's Spanish origin, even if Santayana's legacy amongst literary historians has dwindled. His father Agustín was a lawyer who served in the Spanish colonial service, becoming governor of the Philippine island of Batang in 1845. When Agustín's predecessor in this post, José Borrás y Bofarull, died, he left behind a daughter. Josefina first met Agustín 'when they were the only two Europeans on [this] little island in the Philippines,'² although she would soon leave for Manila. There she would marry the New England merchant George Sturgis, who fathered five children with Josefina before dying suddenly in 'the midst of a disastrous business venture.'³ Josefina carried through on her promise to her late husband to raise the children in Boston (three survived infancy), but she returned to Spain for holiday where she was reacquainted with Agustín. They married in 1861. Agustín moved with Josefina from Madrid to Ávila, and in 1863, their son Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana was born. Six years later, Josefina decided to go back to Massachusetts to raise the Sturgis children in Boston once more, leaving Agustín and Jorge to remain in Spain until the senior Santayana, under professional demands and a tight budget, could no longer attend to the boy's needs. At the age of eight, Jorge crossed the Atlantic, his name was Anglicised, and he became American – a series of 'accidents' that proved to be 'the necessary background of Santayana's career.'⁴

We have heard this story before, time and again. Many critics have needed it as premise for making claims about Santayana's work, characterising the circumstances of his Spanish inheritance with extensive nuance. His condition as a native Spaniard and his accompanying cultural allegiances have been read with consistency across his oeuvre because

his many creations, in a wide variety of genres, proved to be remarkably of a piece. Each was a different way of organizing and expressing the same philosophical vision. For him, literature and cultural criticism were philosophy pursued by other means.⁵

While this may be true – that his materialist scepticism pervades all of his writing – Santayana's Spanish identity is not as consistent and ubiquitous a trait throughout his work. In this essay, I intend to give more focus on the condition of Santayana's immigrant experience as a category of identity in itself, one that can detach from the umbilical tie to Spain and settle into a sovereign foundation for his ethos as a critic, philosopher, poet, and theorist. It is much more than the 'in-

¹ George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920) 168.

² Malcolm Cowley, 'Santayana at Harvard,' *New Republic* 110 (1944) 88.

³ Cowley 88.

⁴ Cowley 90.

⁵ Wilfred McClay, 'Remembering Santayana,' *Wilson Quarterly* 25.3 (2001) 50.

*betweenness*⁶ that Kryzysztof Piotr Skowroński has suggested elsewhere. Wilfred McClay has deduced that like ‘any immigrant, [Santayana] had a complex perspective on American society, defined by multiple frames of reference,’⁷ a statement that is accurate up to the point where Santayana’s perspective is characterised as multiplicitous and not singular. As Bharati Mukherjee has argued,

scholars have not recognised ‘literature of the immigrant experience’ as distinct in its aims, scope, and linguistic dexterity from postcolonial literature, literature of globalization, or diasporic literature, and have misapplied literary theories that are relevant to literatures of colonial damage, nationbuilding, dispersal, exile, voluntary expatriation, and cultural and economic globalization but are inappropriate templates for a literature that centers on the nuanced process of *rehousement* after the trauma of forced or voluntary *unhousement*.⁸

Santayana’s famous scepticism, his distrust, one could even say (and many have) his heresy routinely have been attributed to the cultural predilections of his Spanish character, but these dominant and consistent traits of his record of thought could be more soundly traced to the premise of his status as an American immigrant.

An ‘accidental foreignness’

In Massachusetts, the young Santayana struggled to assimilate into New England society. Once Santayana made the voyage to Boston, his parents separated within months, Agustín finding Boston inhospitable and returning to Ávila for good. ‘For the next decade, he would know his father only through letters.’⁹ Santayana recalled his father as a man who ‘lived when necessary and almost by preference like the poor, without the least comfort, variety, or entertainment. He was bred in poverty, not in the standard poverty, so to speak, of the hereditary working classes, but in the cramped genteel poverty of those who find themselves poorer than they were, or than they have to seem.’¹⁰ This was the life of an official who needed to be dignified in manner and respected in public but was equally restricted by the modest pay that accompanied a government post in an evanescent empire. Agustín was raised as one of twelve children, certainly in poorer conditions than those of his son, but nevertheless Santayana recalls one of his family’s favourite meals as garlic soup with bread: a broth made of garlic, oil, and water, accompanied by toast, however stale.¹¹ The move to Boston was a difficult transition for the unadventurous and quiet Santayana,¹² and it took a psychic strain. But learning and improving his English, he believed, was all the more benefited by his being a foreigner,¹³ and he was indeed successful in attaining a native comprehension of English, even being commended by teachers on his oratory.¹⁴ Mastering English was a way, perhaps the chief way, for Santayana to find social acceptance as a child.

⁶ Kryzysztof Piotr Skowroński, ‘Santayana and the Problem of Americanization,’ *Transactions of the Charles S Peirce Society* 40.1 (2004) 108.

⁷ McClay 52.

⁸ Bharati Mukherjee, ‘Immigrant Writing: Changing the Contours of a National Literature,’ *American Literary History* 23.3 (2011) 683.

⁹ McClay 52.

¹⁰ George Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography, Critical Edition*, ed. William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) 14.

¹¹ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 14.

¹² Santayana, *Persons and Places* 21.

¹³ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 134.

¹⁴ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 134-5.

In his autobiography, Santayana claims that his foreignness bred a sensitivity to speculations and emotions that sharpened his powers of observation, a response, if not a reflex, to the fact that, as he put it, ‘the world around me was utterly undigestible.’¹⁵ Santayana describes the memory of his childhood in America, from the years of eight to sixteen, as ‘blank’, with a smattering of ‘stray images’ that had ‘no sense of any consecutive interest, any affections or sorrows.’ He adds, ‘And yet I know that my feelings in those years were intense, that I was solitary and unhappy, out of humour with everything that surrounded me.’¹⁶ Santayana was a lonely child, in large part because of his ethnic otherness in nineteenth-century America. He was, of course, a native speaker of Spanish and never rescinded his Spanish citizenship; his Spanish nationality escaped neither him nor his critics. In 1935, Q.D. Leavis highlighted ‘the essentially Latin quality of Santayana’s criticism’¹⁷ as among his finest gifts. Thirty years later, James Ballowe, writing for the *American Quarterly*, still claimed that Santayana’s view of civilisation was ‘dictated by his allegiance to the Mediterranean-Catholic ethos.’¹⁸

It would seem that Santayana himself confirmed many of these speculations. He believed, ‘my accidental foreignness favoured my spiritual freedom,’¹⁹ not only because he was an immigrant to the US but especially because he was Spanish. His essay, ‘The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy’ (1911), his novel, *The Last Puritan* (1935), and his poetry collection, *A Hermit of Carmel* (1901), are all widely regarded as the writings of (to borrow the title of one of his poems) ‘Spain in America,’ voicing disillusionment with an inherited Anglo ethos – a dispassionate duty to render static the once fluid dynamics of American social hierarchy – that is wholly counter to the colonial experiment started by Spain in the Americas. For Santayana, his keen philosophical individualism was as much grounded in his heritage as it was in Emerson, Spinoza, or Merleau-Ponty. Of his native culture, Santayana claimed, ‘the Spaniard is an individualist ... socially, externally, he distrusts everything and everybody, even his priests and his kings.’²⁰ We recognise this persona time and again in Santayana’s work, as in this key passage from *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900):

religious doctrines would do well to withdraw their pretension to be dealing with matters of fact. That pretension is not only the source of the conflicts of religion with science and of the vain and bitter controversies of sects; it is also the cause of the impurity and incoherence of religion in the soul, when it seeks its sanctions in the sphere of reality, and forgets that its proper concern is to express the ideal.²¹

But when attributing identarian traits to Santayana’s brand of scepticism, why do contemporary scholars remain inarticulate on the agency of immigrant discourse (as was Santayana) when we have, in the intervening century, developed a more expansive critical vocabulary to examine immigrant psychology and literature? Cognitive psychologists today understand that immigrants’ ‘choices may be constrained by the orientations of the receiving society,’²² and when immigrants value their cultural heritage, the social options are for either *separation*,

¹⁵ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 539.

¹⁶ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 145.

¹⁷ Q. D. Leavis, ‘The Critical Writings of George Santayana,’ *Scrutiny* 4 (1935) 281.

¹⁸ James Ballowe, ‘*The Last Puritan* and the Failure in American Culture,’ *American Quarterly* 18 (1966) 123-135.

¹⁹ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 539.

²⁰ Santayana, *Persons and Places* 24.

²¹ George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Scribner’s, 1900) v-vi.

²² J. W. Berry, ‘A Psychology of Immigration,’ *Journal of Social Issues* 57.3 (2001) 618.

integration, or *marginalisation*,²³ all potential foundations for sceptical thought. Immigrants of any national origin shoulder an array of ‘different types of threat, such as realistic threat, social identity threat, and symbolic threats’²⁴ that lead to defensive behaviours and, by extension, distrustfulness, cynicism, or disapproval. The assertion that ‘he distrusts ... his priests and his kings’ is not one that can be proven to be a uniquely Spanish sentiment but does signal an attitude consistent with a prevailing immigrant mindset. Leavis, Ballowe, Irving Singer, and many other scholars have assessed the importance of his Spanishness, granting importance to this side of Santayana in understanding the roots and nuances of his philosophy. However, I argue, it is not his simply his Spanishness but his *immigrantness* that is key to understanding the basis of his philosophical worldview.

It is not his allegiance to one nationality or another that impacted his purview so heavily but rather the cultural trauma of immigration, a stress accompanied by a linguistic disorientation that Santayana transformed into a veritable calling: to ‘say plausibly in English as many un-English things as possible.’²⁵ Santayana’s ‘deep-felt detachment from the world,’²⁶ ‘his unflinching naturalistic reduction,’²⁷ and his ethical relativism²⁸ are all aspects of a worldview cultivated from the cultural circumstances of his immigration to the US:

Perhaps more than any modern philosopher, one has to account for where Santayana has come from, since he, unlike many philosophers, goes out of his way to tell us that his origins are many, not one. Perhaps, further, if one wanted to indulge in a bit of psycho-biography, one might say that Santayana’s past and the influences on him are so important to him and so evident in his work, because he, in some sense, never had a home, not in Ávila, not in Boston, not in the hotels of Paris and Rome. Hence, it seems significant that he thought of the world as his host, himself a guest in its many possible rooms.²⁹

As Christopher Perricone explains, Santayana lived with few encumbrances later in life, especially after his retirement from Harvard in 1912 when he moved to Europe, never to return to the US. His detached worldview in his philosophy is akin to his extraordinary social self-isolation in his maturity – the result of a second migration, to Italy. However, Perricone’s mention of Santayana’s ‘past’ ought to include not only his childhood in Spain, his adulthood in Boston, and his retirement in continental Europe, but also a consideration of his experience as an immigrant. Santayana’s remarkable ‘ability to understand difference without judgment,’³⁰ known perhaps as his greatest philosophical skill, was by his own admission a talent coaxed forth from his experience with the cognitive dissonance of immigration.

²³ Berry 619.

²⁴ John F. Dovidio and Victoria M. Esses, ‘Immigrants and Immigration: Advancing the Psychological Perspective,’ *Journal of Social Issues* 57.3 (2001) 380.

²⁵ George Santayana, ‘A Brief History of My Opinions,’ *Contemporary American Philosophy*, ed. George P. Adams and William Pepperell Montague (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930) 242.

²⁶ Cesar García, ‘Walter Lippmann and George Santayana: A Shared Vision of Society and Public Opinion,’ *The Journal of American Culture* 29.2 (2006) 183.

²⁷ Jude P. Dougherty, ‘On The Amphibolous Character of Existence: Matter and its Negation in the Thought of George Santayana,’ *The Journal of Metaphysics* 64 (2010) 362.

²⁸ Christopher Perricone, ‘George Santayana’s Roots in Ancient Rome,’ *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37.2 (2001) 230.

²⁹ Perricone 223-4.

³⁰ Todd Cronan, ‘Merleau-Ponty, Santayana and the Paradoxes of Animal Faith,’ *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18.3 (2010) 489.

‘An echo of crude experience’

In spite of his outsider status, Santayana surely had a leading role to play in the Modernist turn from the decadence of Transcendentalism.³¹ In 1882, when he began as a freshman a career at Harvard that would last thirty years, the intellectual presence of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who died in April of that year, loomed large in Cambridge and Boston, and Santayana’s philosophy is in many ways defined by its privileging of an Emersonian individualism. It is well-known that Santayana was a philosopher without a creed. He put an almost religious faith in two ideals of being, experience and reason, which, per their unpredictable function, precluded audience with any established philosophical school. His theories on poetry, in their organisation and privileging of ideas, demonstrate ascension, up through the layers of abstraction that inhabit great poetry, reason being the upper crust before the atmosphere of ideals. He classified the elements of poetry as four: sensuousness in utterance and measure; beauty in imagery; intensity and immediacy of experience; and exercise of the rational imagination.³² When writing his own poems, Santayana committed to these principles, as can be seen in these stanzas from ‘Avila’:

What fate has cast me on a tide of time
Careless of joy and covetous of gold,
What force compelled to weave the pensive rhyme
When loves are mean, and faith and honour old,

When riches crown in vain men’s sordid lives,
And learning chokes a mind of base degree?
What wingèd spirit rises from their hives?
What heart, revolting, ventures to be free?³³

In these lines, end rhymes are paired with alliterative beginnings, and the dactylic shift in the second line adds cadence to the regular iambic pentameter. Diction is forceful, the nouns consistently weighty, and the composition of interrogatives leads the reader to inquiry. Enriching language within the confines of traditional form, Santayana’s poems always take on the largest of questions, a philosopher’s questions. The end, of course, in Santayana is always the personal faculty of reason; his five-volume masterwork, *The Life of Reason* (1905-1906), makes this point unequivocally, as once noted by his fellow Spanish-American critic, Ernest Fenollosa:

Professor Santayana of Harvard University has just been writing some strong books about reason in the world, in society and in art. Many people when they hear of reason suppose that you mean reason-*ing*, that is, disputation and argument; which at best is only reason in our brains, and at worst is reason prostituted to personal pride and whim. People think that there is only rational matter in the world, hard little lumps of stuff that are merely inert. But this is pure error. These little pillets, if they exist at all, are whirling about and shooting bomb-like at each other at inconceivable rates of speed, interlocking into groups for mazy dances more precise than a chronometer, and obeying complex laws of higher mathematics with a much more incredible instinct than a spider in planning the segments

³¹ Lois Hughson, *Thresholds of Reality: George Santayana and Modernist Poetics* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1977) ix.

³² Philip Blair Rice, ‘George Santayana: The Philosopher as Poet,’ *Critical Essays on George Santayana*, ed. Kenneth M. Price and Robert C. Leitz, III (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991) 42-52.

³³ George Santayana, *A Hermit of Carmel, And Other Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901) 96.

of its web. We are forced to admit that there is reason everywhere in nature; and that is why we are enabled to study her.³⁴

Fenollosa is astute in noting Santayana's proposition that 'there is reason everywhere in nature'; it is central to his philosophy, a conviction endemic to all of his writings across genres. As deep as Santayana's impact was on philosophy and Modernist poetics, he was a writer of the first order, and his legacy is one of a perfectly rounded intellectual. In fact, it is hard to find another American writer so successful in so many ventures. In 1957, Lionel Trilling judged Santayana's collected letters to be of 'classic importance: the best since Keats's'.³⁵ Irving Singer, critiquing Santayana's literary essays, considered him a 'rare genius who can combine good philosophy with good literary criticism.'³⁶ 'Reviewing in 1944 the first volume of George Santayana's autobiography, *Persons and Places*, Edmund Wilson noted that it belongs to a class which includes very few examples. "Few first-rate writers," he observed, "have done stories of their lives which are among their major productions.'" Wilson considered its only peers to be those of Yeats, Henry Adams, and Marcel Proust.³⁷

Even Santayana's only novel, *The Last Puritan*, was a major success. Like *Persons and Places*, *The Last Puritan* was a Book-of-the-Month Club bestseller, nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Conrad Aiken, writing for the *New Republic*, ranked the book among the novels of Fielding and Richardson, calling Santayana's achievement 'the most nearly satisfactory analysis ... of the New England character' in American literature.³⁸ This recognition was achieved by Santayana portraying the Puritan character of Oliver through cross-cultural comparison, as lacking the vitality and brio of his Italian-blooded cousin Mario. Santayana believed that 'Americans are all the better for being a mixture of several nationalities' because the so-called 'purer races seem to' be 'missing some of the ordinary attributes of humanity.'³⁹ A comparable theme runs through Santayana's novel. Like the dual protagonists, Oliver and Mario, Santayana's worldview was rooted in two provincial cultures, Boston and Madrid, which he combined into a unique brand of cosmopolitanism.⁴⁰ His story was fresh, his prose sharp, and his sentiment so resonant that at a time when Edith Wharton, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Pearl Buck, James Hilton, and John Steinbeck were still living and writing in America, the *New York Herald Tribune* called Santayana 'the greatest contemporary master of English prose.'⁴¹

The Columbia philosopher Corliss Lamont once asserted that Santayana 'writes philosophy more beautifully than any other thinker since Plato,'⁴² and Ira Cardiff ranks Santayana's oeuvre among 'the finer productions of the race.'⁴³ Some of Santayana's keenest moments really are, in a literal sense, breathtaking. As one who maintained that poetry was of divine significance,

³⁴ Ernest Fenollosa, 'The Bases of Art Education,' in *Ernest Francisco Fenollosa: Published Writings in English*, by Ernest Fenollosa, ed. Seiichi Yamaguchi (Tokyo: Edition Synapse, 2009) vol. 3, 230.

³⁵ Lionel Trilling, *A Gathering of Fugitives* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957) 153.

³⁶ Irving Singer, *Essays in Literary Criticism of George Santayana* (New York: Scribner's, 1956) ix.

³⁷ Richard C. Lyon, introduction to *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography, Critical Edition*, by George Santayana, ed. William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) xv.

³⁸ Conrad Aiken, 'The New England Animal,' *New Republic* 85 (1935) 372.

³⁹ George Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Critical Edition*, 5 volumes, ed. William G. Holzberger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) vol. 5, 1:5-6.

⁴⁰ Cowley 88, 90.

⁴¹ Ellen Glasgow, 'George Santayana Writes a "Novel,"' *New York Herald Tribune* (2 February, 1936) 1.

⁴² Qtd. in Ira D. Cardiff, introduction to *The Wisdom of George Santayana*, by George Santayana, ed. Ira D. Cardiff (New York: Philosophical Library, 1964) xiv.

⁴³ Qtd. in Cardiff xiii.

Santayana wrote: ‘Primitive thought has the form of poetry and the function of prose’;⁴⁴ ‘The function of history is to lend materials to politics and to poetry’;⁴⁵ ‘Poetry is an attenuation, a rehandling, an echo of crude experience; it is itself a theoretic vision of things at arm’s length.’⁴⁶ Every sentence in Santayana’s philosophy is pithy enough to be the final line of the book, the lyricism of his language is so pervasive. And ever the philosopher with a poet’s spirit,⁴⁷ Santayana was eager to find poetry’s purpose, which he summarised in his *Little Essays* (1924):

The great function of poetry is precisely this: to repair to the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas, and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures, richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul. Our descent into the elements of our being is then justified by our subsequent freer ascent toward its goal; we revert to sense only to find food for reason; we destroy conventions only to construct ideals.⁴⁸

Every summary for Santayana was a new one; he was a philosopher without a creed, and his conjectures in his prolific writings always read like observations, constantly renewed, and as such always shifting, taking every chance for surprise. Wallace Stevens, a devotee of Santayana’s, was similarly a poet of surprise; his widely anthologised poem ‘The Emperor of Ice-Cream’ (1923) has come to signpost this reputation. But a perhaps even more popular Stevens poem, ‘To An Old Philosopher In Rome’ (1954) – the old philosopher of the poem being Santayana – is well-regarded as a portal into Stevens’ poetic sensibility, the voice of the infinite possibilities that are perpetually missed and lost forever in a human condition bound by what Santayana called ‘animal spirit.’ The poem begins:

On the threshold of heaven, the figures in the street
Become the figures of heaven, the majestic movement
Of men growing small in the distances of space,
Singing, with smaller and still smaller sound,
Unintelligible absolution and an end –⁴⁹

The poem is homage to Santayana, the man he was and his life’s work, spoken in reverent tones and reflecting through Santayana’s dialectical mode of experience and reason. Stevens imagines how, in facing death,

Two parallels become one, a perspective, of which
Men are part both in the inch and in the mile
...
So that we feel, in this illumined large
The veritable small.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason; Or, The Phases of Human Progress*, 5 volumes (New York: Scribner’s, 1905-6) vol. 1, 49.

⁴⁵ Santayana, *The Life of Reason* vol. 5, 66.

⁴⁶ George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1910) 124.

⁴⁷ Vincent Colapietro, ‘A Poet’s Philosopher,’ *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 45.4 (2009) 552, 567.

⁴⁸ George Santayana, *Little Essays*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith (New York: Scribner’s, 1924) 140.

⁴⁹ Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1955) 508.

⁵⁰ Stevens 508-509.

The idea is that wisdom is rooted in the intensity of abstraction that the mind can make out of a sober regard of the seamless, unprioritised, unclassified world that the senses apprehend. This is the defining trait of Santayana's philosophical attitude, as he was foremost a naturalist and a materialist.⁵¹ It is an idea of renewal, and, moreover, of finding the pleasures of keeping the mind attuned to a register of perpetual renewal, and while one might be inclined to take this as the poet-as-maker, I would argue that it is equally the poet-as-immigrant. The image of 'men growing small in the distances of space' toward an '[u]nintelligible absolution,' in the context of a tribute, glosses the foundation of Santayana's immigrant/philosophical purview. Displaying such a marriage of immigrant ethos and philosophical reflection, Santayana's essay 'The Intellectual Temper of the Age' (1913) describes its era as 'saturated with the slow upward filtration of a new spirit, of an emancipated, atheistic, international democracy,' and he projected an attitude deeply shared by Stevens' poem in suggesting that 'a philosopher in our day, conscious both of the old life and of the new, might repeat what Goethe said of his successive love affairs – that it is sweet to see the moon rise while the sun is still mildly shining.'⁵²

Santayana's charm lies between his gravity and his humour, for he was equally serious and optimistic, and his penchant for relating a scene or experience or text to its own primacy – in other words, its goodness and its freedom – had a penetrating allure for many writers besides Stevens. The most famous case is T.S. Eliot. The way Ezra Pound filed Ernest Fenollosa's 'ideogram' into the key trope of his poetic method, so Eliot defined his guiding aesthetic principle as the 'objective correlative', the establishment of an effective situation in which particulars can resonate into an emotion: in verse, the objectified image, in a self-contained way, pertains to emotion determined by context, but carries no symbolic weight.⁵³ An example can be found in the second stanza from Eliot's poem 'A Cooking Egg':

Daguerreotypes and silhouettes,
Her grandfather and great great aunts,
Supported on the mantelpiece,
*An Invitation to the Dance.*⁵⁴

The first line presents pictures, copies of people suddenly identified as far older relatives stocked above a fireplace – the pictures are essentially headstones. And in the stanza's final line, '*Invitation to the Dance*' not only shapes the rhythm of the line but also makes the phrase specific, and real: a reference to Carl Maria von Weber's 1819 composition for piano, famous for being the first known concert waltz ever written, and such connotations seep into the nostalgic décor of the scene. Nothing in the stanza is truly symbolic; it is not a symbol of sorrow and loneliness but, through imagery, an experience of sorrow and loneliness: a moment, objectified in a scenario but detached from symbolic prescription, that correlates to an emotion. In his essay 'Santayana and Eliot's "Objective Correlative"' (1957), B.R. McElderry argues a point that to my knowledge has yet to be discredited: that although the American poet Washington Allston actually coined the same term sometime around 1840, Eliot was unaware of

⁵¹ Cronan 489, 503.

⁵² George Santayana, *The Winds of Doctrine* (New York: Scribner's, 1913) 2.

⁵³ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951) 144-5.

⁵⁴ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1930) 38.

Allston's usage, and that the provenance of the Eliotic objective correlative principle lies in Santayana's philosophy.⁵⁵

But to what extent was this concept derived from Santayana's reconciliation of English and Spanish? Julio Marzán, in *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams* (1994), and Jonathan Cohen, in his introduction to Williams's translations collected in *By Word of Mouth: Poems from the Spanish, 1916-1959* (2011), have both extensively argued that Williams's reading in Spanish, and his relationships with his Puerto Rican mother and grandmother, deeply motivated his technical innovations of poetry – his Imagism, his Objectivism, the 'variable foot,' and specific conceits in verse – in ways that blended English and Spanish modes into new poetics of the first-generation American. In the case of Santayana, who was more proficient in Spanish than Williams ever was, we can observe a similar play. The identified source of Eliot's objective correlative is Santayana's essay, 'The Elements and Function of Poetry,' first published in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900), and in its key passage, we can see two distinctly Spanish aspects rendered into English discourse:

The various forms of love and hate are only possible in society, and to imagine occasions in which these feelings may manifest all their inward vitality is the poet's function, – one in which he follows the fancy of every child, who puffs himself out in his day-dreams into an endless variety of heroes and lovers. The thrilling adventures which he craves demand an appropriate theatre; the glorious emotions with which he bubbles over must at all hazards find or feign their *correlative objects*.⁵⁶

The first is the quixotic, in the most original sense of the word, characterising the poet's function in thoroughly Cervantic terms. In short, the poet is an escapist who 'day-dreams ... thrilling adventures' with the unrelenting imagination of a child. But the second is more subtle and a matter of translation. The Spanish word for 'correlative' is a cognate, *correlativo*, which is synonymous with the English in all meanings (corresponding, reciprocal, supplemental) except for one: *correlativo* also can mean 'consecutive.' The Spanish term adds a level of coherence to the definition of the term, a sense of sustained spatial-temporal congruity that the English word lacks. To add *consecutiveness* to the range of implications of the term 'correlative' expands its potential: it includes the idea of a chain of events to the ideas of context, connectivity, and interrelation that the word denotes in English, thereby allowing for causation but also *process*. Santayana's choice of adjective, an English term with a more extensively defined Spanish cognate, expands the connotations of this coinage and its implications in Eliot's poetics, for we recall that Santayana – ever the immigrant – wished to 'say plausibly in English as many un-English things as possible.'

'La letra con sangre entra'

As substantial an influence as Santayana had on Stevens and Eliot, he might have had a comparable influence on Pound had Santayana not been so initially resistant to Pound's advances. In his article, 'George Santayana and Ezra Pound' (1982), John McCormick explains how, 'As was his habit, Pound took it upon himself to move in on Santayana, not so frontally as on others, but [still] vigorously.'⁵⁷ In the late 1930s and into the 1940s, Pound was tracking

⁵⁵ B. R. McElderry, Jr., 'Santayana and Eliot's "Objective Correlative,"' *Boston University Studies in English* 3 (1957) 179-181.

⁵⁶ George Santayana, *The Essential Santayana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 275-6.

⁵⁷ John McCormick, 'George Santayana and Ezra Pound,' *American Literature* 54.3 (1982) 414.

Santayana. Whether trying to contact Santayana directly or through his literary executor Daniel Cory,

Pound's various approaches to Santayana concealed guile. What he was after was Santayana's collaboration with Eliot and him in a 'new Paideuma,' a book in which the three would set about the task of reforming American education. Pound had indeed sold the idea to Eliot, and Eliot had got a sympathetic response from his editorial board at Faber and Faber ... Pound tried to convince Santayana of the opportunity before him by saying that the book would be a good place in which to answer critics of his philosophy, and a forum from which to display his philosophy before readers who normally might never encounter it.⁵⁸

Santayana's response was a resounding no. Gawking at the impossible idealism at the heart of such a project, Santayana, the unrelenting critic of sentimental illusions,⁵⁹ replied: 'a Spanish proverb says that is impossible without the rod, without blood – *la letra con sangre entra* – and I don't like blood. And it is so with all Utopias.'⁶⁰ From the very beginning of Pound's pursuit of the old philosopher, Santayana unflinchingly kept the iconoclast at arm's length with unequivocal pronouncements such as, 'for heaven's sake, dear Cory, do stop Ezra Pound from sending me his book' and 'I abhor all connection with important and distinguished people.'⁶¹ In time, Santayana would soften his prickly intolerance of Pound and his incessant social networking by reading, annotating, and responding to some of Pound's work, but his distrustfulness never totally left his consideration of the poet. As one who found comfort in the Classical mentality of Latin, for 'Latin was ... old Spanish' and thus its 'roots were all my roots,'⁶² Santayana disliked Pound's pet project of the Chinese ideogram as a medium for poetry. In a letter to Pound from 1940, Santayana offers his impression that Chinese poets are 'only highly refined prosaic sensualists,' concluding that 'I am floundering in your philosophy, badly but not unpleasantly.'⁶³ Dissatisfied with Pound's Fenollosan approach to new poetry, Santayana could not privilege a poetics of particulars over the nuances of inflection and complexities of abstraction endemic to Classical literature and its Metaphysical and Romantic offshoots. He preferred what was closer to Latin, Spanish, and English, staying true to his own culture – the circumstance of his immigrant experience. While Santayana did share sympathies with Pound over matters concerning 'the loss of liberal democracies' rights because of the sudden emergence of the masses in the public sphere,' their writings seem at odds over what Santayana believed to be 'the relativity of ethical values.'⁶⁴ Unlike Pound the bard-cum-encyclopedist who saw the archetype of the 'factive personality' in every part of the world where he looked, Santayana had no faith in such coherence of ambition. In discoursing on individualism, Santayana would distinguish the halves of human life as *the spirit* and *the psyche*, or the 'essence ... to think' and 'a *mode* of substance.'⁶⁵ Their combined aspiration is to live in the

⁵⁸ McCormick 420.

⁵⁹ Cronan 495.

⁶⁰ Qtd. in McCormick 421.

⁶¹ Daniel Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years: A Portrait with Letters* (New York: George Braziller, 1963) 188.

⁶² Santayana, *Persons and Places* 156.

⁶³ Qtd. in McCormick 418.

⁶⁴ García 186, 188.

⁶⁵ George Santayana, *Realms of Being* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1972) 331-2.

world. In short, Santayana believed that the philosopher ‘lives by thinking, and his one perpetual emotion is that this world, with himself in it, should be the strange world which it is.’⁶⁶

His ultimate rejection of Poundian poetics, coupled with his measurable influence on Wallace Stevens, situates Santayana more on the Stevens side of the Modernist divide. Marjorie Perloff explains, in her chapter ‘Pound/Stevens: Whose Era?,’ that Hugh Kenner and Harold Bloom, both writing in the 1970s, established antithetical perspectives on aesthetics and allegiances (Kenner arguing for Pound, Bloom for Stevens) in the debate over dominant characteristics of Modernist poetry, noting that ‘the split goes deep, and its very existence raises ... central questions about the meaning of Modernism – indeed about the meaning of poetry itself in current literary history and theory.’⁶⁷ Comparable to the depth of Fenollosa’s influence on Pound, Santayana’s influence on Stevens – as well as Eliot – covers a large field of Modernist poetics, and in part begins to show a pervasive influence of immigrant experience on the intellectual emergence and development of American Modernist poetry. Santayana’s extreme cynicism and distrust of doctrine was a product of his experience as an immigrant to the US, a set of circumstances that gave birth to a philosophical purview that by extension dictated much of what poets believed in the twentieth century.

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⁶⁶ George Santayana, *Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923) xiii.

⁶⁷ Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1996) 2.