

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MEDIATED POET:
LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO IN ROBERTO
BOLAÑO'S *2666*

*La emergencia del poeta mediatizado: Leopoldo María
Panero en 2666 de Roberto Bolaño*

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RESUMEN: Este trabajo analiza el papel de Leopoldo María Panero en la novela *2666* de Roberto Bolaño. Como figura pública, la imagen de Panero también circula en cine (*El desencanto*), en la prensa escrita y en la televisión. La imagen mediatizada de Panero forma un nexo complejo con la imagen literaria que crea Bolaño en *2666*. Esta imagen dialoga con nociones del malditismo en la poesía reciente, la transición a la democracia en España y el papel de la poesía en la era de la información. Es una imagen que afirma la comercialización de la «autenticidad» artística en el contexto de la globalización al mismo tiempo que la cuestiona.

Palabras clave: Malditismo, Infrarrealismo, *El desencanto*, Leopoldo María Panero, Roberto Bolaño.

ABSTRACT: This essay analyzes the role of Leopoldo María Panero in the novel *2666* by Roberto Bolaño. As a public figure, Panero also circulates in cinema (*El desencanto*), in the written press and on television. The mediatized image of Panero dialogs with notions of mauditism in recent poetry, with the transition to democracy in Spain and the role of poetry in the Era of Information. It is an image that both affirms the commercialization of artistic «authenticity» and also calls it into question.

Key words: Mauditism, Infrarealism, *El desencanto*, Leopoldo María Panero, Roberto Bolaño.

This essay does not analyze Leopoldo María Panero's poetry, as worthwhile and delightful as that exercise would be, but rather the figure of Leopoldo María Panero as a poet, in particular in *2666* by Roberto Bolaño. Before looking at the Chilean writer's posthumous novel, I will briefly take into account Panero's construction as a public figure in cinema, broadcast media, and the press. As such, this essay begins as a juggling act between filmic, televisual, and literary texts from which this poet emerges as something of a curious commodity in media representations within Spain as well as Latin America, before turning to the particulars of Bolaño's novel. In all these texts, Panero is typically cast, in broad strokes, as mad man, as authentic bohemian, and as an antidote to the repetitive doldrums of globalization. Why does this figure emerge in this way and at this time? How do these readings of him circulate along paths (both literary and mass-media) that the figure of the poet in Leopoldo María Panero purports to critique? In what ways does Bolaño's appropriation of the image of Panero differ from or resemble the Spanish poet's mass-media appearances?

Based on a cursory view of his literary production, Leopoldo María Panero would not seem more likely to become a figure that would move along mass-media circuits than any other poet of his generation. His work first rose to national attention in Spain when it was included in J. M. Castellet's 1970 anthology of younger, experimental Spanish poets entitled *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles*. From the seventies through the first decade of the 21st century, Panero has published numerous volumes of poetry, often detailing his own history of mental illness, with notable Spanish publishing houses such as Hiperión and Visor. While these institutions publish many well-known poets, they do not publish bestsellers or writers who are likely to be known beyond the small circle of consumers who frequent the poetry sections of book stores. In order to explain Panero as a mediatic phenomeon, we must look beyond solely his written work, because it is not strictly, or even primarily, his literary production that brings him into

broader media circles. Panero represents the emergence of the *figure* of the poet as a minor media spectacle in the age of information. We can think of similar cases in the examples of Charles Bukowski, to whom U2 dedicated the song «Dirty Day» from the 1993 album *Zooropa* and whose work and image were presented to new audiences in the 1987 film *Barfly*, or Pablo Neruda's posthumous international fame as the subject of the 1994 Italian film *Il Postino*. In short, we have the figure of the poet who has, to some extent, transcended the circuit of consumption limited to readers of poetry by means of media flows that only become possible in the age of globalization.

Admittedly, this phenomenon occurs infrequently and its theorization may have a somewhat tenuous connection with the concept of emergence. Nevertheless, I posit that some of the meanings associated with the concept of emergence map fairly closely onto the process by which Panero becomes a minor media figure. Furthermore, this mapping of meanings may in some small measure be able to enrich and extend the concept of emergence. In *Marxism and Literature* Raymond Williams defines the emergent, in contrast to the dominant and the residual, in very broad terms:

By «emergent» I mean, first that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense «species-specific») and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel (1977, 123).

The mediatized poet could be read as emergent, rather than «merely novel» in the sense that he or she comes to be figured in the space of mass culture as opposed to that of the dominant literary culture. Quite simply, within literary studies, mass-produced culture is often viewed as implicitly inferior to literary high culture. As Adorno wrote, «those who have been duped by the culture industry and are eager for its commodities were never familiar with art» (2004, 22). Implicit in Adorno's affirmation and in many critical approximations to art, and particularly the literary arts, is the notion that mass culture's commercial interests are its failing and that high art's purported disinterestedness is above duping the public. This paper suggests that the two cultures are not diametrically opposed, but rather cannibalize and feed off each other, and that the study of this cannibalization is not always best served by strictly literary studies. As César Domínguez writes, emphasizing broader relationships of literary production with political economics, «[t]he study of emergence requires an interdisciplinary focus as

we are dealing with a phenomenon that goes beyond the boundaries of literary, artistic and even cultural circles» (2006, 3).

While such a transdisciplinary approach obviously entails many risks, it could help in situating the notion of *authenticity* that the emergent mediated figure of the poet entails. García Canclini in *Culturas híbridas* succinctly characterizes the paradoxical situation that emerges from mediated shifts in the era of globalization with respect to the art world in general:

Paradójica situación: en el momento en que los artistas y los espectadores «cultos» abandonan la estética de las bellas artes y las vanguardias porque saben que la realidad funciona de otro modo, las industrias culturales, las mismas que clausuraron en la producción artística, las rehabilitan en un sistema paralelo de publicidad y difusión. A través de entrevistas biográficas a artistas, invenciones sobre su vida personal o sobre el «angustioso» trabajo de preparación de una película o una obra teatral, mantienen vigentes los argumentos románticos del artista solo e incomprendido, de la obra que exalta los valores del espíritu en oposición al materialismo generalizado. De manera que el discurso estético ha dejado de ser la representación del proceso creador para convertirse en un recurso complementario destinado a «garantizar» la verosimilitud de la experiencia artística en el momento del consumo (2001, 62).

How, then, does this consumed authenticity circulate? W. H. Auden once wrote in his elegy for Yeats, «poetry makes nothing happen» (1976, 197) and as such, poetry makes for a strange cultural phenomenon to be picked up in mainstream media. Looking at the Spain in which Panero emerged as a minor media figure, we can see that it was experiencing, as was the case in many other contexts during the same years, a notable privatization in the culture industries following the transition to democracy. Private finance, as Barry Jordan observes, became the key player in cinema, television and print media in 1980s Spain:

During the 1980s, we witness the gradual dismantling of the old statist/Francoist media operations, the selling off of state-run newspaper chains, the concession of radio licenses, the rise of regional television and press groups and the reluctant approval in 1988 by the PSOE government of three new private television channels [...]. All these moves toward media pluralization and «marketization» tended to encourage major levels of concentration within specific media, plus significant levels of foreign investment in television stations. We also see the emergence of two important Spanish multimedia groups ZETA and PRISA, and the crucial influence of big banks as major investors in press, television and satellite/cable groups (2000, 145-146).

Further complicating matters for media production at the national level, the quotas which offered a measure of state protection for Spanish national cinema were deemed unconstitutional in 1979, allowing for a veritable U.S. flooding of the film market (Torres, 1995, 370).

Within this media context, we have the figure of Leopoldo María Panero, a poet, to borrow the terms of Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large*, visible in the mediascape. Before these quotas were rescinded, a film, *El desencanto*, in English «The Disenchantment», helped cement Leopoldo María Panero's status as a cultural figure. The film eventually attained cult status and in 2004 *Rockdelux*, a well-know Spanish pop culture magazine, named *El desencanto* the third best Spanish film of all time. The 97 minute, black and white film, directed by Jaime Chávarri and produced by Elías Querejeta, features footage from several interviews with family members, and a handful of backdrops of familial importance, such as images of the inauguration of the statue of the family patriarch, Leopoldo Panero, in Astorga. Throughout the film, Felicidad Blanc, the mother of the family, Leopoldo María, his older brother Juan Luis, and his younger brother Michi, argue about the dynamics of the Panero family and recall the void left by their father's death in 1962 and their attempts to fill it.

According to Leopoldo María Panero's biographer, J. Benito Fernández, some spectators at the first showing in 1976 stood up and left the room well before the film was over. Its first run only lasted two weeks and it was withdrawn from the Palace e Infantas cinema in Madrid as a total financial disaster (Fernández 1999, 208). Several spectators later expressed the feeling that the film was little more than a tasteless airing of the family's dirty laundry. Francisco Umbral, in *Las palabras de la tribu*, called it «el único asesinato del padre que se ha filmado jamás» (1994, 288). The film has an undeniable personal and biographical aspect, focusing on the details of the Panero family seemingly for their own sake. This aspect seems to be the only one Jaime Chávarri will admit to in terms of his own intentions with the film, and seems to be the only one that Felicidad Blanc, the mother of Juan Luis, Leopoldo María, and Michi Panero, seems to consider in her memoirs, *Espejo de sombras* (Mirror of Shadows)¹. Blanc describes the process of making the film largely in terms of the stress of speaking on camera, of confronting family issues and her fears of criticism from friends.

1. «No era metáfora de nada. Yo lo único que quería era contar la historia de los Panero y en ningún momento se me ocurrió la metáfora de nada. Titulé *El desencanto* porque me encanta la palabra» (FERNÁNDEZ 1999, 209).

Despite the personal nature of the film for its creators and protagonists, and despite its apparent initial difficulties with its first audience, the content soon became allegorized by many critics as a battle between new and old regimes, a request that the dead patriarch be held accountable for the difficulties of the past. Furthermore, years later, the term «desencanto» would enter into common usage, critically and popularly, to describe a sense of disappointment with the changes (or lack of changes) following the transition. Juan Egea complicates and historicizes these arguments by pointing out that, among other things, there is a certain attribution of clairvoyance to the film if it is to be credited with foreseeing the *desencanto* described in the pages of *El País* years before it happened (2004, 80). Furthermore, the tensions between father and sons cannot be neatly mapped onto the relation between Franco and post-Francoist Spain. Egea writes:

Sí, la ausencia del padre es fundamental en *El desencanto*, como lo es la muerte de Franco para que la transición misma se produzca. Sin embargo, a lo que esa ausencia da origen es a una narración en imágenes donde no todo lo explica la muerte del padre y donde se corre el peligro de perpetuar su mirada.

El desencanto es también modelo de ruptura, de discontinuidad y de confrontación. Estamos, en el fondo, ante la necesidad de evaluar la relación que existe entre los productos culturales y la realidad sociopolítica en la que nacen. Ni espejo ni lámpara, ni origen ni explicación, la historia de los Panero tal y como la filma y edita Jaime Chávarri es un texto contradictorio en el que se ensayan algunos de los acercamientos hermenéuticos que luego tienen lugar en relación al proceso histórico que nombra. *El desencanto* es, finalmente, el texto cuyo significado excede los mecanismos reductores de esos acercamientos aunque sólo sea porque es también la crónica de lo que no pasó, de lo que no pudo tener lugar ni escenificarse durante los años de la transición democrática española (2004, 89).

Despite the contradictions, complexities, and richness of the film, the reading of Leopoldo María Panero as wounded son of the dead patriarch becomes entrenched around the text. This symbolic status, I would suggest, is perpetuated in his media appearances. In addition to his own writings for *El País* and *ABC*, Leopoldo María Panero has also been interviewed on numerous occasions in the print media, in Spain and also in Latin America. Perhaps more notable are his interviews and interventions in the broadcast media. In several television interviews, we witness the rhetorical creation of Leopoldo María Panero the media figure as mad genius. We see the supremely uncomfortable nature of Panero's presence in a filmic image. On the screen, he is constantly twitching, waving a vacuous gaze across the onlooker, sipping Coca-cola or bottled water, hauling on cigarette after

cigarette with sunken cheeks. A blogger for *El Mundo* remarked that a 2005 appearance of Panero on the *telediario* of TVE's Canal 2 «sabe a gloria», because the image of the «demacrado» poet was a break from the glossy, too-well-proportioned images of people who typically inhabit the television sphere (2007, Pérez de Albéniz). While this might be considered unsurprising in some particular individual's blog that had little circulation, this blog, which for years was attached to *El Mundo*'s online edition and which is entitled *El Descodificador*, is one of the more frequently visited of the Spanish blogosphere. Furthermore, it focuses on pop culture at large, but most particularly on television. In this instance, the figure of the poet in Panero shares virtual coverage with leading ladies, cop drama plots, and political speeches. In a blog that discusses fictional narratives and televisual representations, Panero becomes a copy of himself with no true original. The image of Panero as a figure that questions, as *El Descodificador* insinuates, media glossiness is presented in a blog that itself relishes media glossiness. This is reminiscent in some ways of what Baudrillard writes of the digital order of simulacra:

All content is neutralised by a continuous process of orchestrated interrogations, verdicts and ultimatums to be decoded [...]. This cycle merely describes the perpetual realisation of the same models. The equivalent of the total neutralization of signifieds by the code is the instantaneous verdict of fashion or every billboard or TV advertising message. Everywhere, supply devours demand, the question devours the answer, either absorbing it or regurgitating it in a decodable form, or inventing it and anticipating its predictable corroboration (1993, 62).

In print and broadcast media, Panero appears to be standing in as a figure of authenticity in perpetual process, a literary personality rather than a creator of texts himself. Additionally, he is an oppositional figure who is «regurgitated in a decodable form».

While it may be less surprising for Panero to be fodder for literary representations, it is striking how similar the literary representations of him are to mass-media representations. He is made to stand in for bohemia itself, an artist in a moment when Mcdonaldization is perceived as taking over. Or he is seen as a crippled vestige of the spirit squashed during the Franco regime. He is also generally included as a minor figure, set in various novels more to evoke a sentiment by his presence rather than as what E. M. Forster famously referred to as a round character, a figure to be developed and complicated over the course of the plot.

What does a reader do with this image as it appropriated in a literary work that coincides to a greater degree with more standard notions of emergent literature in the work of Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño? If the

figure of Panero disrupts certain cultural categories, the novelist Bolaño interrupts certain national categories of authorship. Though he was born in Chile and spent his formative years there, there is some doubt among Chilean scholars as to how he forms part of Chilean letters. He will undoubtedly be included in the history of Mexican letters because of his deep connections with the *infrarrealistas* who populate his seminal novel *The Savage Detectives*. In the latter of half of the first decade of the 21st century, his translation into English has made him into a bestseller, a post-post-Boom phenomenon in international book markets. Further complicating the difficulty of categorizing his work along national lines are his years in Europe and the fact that his publication and distribution in Spanish was carried out by Spanish and not Latin American publishing houses.

A writer with multinational roots, Bolaño is certainly not the first novelist to employ Panero as a fictionalized character. There is 1988's, noir novel *Lady Pepa* by Jesús Ferrero, where Panero appears as Falstaffian member of the nocturnal fauna of Barcelona. Jorge de Cominge's *Tul illusion* uses Panero as a thinly veiled reference to the suffering of intellectuals under Franco. *Lejos de Veracruz* by Enrique Vila-Matas uses the whole Panero clan, and Leopoldo María in particular, to meditate on the qualities of artistic authenticity. Manuel Vázquez Montalban's 1996 Pepe Carvalho novel *El premio* uses a cameo by a Panero-inspired character as a foil to the polished, homogenized literary production fomented by the culture industries. Bolaño, a poet himself, is obsessed with mad poets, such as Zurita in *Estrella distante*, or *infrarrealista* Mario Santiago as Ulises Lima in *The Savage Detectives*, a novel in which Panero also appears at the *Feria del libro* in Madrid being wheeled about in his chair by a nurse.

His greatest protagonism occurs in Bolaño's massive posthumous novel *2666*, particularly in the section of the book entitled «La parte de Amalfitano». This section is the story of a Chilean professor, Amalfitano, and his decent into madness, with Panero acting as a mysterious catalyst for that madness. He is the object of Amalfitano's wife's desire and represents, on many levels, the inaccessible fulfillment of many of the protagonist's own desires.

In *2666*, the symbolic weight of Panero's character is so notable that he does not even have a name; he is known simply as «el poeta». The second of what Bolaño envisioned as five novels, «La parte de Amalfitano», is the story of a Chilean professor of philosophy in Barcelona whose wife, Lola, leaves him, in the company of a woman named Inmaculada, to go off in search the fictionalized Panero. The two women travel to Mondragón «so pretexto de visitar a su poeta favorito» (2004, 213). Passing as a journalist

and poet respectively, Inmaculada and Lola gain access to the mental ward and discover that «la gente del manicomio estaba orgullosa de tenerlo [al poeta]» (2004, 221). The physician who cares for him calls him «uno de los grandes» and foresees a Nobel prize for his patient. Lola tries to make plans with the poet to escape to France, to bear his children, but nothing comes of it in the novel.

Bolaño makes full and effective use of the «idea» of the poet as embodied in Leopoldo María Panero. Lola's search for the poet is sparked by memories from a party from years earlier in Barcelona:

Los invitados esperaban la aparición del poeta. Esperaban que éste la emprendiera a golpes con alguno de ellos o que defecara en medio de la sala en una alfombra turca que parecía la alfombra de las mil y una noches (2004, 217).

Lola eventually passes a night of lovemaking with *el poeta* and decides that he is «un niño perdido y [ella] podía salvarlo» (2004, 218).

When she finds him again, years later, in the asylum, he is essentially mute. While this coincides with the idea that he is like a child who must be saved, it also coincides with media representations of his persona, in which his work itself doesn't matter, but rather his image. She has all of his books in her backpack, but none of them are explicitly named in the text of the novel, in stark contrast to the texts that Amalfitano obsessively refers to, as we shall see shortly. In the media, as in the eyes of Lola, this image is driven by the idea of authenticity. In a moment where Lola cannot locate this authenticity in reality, she painfully discovers, to quote García Canclini once more, that «la realidad funciona de otro modo». When Lola offers to run off to France and bear children for the poet, he simply smokes, explaining the positioning of his tongue to make smoke rings:

Con la lengua poniendo los labios de determinada manera, dijo. A veces, como si los tuvieras estriados. A veces, como si los hubieras quemado tú mismo. A veces, como si estuvieras chupando una polla de tamaño mediano tirando a pequeño. A veces como si dispararas una flecha zen con un arco zen en un pabellón zen (2004, 223).

The poet's image, a simulacrum created in Lola's mind, can have no bearing on lived reality. To return again to the quote from Baudrillard, Panero's «content is neutralised by a continuous process of orchestrated interrogations». The poet's detachment from reality is so marked that when there is a poetry reading in the asylum, he doesn't even speak his own verses: he requests that Lola's companion Inmaculada read the verses since she is posing as a poet.

Soon after, in the course of the novel, Lola is denied access to *el poeta*: the patient she is told, requires absolute rest (2004, 226). To summarize quickly, she never gains access to the poet again and she is abandoned by her companion, Inmaculada. Lola meets a chauffeur with whom she has a child and disappears to France where she works cleaning office buildings for seven years before returning out of the blue, apparently terminally ill, to say goodbye to her daughter.

Lola's lack of access to the space she desires parallels a similar denial for the main character, Amalfitano. One of the recurring themes of this section of the novel is access to Europe via Spain, particularly Catalonia, as a Chilean outsider. Life in Barcelona becomes a prism through which the protagonist's Chilean roots are viewed. In highly reduced terms, for Amalfitano, professor of philosophy, knowledge is situated in Europe, and violence and lies are situated in Chile. The novel is the negotiation of a Chilean who produces knowledge in Europe and then returns to the American continent, specifically to Mexico.

In a telling moment of border negotiation, the Amalfitano section of the novel opens with Amalfitano's daughter, Rosa, as Spaniard, literally having greater access to the country while Amalfitano's access is delayed:

Rosa tenía 17 años y era española. Amalfitano tenía 50 y era chileno. Rosa tenía pasaporte desde los 10 años. Durante algunos de sus viajes, recordaba Amalfitano, se habían encontrado en situaciones raras, pues Rosa pasaba las aduanas por las puertas de los ciudadanos comunitarios y Amalfitano por la puerta reservada a los no comunitarios [...] En una ocasión a Rosa le revisaron su maleta pues sospecharon que el padre podía pasar droga o armas amparado en la inocencia y en la nacionalidad de su hija (2004, 212).

Rosa's mother, Lola, however, gets through customs with «una navaja de acero inoxidable» by explaining to the agents that it is for peeling fruit (2004, 212-213). As Cornelia Grabner writes in «Commitment», a piece on intellectual political commitment in an institutional context in the collection *Conceptual Odysseys*, despite much theoretical praising of hybridity and porousness of borders, nations and borders still very much exist and, obviously, very much impose themselves:

Borders are being closed down in a very violent manner and those that are «culturally different» are being subjected to policies of «integration» that bear a worrying resemblance to repression and assimilation. At the same time, the politics of education enforce the separation between North and South rather than working against it; they encourage the privatization and

the brain drain, and a streamlining of the contents of curricula and research that exclude precisely theory that comes from the South (2007, 172).

Grabner's comment on intellectual commitment also sheds light on the figure of a Chilean academic as an outsider in the Spanish academy. While her comments might be somewhat hyperbolic with regard to the situation of Bolaño's protagonist, they do have some bearing on the nature of his relationship to knowledge as it is presented in 2666.

Knowledge, for Amalfitano, gets progressively tangled up in madness. «La locura es contagiosa» (2004, 229) says Lola toward the beginning of the novel. After meeting with the poet in Mandragón and having mistakenly thought he had laughed, Lola says «El poeta no se reía [...] Era mi locura que se reía» (2004, 231). The madness of the poet, via Lola, seems to infect the protagonist of the novel, particularly after Lola's definitive leave-taking. Amalfitano's madness, brought about by Panero's fictionalized character, causes him to become obsessed with Galician writer Rafael Dieste's writings on geometry and the idea that O'Higgins, the supreme liberator of Chile, was actually Mapuche. Tellingly, Bolaño takes a text from the very limit of Europe and the idea that his nation's founding father was not European as the points of departure for his protagonist's madness. As we shall see, Amalfitano's eccentricity leads him to decentralize European space in his life, literally, by finally moving to northern Mexico.

Soon after Lola leaves him, Amalfitano finds Dieste's *Testamento geométrico* among his books, complete with a receipt from Follas Novas, in Santiago de Compostela (2004, 241). Having no recollection of how the book got into his possession, given he had never been in Santiago, the book obsesses him. Produced at the figurative and literal limit of Europe, the text bears knowledge in its most rarefied form: mathematical knowledge. It is baggage which he carries with no recollection and which deepens his spin into madness as he begins diagramming triangles and rhombuses among his notes for teaching philosophy classes at Santa Teresa University. Regarding his new found obsession for geometry, the narrator muses:

Amalfitano tenía unas ideas un tanto peculiares al respecto. No las tenía siempre, por lo que tal vez sea excesivo llamarlas ideas. Eran sensaciones. Ideas-juego. Como si se aproximara a una ventana se forzara a ver un paisaje extraterrestre. Creía (o le gustaba creer que creía) que cuando uno está en Barcelona aquellos que están y son en Buenos Aires o el DF no existen. La diferencia horaria era sólo una máscara de la desaparición (2004, 243).

This attempt to apprehend geometrical knowledge, produced at the edge of Europe looking out toward the New World, obscures the very existence of the American continent.

As his obsession progresses, living now in Santa Teresa (as Ciudad Juárez is fictionally referred to in the novel) in México, Amalfitano hangs Dieste's book on the clothesline, in the spirit of a DuChamp readymade, to see if the text can learn anything from the wind. He then begins to hear the voice of his dead father, who claims that Chile is a terrible country, «un país de mierda» full of weaklings and homosexuals (2004, 261). Afraid of the disembodied voice, Amalfitano grabs a book on the history of German and French philosophy from 1900 to 1930 and a knife much like the one Lola carried while crossing borders with no problem, to protect himself (2004, 259). As the section of the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that the narrator intends to associate Amalfitano's madness with a national frustration over the recent military dictatorship, exile and contemporary Chilean history, with «la mala fama de Chile en el extranjero» (2004, 287) even if Amalfitano himself doesn't appear to make that connection. «Lo que los chilenos llaman resentimiento», Bolaño writes, «Amalfitano llamaba locura» (2004, 287).

Towards the end of the section one of his colleague's sons in the University of Santa Teresa tells Amalfitano, «Sólo leo poesía» (2004, 288) since it is the only healthy way to feed the mind. The mention of poetry makes Amalfitano think, not of the poet who obsessed his wife, but, for no ostensible reason, of a pharmacy that was near his home in Barcelona: a pharmacy with drugs that could potentially medicate his madness (2004, 289). The cause of his madness and the remedy is situated in Barcelona, and the idea that is mentioned in the novel of contagious madness is highly suggestive: its origin is a Spanish poet who has access to everything that Amalfitano does not: to Spanish nationality, to his wife, to the idea that he emerges from a European tradition as an authentic bearer of truth, and that he is «one of the greats». But that same poet paradoxically enjoys limited access to his surrounding world, living as he does, in a mental asylum. His treatment of Panero as a fictionalized character is an ambivalent figure of access and excess. He stands in for what the excluded southern academic cannot attain, and, at the same time, the Panero character mimics those limitations with his internment.

As nuanced as Bolaño's treatment of Panero is, it is essentially similar to other contemporary representations. As with many print and media representations, Panero is something of a canvas on which to project bohemian desires for an authentic artistic experience. In the novel, as in all the representations I have touched upon, Panero's texts themselves do

not matter (only Lola reads them in *2666*), but rather his construction as a poet. The mass-mediated figure of the poet emerges from literature in a commercial setting that is, if not entirely oppositional to it, at least radically different from it. To borrow Baudrillard's term again, the authenticated poet of the media is a simulacrum of the poet who actually writes. This emergent notion of authenticity as commodity hides or suppresses what would logically make it authentic in the first place: the actual written text of the poet. It is as if, instead of the death of author, we were witnessing the death of the text. At the same time, Bolaño includes an image of Panero into his novel, plainly the product of film, broadcast and print media and reconfigures it in a way that would not have been possible without the mass-culture emergence of the figure of the poet.

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