

Apocalypse as Catalyst of Hope for a New World in Homero Aridjis' *La leyenda de los soles*

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Abstract

Homero Aridjis' novel, *La leyenda de los soles* (1993), uses some of the elements of the neo-police genre to make a criticism on the corruption in different areas such as in politics, society, the environment and spiritual life of Mexico City in 2027. It also reflects the complicity between the citizens and the corruption itself. In this paper I suggest that Aridjis builds his novel with the objective of getting us out of the apathy and to encourage us to change our society. The novel's end is an optimistic one, since the dark forces destroy each other and not by direct intervention of a hero—in this case Juan de Cóngora—. The corrupt world ends, and the hope of a new world arises in the horizon: the sixth sun. This ending offers the opportunity to build a new, better society, with renewed values. We can say that the apocalypse in *La leyenda de los soles* is the catalyst of hope.

Key Words: police novel, environment, Mexican literature, apocalypse, corruption.

HOMERO ARIDIJS' 1993 NOVEL *La leyenda de los soles* presents an apocalyptic vision of Mexico City in 2027. Environmental disasters, from water shortages to earthquakes, have transformed Mexico City's urban landscape into a scene of nightmarish destruction. The physical destruction of the city is mirrored by the moral depravity of a society plagued by pedophilia. The citizens of Mexico City cannot look to the government for assistance, because the government itself is the perpetrator of this physical and moral destruction of civilization. The president of the country, Licenciado José Huitzilopochtli Urbina, is actually the infamous Tláloc, violator and murderer of Mexico City's girls (Aridjis 116). Urbina's power is second only to General Carlos Tezcatlipoca. As the real political force in the city, it is Tezcatlipoca who promotes and sponsors violence against citizens and the environment. To magnify the power of the government, Aridjis borrows from Aztec mythology to grant supernatural status to his governmental officials, raising them from being mere mortals to attaining the status of evil gods in the Aztec pantheon.

Surprisingly, the Mexican public remains largely indifferent to the environmental and societal degradation that occurs throughout the novel. The protagonist of *La leyenda de los soles*, Juan de Góngora, is as curiously apathetic as his fellow citizens. However he, unlike his fellow citizens, is charged with saving the world for the future by provoking the apocalypse now. To accomplish this task, he must find and withhold a precious page of the Codex of the Suns from General Tezcatlipoca, who represents both the head of the Mexican military and the head of the Aztec world of the Fifth Sun. Tezcatlipoca's continued power depends upon his possession of this page. If Tezcatlipoca remains in power, *tzitzimime*, evil demons, will come up from the underworld to devour all humans, and the world will remain stuck in the Fifth Sun forever. If, however, Tezcatlipoca does not have this page, the world as it exists will come to an end and be reborn into the Sixth Sun. Juan de Góngora vacillates in his task. Tezcatlipoca is killed only by accident by a pair of corrupt detectives. The world comes to an end, and the Sixth Sun rises. Aridjis holds out hope for his readers that the world of the Sixth Sun holds the potential of fostering a gentler, kinder future for humankind.

This novel has received little critical attention during the past decade and a half. Only four critical articles and one doctoral dissertation that study the novel are listed in the MLA International Bibliography.¹ Of those five entries, two critics have crafted distinctly different readings of the text. James Joseph López asserts that an apocalypse plot necessarily involves the history of humanity, and therefore he offers his interpretation of Aridjis' work as a historical novel. Miguel López, on the other hand, considers how the novel fits

into the ecocritical category, a subtype of the dystopian novel (175). Although both articles center on classifying the novel as belonging to one particular genre, James Joseph López acknowledges that Aridjis' work contains elements of many genres: "It is at the same time an apocalyptic and utopic novel, futuristic and historical, ecological and *policíacal*, urban and mythological, encompassing romance and comedy" (49).² Many of Miguel López's examples that support his ecocritical reading also can be read as criticism of the Mexican state's abuse of power.

While both López and López's readings provide valuable insights for the interpretation of the novel, several elements of the plot suggest it may best be read through the lenses of the *neopolicíacal* genre. These elements include the sharp social criticism of State power featured in the novel, the protagonist's conflicted relationship with his status as a hero, and the debate over utopia versus dystopia. Therefore, this essay seeks to contribute to the critical dialogue on *La leyenda de los soles* by considering the novel as an example of the *neopolicíacal* genre. The theoretical framework for this essay will be comprised of a summary of the history and theory of the *neopolicíaco*, including additional theories of violence, fear and globalization as they pertain to a deeper understanding of the *neopolicíaco*. Insights from these theories will then be applied to a close reading of key scenes in *La leyenda de los soles*.

Several critics have studied the detective novel and its permutations in Latin American fiction, notably Persephone Braham, Ernest Mandel, Ilan Stavans and Ignacio Corona. Braham acknowledges that the detective novel is difficult to define: "Most critics affirm that detective fiction is a product of mass culture, that it is formulaic, and that its nucleus is the

¹ Aridjis is, however, the subject of several articles that focus on his work as a poet and novelist of historical fiction (approximately 44).

² Quotations from critical articles written in Spanish translated into English by author.



reconstruction of events leading to a criminal act" (xii). Ernest Mandel defines the original detective story as a study of "Enigma. The problem is analytical, not social or juridical" (15). Ignacio Corona convincingly argues that the traditional detective novel has many similarities to the utopian novel. Although a crime does occur, the crime only exists to allow the author to demonstrate that all crimes can be resolved and justice can be served. This perfect resolution of conflict appeals to a certain type of reader, according to Ernest Mandel. In his historical study of the crime novel, Mandel cites Walter Benjamin's suggestion that detective stories quell real-life anxieties by replacing them with fictional fears (9). This distraction serves an economic and political function, according to Mandel, by distracting the middle class from any soul-searching that might result in increased political action and decreased economic production (11).

All four of these critics agree that the Latin American detective novel differs from the traditional detective novel in its treatment of social problems. These problems are brought to the forefront of the plot of the Latin American detective novel. Braham and others find the genesis of this social criticism aspect of the genre in the 1968 student massacre in Mexico City (xi). The gravity of this crime, coupled with the government's refusal to acknowledge their culpability in the massacre, propelled Mexican authors towards the detective story as a tool for registering protest against the State.³

The term *neopoliciano*, rather than simply *policiano*, is subject to debate by scholars, as

Corona observes in his article. Proponents of the *neopoliciano* view the 1968 student massacre at Tlateloco and the Mexican government's subsequent mismanagement of justice as the turning point in the importance of social criticism in the detective novel. Proponents of the simple, "*policiano*" title for all detective fiction argue that all detective fiction has always had an element of social criticism and that they do not read further literary distinctions into detective fiction that would justify these stories' classification into two different groups (Corona 183).

Corona, however, makes an additional distinction between the *policiano* and *neopoliciano*. Drawing from Ilan Stavans' study of the hard-boiled detective, he points out that the *neopoliciano* detective is an outsider in society, and perhaps even a bad guy, "un tipo malo" (Corona 183, Stavans 157).⁴ This essay uses the term *neopoliciano* because the novel is written after 1968. Furthermore, there is a scene in the novel that closely parallels the massacre in 1968. When the end of the Fifth Sun is announced, indigenous Mexicans come to the central plaza to celebrate peacefully, but are met with a terrible fate:

Los feroces nacotecas atacaban a hombres, mujeres y niños, los perseguían hasta hacerles daño físico, hasta dejarlos inconscientes en el suelo... Nadie sabía quién había ordenado atacar a la muchedumbre pacífica ni por qué. Lo único que se sabía es que ahora el general Carlos Tezcatlipoca era el presidente de México.

[The fierce nacotecas attacked men, women and children, pursuing them to the point of

³ Stavans makes a fascinating comparison between the detective novel and theater. Historically, theater, such as Golden Age comedias, existed as tools for protesting, albeit obliquely, against the government. In the 20th century, however, "theater is 'too' public and there are some things that cannot be said out loud" but one can put such criticism into an easily accessible mass-market paperback (157).

⁴ This concept of the variable job title of the "bad guy" (as a criminal, detective, victim), is explored in great depth by Ernest Mandel, in his study of the detective story, *Delightful Murder*. Nineteenth century novelists "treated criminals as social nuisances pure and simple", in stark contrast to early modern writers who treated bandits as crusading rebels fighting against feudalism (Mandel 7, 2). The police force emerged in the mid nineteenth century as a way to manage and repress the revolt of the lower classes (Mandel 13).

physical harm, leaving them unconscious on the floor... No one knew who had ordered the attack on the pacific crowd nor why. They only knew that now, General Carlos Tezcatlipoca was the president of Mexico] (Aridjis 161).

Additional elements that make this book a *neopoliciaico* include the sharp social criticism and outsider detective. In *La leyenda de los soles*, the theme of social criticism almost completely subsumes the novel detectivesque elements. The two detective types featured in the story are Juan de Góngora and the Saturno Brothers. The former is an outsider full of doubts, while the other pair is morally corrupt.

The importance of the 1968 student massacre to the development of the *neopoliciaico* explains an important message repeated in many plots in the genre, namely, that the State is the perpetrator of violence against its citizens, or functions as the ignorant accomplice to such crimes by failing to enforce laws and thereby dissuade criminal activity. The advantage of citizenship is found in the government's ability to protect its citizens from harm. States that are incapable of guaranteeing this protection open the floodgates of chaos (Rotker 17). This chaos is exactly what Aridjis describes in his novel: a society in collapse from an intentionally ineffectual government.

Aridjis crafts precise illustrations of this governmental complicity with violence in his descriptions of Urbina and Tezcatlipoca. General Tezcatlipoca rose to power through his work as a drug trafficker "[n]adie supo cómo ni cuándo se hizo general, y si realmente lo era" [no one knew how nor when he became a general, or even if he really was a general] (26). The president himself is the dreaded Tláloc, pedophile and murderer of adolescent girls. One conversation at the beginning of the novel, when Urbina welcomes Tezcatlipoca back from the dead, is particularly striking in its direct acknowledgement of their philosophy of power: "Presidente y general hablaban el

mismo lenguaje de la violencia indirecta. O sea, aquella que perpetran otros sin que ellos metan las manos" [The president and the general spoke the same language of indirect violence: the hands-off kind of violence, perpetrated by others on their behalf] (26). The highest government officials acknowledge their role in the destruction of society through violence, although they do not directly commit violent acts. Instead, Tezcatlipoca and Urbina use the police to do their dirty work.

Examples abound in the novel of police brutality sponsored by the State. When Juan de Góngora and his girlfriend Bernarda Ramírez go to look for her daughter in Ciudad Moctezuma, they are greeted on the highway by a morally reprehensible police block:

En las afueras las unidades eran asaltadas por bandas de policías, policías vestidos de civil, ex-policías, estudiantes de la Academia de Policía, soldados sin uniforme, soldados ebrios con uniforme, agentes judiciales federales, agentes judiciales estatales; quienes, armados con metralletas, granadas, pistolas y cuchillos despojaban a sus compañeros de viaje de su pertenencias y dinero, desviaban el transporte hacia parajes solitarios y violaban a las mujeres jóvenes delante de los otros pasajeros.

[Bands of policemen assaulted the suburbs: plainclothes policemen, ex-police, Police Academy cadets, soldiers out of uniform, drunken soldiers in uniform, *federales*; who, armed with submachine guns, grenades, pistols, and knives, divested their travel companions of their belongings and their money, and diverted vehicular traffic to isolated spots where they raped young women in front of the other passengers] (44).

In this scene, and throughout the novel, the line between police and criminal is blurred. The police are attacking the citizenry, instead of protecting them from criminals.

Shortly after this scene of police brutality, Juan de Góngora and Bernarda are dealt another devastating blow: they miss the abduction of a twelve-year-old girl by just moments. Based on the previous scene, it is not



surprising that her kidnappers are policemen and that the public did nothing to stop her attackers (Aridjis 45). When the police do act in the investigation of these abductions, their sympathies lie with the accused rather than the accuser, as Bernarda explains in her description of her daughter's kidnapping:

Secuestraron a mi hija Ana Violeta, se la llevó El Tlálloc, El Violador del Alba. Esta mañana cuando se dirigía a la escuela Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz la atacó un patrullero enmascarado. Un niño de la calle lo vio llevársela pistola en mano, jalarla de los cabellos. Se lo dijo a un periodista. El niño desapareció después de hablar con la policía. El periodista ahora dice que el niño callejero no le dijo nada, porque nunca existió.

[They kidnapped my daughter, Ana Violeta. She was taken by Tlálloc, the Dawn Rapist. This morning, when she was walking to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz School, a masked patrolman attacked her. A child on the street saw her being dragged away by her hair at gunpoint. The child told this to a journalist, and then he disappeared after talking to the police. The journalist now says that the child told him nothing, because the child never existed] (21).

While it seems incredible that fellow citizens would not act to save children, Ignacio Corona's article on the police novel in Mexico suggests that other factors may drive citizens' lack of action, namely, a sense of hopelessness confirmed through experience. The statistical reality of Mexico City is that "the majority of the population has had to learn to live facing daily impunity and injustice" (Corona 176). Bringing one's accuser to justice rarely results in a conviction and imprisonment. Susan Rotker places the figure of unpunished crime in Mexico at 97 percent (7). Accusing someone of a crime may even result in a vengeance killing, making it wise to stay silent (Corona 176-177). The result of this reality is that "[t]he portrait of daily life in urban Latin America depicts a feeling of generalized defenselessness and the risk of paralysis (the stance that it is 'better to do nothing' in order to avoid danger

or, in the end, because it just isn't worth it)" (Rotker 14).

Néstor García Canclini's meditation on the many catastrophes facing Mexico City, "[i]ntolerable pollution during most of the year, floods and landslides, increases in extreme poverty, a general deterioration of the quality of life, and systematic and uncontrollable violence", leads him to question the propriety of sociologists and anthropologists promoting change (64). Instead, he asks, "'why don't we leave?'" (65). Canclini answers his own question with a quotation of a poem by Efraín Huerta that suggests that indifference is the reason that Mexico City does not become a depopulated ghost town (65).

An element of protest certainly exists in the novel, but it is presented as small and inefficient. For example, when Tezcatlipoca leaves his mansion, there are protestors outside:

Afuera de Los Cedros había protestas por el aumento de los precios de la carne y el huevo, por la escasez de agua, por el cierre de fábricas de detergentes, cemento y plomo en Ciudad Moctezuma, por los desaparecidos políticos en Chiapas, por los periodistas asesinados en Veracruz, por los salarios bajos en Morelos, por un pariente preso en Zacatecas, por un estudiante reprobado en Sinaloa. Razones no faltaban.

[Outside of The Cedars, there were protests over the increase in meat and egg prices, over the lack of water, over the closing of the detergent, cement and lead factories in Ciudad Moctezuma, over the vanished politicians in Chiapas, over the murdered journalists in Veracruz, over the low salaries in Morelos, over an imprisoned relative in Zacatecas, over a flunked student in Sinaloa. There was no shortage of reasons for protests] (55).

Carlos Monsiváis, in his essay, takes note of the recent rise in protests against violence, but argues that the Mexican melodramatic feeling of fatalism—that all Mexicans are destined to become victims of crime—shared by both the State and the individual, hampers any serious attempt to limit crime (242-243). Monsiváis

blames his countrymen for allowing crime to remain in society because it fulfills what he considers their need for melodrama.

Perhaps with Monsiváis' condemnation in mind, Aridjis communicates in his novel that the citizens united could fight against the police who are the greatest perpetrators of crime in his 2027 world. The police are so powerful: "pues arrestaba al delincuente antes de que pensara cometer un crimen" [they simply arrested delinquents before they even thought to commit a crime] (26). Aridjis' descriptions of the crush of citizenry suggest that the citizens could become a powerful force that could fight against the police.⁵ For example, a description of waiting to enter the Chalpultepec metro station transforms the line of people into a snake:

Antes de alcanzar la ventanilla de los boletos, ella y diez mil gentes más, se hallaron en una larga fila que empezaba delgada, se ensanchaba, se bifurcaba, se juntaba de nuevo, daba la vuelta y se encontraba consigo misma como una serpiente que se muerde la cola. Un cojo iba adelante de la multitud.

[Before one could reach the ticket booth, she and ten thousand others formed a long line that started out skinny, widened, and then forked in two before joining back into one line that twisted back upon itself like a serpent swallowing its own tail. A lame man headed up the line] (30).

The image of people as a snake is powerful, but Aridjis criticizes the people's power by suggesting that the people limit their own power by going around in circles, i.e. "como una serpiente que se muerde la cola" and that they allow themselves to be led by a leader clearly not suited to the task, "un cojo". This

⁵ Aridjis also compares the mass of humanity to an organism with multiple parts, like an ant hill or bee hive. "Miles de gentes andaban en el Paseo de la Malinche, como un organismo múltiple que como cuerpos independientes, más como fantasmas del presente que como seres reales" [Thousands of people strolled along Malinche Avenue, more like a multicellular organism than independent bodies, more like ghosts of the present than like real beings] (46). This organism, properly directed, could control the city.

frustrating circularity without progress is reflected in a real-life study undertaken by Canclini. His sociological study reports that Mexico City's residents regard their urban setting as a "hostile environment" and that a majority of residents stay home when they have free time, in order to avoid the headaches associated with navigating polluted and traffic-congested streets (Canclini 52). This is ironic because the polluted and traffic-congested streets are the result of the mass of people, much like the snake that bites its own tail.

As further evidence of the self-defeating aspects of humanity, Aridjis combines this snake image with an image of the conspicuous consumption endemic to globalization. Outside the metro station, no one can enter or leave because the entrances and exits are blocked by salespeople selling "zapatos, camisas, calcetines, sombreros, sacos, máscaras, guantes, lentes de sol" [shoes, shirts, socks, hats, jackets, masks, gloves, sunglasses] and quacks selling fake medical exams (Aridjis 30). People's greed limits their ability to break free from the system.

Although Aridjis' systematically ineffective vision of Mexico City is fictional and futuristic, Raquel Sosa Elízaga's historical overview of Mexican politics suggests that Aridjis' Mexico City is only thinly fictionalized. Sosa Elízaga asserts that the Mexican government has consistently valued economic benefits for the rich over social benefits for the poor (73-76). The media does not challenge the superficial political debates and parroted slogans of candidates, thereby allowing political decision-making to occur without criticism (Sosa Elízaga 77). The power of the military appears absolute, or at least unquestioned: "What is peculiar is the absence of arguments that might be used to convince the rest of the population that the use of force is justified" (Sosa Elízaga 79). Military actions occur within the country without any justification. This real-life abuse of power is reflected in the fictional power of General Carlos Tezcatlipoca.

Tezcatlipoca gains his power through his connection with Mexican history, a graphic illustration of Braham's thesis that the origins of state-sponsored violence against citizens is found in "an oppressive discourse of 'Mexican-ness' (*mexicanidad*) represented in elite culture, official history, and the mass media" (xi). Stavans also argues that employing aspects of the Pre-Columbian period is a striking feature common to the *neopolitaco* genre (156). Aridjis juxtaposes Tezcatlipoca with Aztec material goods, as well as symbols of violence, to illustrate how Tezcatlipoca takes his power from his relationship with the "official" Mexico. Tezcatlipoca's chauffeur, Jaime García Torres, pauses to observe two collections displayed side by side in Tezcatlipoca's house:

había visto salas con armarios repletos de armas blancas, por la afición del general al cuchillo, a la espada y a la navaja. Las vitrinas con piezas y joyas encontradas en las tumbas de Monte Albán, El Tajín, Uxmal, Teotihuacan, Tenochtitlan y en la Zona del Silencio contenían calaveras, antiguas y nuevas.

[he saw galleries with cabinets full of cut-and-thrust weapons, a sign of the general's preference for knives, swords, and razors. Showcases displayed artifacts and jewelry found in the tombs of Monte Albán, El Tajín, Uxmal, Teotihuacan, Tenochtitlan. In the Zone of Silence, the showcases contained skeletons, both old and new] (25).

The introduction of new skeletons to Tezcatlipoca's collection implies that his violent past continues into the present.

A further juxtaposition of Tezcatlipoca's violent past and the present appears during an Aztec ritual is disguised as a bureaucratic festival. Tezcatlipoca and Urbina participate in a celebration of the exhumation of Xipe Tótec, God of Shamelessness. A nameless character in the crowd comments on the fallacy of celebrating this god's appearance:

—Qué imprudencia desenterrar a los dioses sanguinarios del México viejo. Es como si en un castillo de Transilvania hubieran sacado el cadáver

del conde Drácula y le quitaran la estaca que le atraviesa el corazón —le dijo alguien a Juan de Góngora.

[“How reckless of them to exhume the bloodthirsty gods of ancient Mexico. It is as foolish as a castle in Transylvania digging up Count Dracula's cadaver and removing the stake driven through his heart,” someone said to Juan de Góngora] (96).

Tezcatlipoca's subsequent conference with the cadaver clearly connects the two evil gods together. An additional scene of a grotesque and macabre supper shared between the president and the general underscores this misuse of Mexican culture and connection with the past, and Aztec human sacrifice. The pair dines on a menu “a propósito [...] de pura comida mexicana” [purposefully [...] made with genuine Mexican food] (Aridjis 51). This menu offers traditional Mexican dishes prepared with ghoulish ingredients fresh from the day's state-sponsored assassinations: sangria made with real human blood, “conejo” *mole* in which the rabbit is a code word for a murdered senator, nopal cactus, black beans with *epazote*, frog legs, testicles and brains (Aridjis 52). Clearly, the government misappropriates Mexican culture to further its own power.

Another appropriation of Mexican culture by Aridjis works to criticize globalization. Miguel López includes a quotation by Homero Aridjis that confirms the author's intention in “employing the Aztec myth of the Fifth Sun as a metaphor to describe the conditions of environmental degradation that plague Mexican society, underscoring how the end of the world will not only be caused by natural disasters, but also by the hand of man” (176).⁶ Rather than linking “the hand of man” to a specific

⁶ Aridjis actually puts that precise sentiment in Bernardo's mouth. She looks at the destroyed city, and thinks “ruinas contemporáneas no producidas por los desastres naturales sino por la mano inepto y corrupto del hombre” [modern ruins that were produced not through natural disasters but by the inept and corrupt hand of mankind] (143).



character or set of characters in the text, Miguel López equates human intervention with “the innocent confidence in industrialization and globalization insofar as their capacity to improve the standard of living for the immense majority of the inhabitants of Mexico” (177). I agree with this argument, and further argue that specifically the Aztec gods and the indifferent mass of humanity function as the embodiment of these abstract concepts of globalization: too much power in the hands of the malevolent elite, and too little power in the hands of the average person.

One example of the malevolent elite is contained in the Saturno Brothers, the corrupt detectives. These characters fit with Stavans’ view of the detective as an anti-intellectual “bad guy” (157). The Saturno Brothers are charged with finding the dreaded Tláloc. The Saturno brothers are police detectives, which in this novel places them firmly in the category of “tipo malo”. The reader’s first introduction to the pair is in a conversation between Juan de Góngora and Bernarda. She says hopefully that the detectives have discovered El Tláloc’s whereabouts, but Juan doubts the detectives’ ability by commenting cynically that “[e]sos agentes lo tienen localizado desde hace cuatro años” [those agents have known where he is for the past four years] (21).

Further evidence of the brothers’ immorality appears when the brothers report the rape of a young girl to Tezcatlipoca. Their description is detailed, almost pornographic, of the cadaver. To add an additional note of malevolence, the brothers speculate that the violence may not have been immoral: “—La violencia del violador puede ser coercitiva y también moral” before suggesting that the victim may have derived pleasure from her attack and murder (Aridjis 58). The detectives finally blame an innocent man, a “Miguel Ramos García” for all the crimes that El Tláloc committed (Aridjis 176). The brothers do eventually kill the “bad guy” Tezcatlipoca, but they do so by accident (193).

These bumbling detectives represent a major difference from the genteel nineteenth century detectives described by Ernest Mandel. Justice is only a coincidental result of the detectives’ work.

Stavans’ profile of the *neopoliciaco* detective includes someone who does not demonstrate “the supremacy of human intellect, morality and order, but instead [the supremacy] of a new and strange code of doubts” (159). The Saturno Brothers are supremely confident in their deductions, which are, of course, supremely incorrect. Juan de Góngora, on the other hand, is doubtful and reluctant —almost too reluctant to solve the crime. Juan’s first doubts arise from his estranged relationship with consumption. For example, he rejects new clothing and prefers to wear old hand-me-downs from his uncle, “por el desagrado que sentía por los materiales sintéticos, no obstante que mucha de la nueva ropa era antibalas y anticuerpos y lo protegían de violencias y enfermedades callejeras” [due to the displeasure he felt toward synthetic materials, in spite of the fact that much of the new clothing was bulletproof and antibacterial and protected him from street violence and disease] (Aridjis 34). He also willfully refuses to carry the tools that may save his life in the dangerous environs of Mexico City: a personal alarm against assaults and air and water purifiers (34). His doubting nature is reflected on his bookshelf and speed-dial: he has *Ansiedad 21* and *Neurotics Anonymous* on his videophone, and twelve books on anxiety, paranoia, and how to survive lining his shelves (34).

Further evidence of Juan’s questioning and pessimistic nature emerges when he meets Cristóbal Cuauhtli, the Aztec god who asks him to search for the missing page of the Codex. At first, Juan turns Cuauhtli down, explaining “—No creo en mí mismo, tampoco en leyendas— se alzó de hombros Juan de Góngora” [“I don’t believe in myself, much less in legends”, as he shrugged his shoulders] (38). When Cuauhtli



presents Juan with a rucksack full of historical treasures, Juan looks inside and declares that he sees nothing, a result, Cuauhtli explains, of his lack of faith (65). Juan tries to save a girl from walking into oncoming traffic, but concludes that his efforts had been useless when he realizes she was deaf and therefore unable to hear his warnings (132).

However, despite a shaky start, Juan does end up with some successes, although these gains seem accidental. He saves Bernarda from Tezcatlipoca's death stare by coming between Tezcatlipoca's gaze and Bernarda's body (140). Bernarda's daughter, Ana Violeta, is saved but only through the efforts of the Saturno Brothers (178-179). He eventually learns to stop doubting, "se había acostumbrado a vivir en un mundo fantástico donde los hechos cotidianos eran más ordinarios que aquellos que soñaban las mentes calenturientas" [he had become accustomed to living in a fantastic world in which his daily reality outshone any other reality imagined by feverish minds] (149).

Perhaps by making Juan de Góngora such an ineffectual detective, Aridjis works to illustrate Stavans' argument that the detective cannot find solutions to social problems, only "an enigmatic mosaic of possibilities without solutions" (Stavans 161). The solution that Aridjis proposes is apocalypse. This unusual solution is not as pessimistic as it may appear when studied alongside anti-globalization theories.

An important element of the neopoliciaco novel that Aridjis' novel does not contain is a strong note of pessimism. A *neopoliciaco* novel is necessarily dystopian, because the crime is usually not solved, justice is not served, and political and social problems are brought to the forefront of the reader's imagination (Corona 184-185). *La leyenda de los soles*, read as a detective novel, has a very optimistic ending compared to the typical neopoliciaco's ambiguous and negative ending. The Sixth

Sun rises, and it is full of potential: "Nadie conoce aún a este Sol innominado, que ahora, quizás, estamos viendo por vez primera" [No one knew this unnumbered Sun yet, that now, maybe, we were seeing for the first time] (Aridjis 198).

Miguel López further distinguishes Aridjis' apocalypse from the Biblical apocalypse. Aridjis' Aztec apocalypse signifies a rebirth and renewal of the world, rather than death and destruction (177). This optimistic interpretation of the apocalypse as part of a natural cycle is presented as an alternative to modernization and its push for constant progress without an end (M. López 184). This ending challenges the novel's classification as a dystopian novel. If destruction is necessary for future improvement, then the environmental and social problems in the novel could be read as a necessary step in the march towards utopia. However, because the novel deals with very real social and environmental anxieties, it cannot be read as a traditional crime novel because the story does not provide an escape from the challenges of everyday living, even if elements of the story are fantastic and futuristic. The novel is a call to action, not a reassuring text that confirms the *status quo*.

Mike Davis' study of Los Angeles fiction suggests a strong connection between detective fiction and environmental disaster fiction, and these connections reveal some important parallels with Aridjis' disaster/crime novel of Mexico City. Davis catalogued "Los-Angeles-based" novels, and found over 2/3 were crime novels, often with Hollywood themes (279). Davis' survey revealed that Los Angeles fiction revolves around "disaster or survivalist narrative" (280). Davis further classified this regional detective fiction by year and theme. Fiction published during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s centers on three themes: armageddon, alien invasions, and magical dystopia (280). Certainly Aridjis' 1993 novel addresses

these three themes: armageddon, with its use of Aztec mythology of the Sun cycles; alien invasion, with the threat of *tzitzimimes* taking over the world; and the theme of dystopia with the polluted world the novel depicts. Davis connects Los Angeles to Mexico City in his discussion of the types of disaster novels because “Los Angeles, of course, is perfectly cast in the role of environmental suicide. Only Mexico City has more completely contaminated its natural setting” (318).

The great distinction between the disaster novel in Los Angeles and Aridjis’ disaster novel in Mexico City is the role of the government and the individual. In Aridjis’ tale, the government’s decisions work to destroy the city and the only salvation is one individual’s actions that destroy the city in order to allow for rebirth. In the disaster fiction of Los Angeles, the actions of one hapless individual spell permanent destruction for an entire city, despite the valiant efforts of the federal government to solve the problems (Davis 319-320).

Aridjis’ novel, *La leyenda de los soles*, uses elements of the neopolicial genre to criticize citizens’ complicity with corruption on a political, social, environmental, and spiritual level in 2027 Mexico City. Juan de Góngora’s ambivalence over his mission—to assassinate General Tezcatlipoca, the root of corruption in both Mexico City and in Aztec mythology, in order to save the world—is characteristic of the neopolicial genre, as is the character’s failure to bring Tezcatlipoca to justice. Although the story ends with the destruction of the world, it is also a moment of rebirth and may be considered optimistic in this context. This outlook represents a radical optimism when compared to disaster fiction written about Los Angeles, California, a city beset by similar problems. Moreover, by setting the novel thirty-four years in the future, Aridjis’ work may be viewed as a call for reform among

readers, urging them to action when presented with the consequences of Juan de Góngora’s selfish inaction. ❧

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