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DIGGING UP THE *CEMETERY OF THE LIVING*: A TRANSATLANTIC TOPOS, FROM THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, TO ROSALÍA DE CASTRO, TO LIMA BARRETO

DESENTERRANDO O *CEMITÉRIO DOS VIVOS*: UM TOPOS TRANSATLÂNTICO, DA REVOLUÇÃO FRANCESA A ROSALÍA DE CASTRO, ATÉ LIMA BARRETO

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ABSTRACT

In her poem "Santa Escolástica, " published in 1884 as part of the collection *En las orillas del Sar*, the Galician author Rosalía de Castro uses the image of the "*cementerio de los vivos*" to describe the solitude and inhabitability of a peripheral Spanish city, in the wake of a mass exodus of workers and artists from the region. Nearly four decades later, the Brazilian writer Lima Barreto deploys the same metaphor as the title of his unfinished novel *O cemitério dos vivos*, which is a fictionalization of the diaries he wrote while institutionalized, between 1919 and 1920, at the National Hospital for the Insane in Rio de Janeiro. This terminological coincidence is taken here as a starting point for an unlikely linking of two authors from immensely different backgrounds. In attempting to reconstruct the genealogy of the *topos* "cemetery of the living, " this essay recovers a range of texts published in Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French dating back to Revolutionary France. This provides the necessary context for understanding how and why these two authors turned to this same image as a means of giving a name to the spaces that simultaneously oppress them and, paradoxically, offer them creative refuge.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Modernity, Asylum, Brazil, Spain.

RESUMO

No poema "Santa Escolástica", publicado em 1884 no livro *En las orillas del Sar*, a autora galega Rosalía de Castro utiliza a imagem do "*cementerio de los vivos*", como meio de retratar a solidão e a inospitalidade de uma cidade periférica espanhola, após um êxodo massivo de trabalhadores e artistas da região. Quase quatro décadas depois, o escritor carioca Lima Barreto retoma essa

mesma metáfora em seu romance inacabado *O cemitério dos vivos*, escrito a partir de diários compostos enquanto internado entre 1919 e 1920 no Hospital Nacional de Alienados, no Rio de Janeiro. A coincidência terminológica é explorada como ponto de partida para uma vinculação improvável entre dois autores provindos de contextos muito diferentes. Ao procurar reconstruir a genealogia do *topos* do "cemitério dos vivos", este ensaio recupera textos publicados em espanhol, português, inglês e francês, desde os anos da Revolução Francesa, iluminando assim o como e o porquê desses autores empregarem a mesma imagem para dar nome ao lugar que os oprime, enquanto, paradoxalmente, serve como refúgio criativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Literatura, Modernidade, Hospício, Brasil, Espanha.

What does it entail to write literature from the margins? How do marginalized authors portray these margins within their writings? Or challenge them? These are recurring questions in literary and cultural studies, and here, they orient my unlikely comparison of two authors whose lives, indeed, were quite distant: Rosalía de Castro (1837-1885), a foundational Galician writer and militant defender of her homeland; and Lima Barreto (1881-1922), from Rio de Janeiro, whose novels and short stories testify to the failed ideals of Brazil's First Republic.

Though both are now canonical authors in their respective countries, these legacies were never assured. Rosalía de Castro was a highly political poet, novelist, and intellectual, who despite her intersecting marginal identities, achieved considerable visibility during her lifetime. Hailing from a peripheral region in Spain, Galicia, it was difficult to gain recognition in the country's cultural capitals as someone who often wrote in the Galician language and centered "local" themes. The strategy taken by many of her regional contemporaries for finding success in Madrid's "national" literary scene often consisted in provincializing Galician culture (Geoffrion-Vinci, 2000; Miguélez-Carballeira, 2020; Davies, 1984). In a posthumous tribute to Castro, for instance, the writer Emilia Pardo Bazán – also a female Galician author – praised Castro's talents but restricted the scope of her work to the "limits of her own province" (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2020, p. 214). This was not the strategy of Castro or her husband Manuel Murguía. They made many enemies as advocates for republican government and members of the Galician *Rexurdimento*, a "regionalist" movement that aimed to revalorize popular culture and promote the region's political, intellectual, and artistic independence. Castro was also a mother of seven, writing and publishing at a time when female literacy was often considered dangerous. For these reasons, as well as for her

considerable literary talents, Castro has long been considered a cultural icon in Galicia, as well as in the Galician diaspora, quite notably in Cuba.

Across the Atlantic, the writer Lima Barreto lived all his life in Rio de Janeiro, meaning he had access to the literary scene of Brazil's then-capital – unlike Rosalía de Castro, who lived for only a few years in the Spanish capital of Madrid. Lima was perhaps the first Brazilian author to bring Rio de Janeiro's Black population and suburban zones to the center of a literary project, an idea suggested in the evocative title of Gabriel Chagas' recent book *Pérolas negras na periferia* (2023). A descendant of enslaved people born seven years before abolition, he was also a resident of Rio's largely Black periphery, and a commuter. He was also committed to the National Hospital for the Insane twice as an "alcoholic" and "degenerate, " in accordance with the Social Darwinist theories of the time. These diverse identities are frequently at play in his literary project, which was often damningly critical of the unfulfilled promises of Brazilian abolition and the First Republic (1889-1930). His diverse body of writing may be read as arguing that neither were successful in upending deep-rooted social hierarchies or in fully delivering on ideals of democracy and freedom.

Like Castro, Lima often felt excluded from elite literary circles, trying and failing twice to enter the Brazilian Academy of Letters, and retracting his candidacy on a third occasion. He maintained a fraught relationship with the emerging São Paulo modernist movement, which was famously inaugurated with the Week of Modern Art of 1922 – the same year that he died (Schwarcz & Meira Monteiro, 2016). In terms of literary criticism, both Castro and Barreto were long treated as "precedents" to their countries' respective modernisms. If Castro, for Juan Ramón Jiménez, was a "*precursora del modernismo*, " Lima was long labeled a "*pré-modernista*, " relegated to a sort of no-man's-land between the generation of Machado de Assis (1839-1908) and the *paulista* modernist movement. As Rafael Cardoso puts it, the category of *pre-modernist* "is so meaningless in its historicist overdetermination that it is best jettisoned right away and altogether. No one sets out to be *pre-* anything" (Cardoso, 2021, p. 2).

This broad comparison – perhaps the first ever made between these two authors – is a useful introduction to the real object of this essay, which might initially appear rather minor: a terminological coincidence between their works that would be easy to overlook or dismiss as insignificant. Indeed, I am interested in a single image that they both deploy in their writing: *cemetery of the living* ("*cemitério dos vivos*, " in Lima's case; "*cementerio de vivos*, " in Rosalía's). This term is not recurrent in either of their *oeuvres*, appearing in only one verse by Castro, and as the title of an unfinished novel by Barreto. Yet, as will become clear, the phrase is a *topos* that links these works in a rather particular way.

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It appears early in Castro's extended poem "Santa Escolástica, " published in her final book of poetry *En las orillas del Sar* (1884), where it illustrates the human absence left behind in the city of Santiago de Compostela as many Galicians fled the region for work:

–¡Cementerio de vivos! –murmuraba	*["Cemetery of the living!", I whispered*
yo al cruzar por las plazas silenciosas	*as I crossed silent plazas,*
que otros días de glorias nos recuerdan.	*reminders of gone by glory days.*
¿Es verdad que hubo aquí nombres famosos,	*Is it true that once this place knew fame,*
guerreros indomables, grandes almas?	*invincible warriors, mighty beings?*
¿Dónde hoy su raza varonil alienta?	*Where are these virile figures now?]*

(Castro, 2014, p. 66-7; trans. Gioffrion-Vinci)

Castro stages a vital search for the departed and the absent. In preceding stanzas, the narrator wanders the "deserted streets" (64) of this suffocating city – described both as a "tomb, " and here as a "cemetery of the living" (66) – in search of poetic inspiration and even her own breath. In the process, she encounters artworks created by the great sculptors and architects of the city's past, a means of contact with the dead that triggers a divine faith in art.

Three and a half decades later, in his unfinished novel *O cemitério dos vivos*, Lima Barreto fictionalizes the diary he wrote in 1920 while committed to the National Hospital for the Insane to create the fictional narrator Vicente Mascarenhas – also Black, also a writer, also committed to this hospital for alcoholism. The book overflows with references to death, representing the asylum not as a space for recovery, but rather, like in the title, as a "cemetery of the living, " where those deemed mentally ill are sent, often by police force, to live out their days in confinement. At the same time, the narrator finds escape from this cemetery in literature. In this way, like in Castro's poem, the phrase both evokes a physical place of marginalization and demarcates, metafictionally, a place of literary creation.

Digging up a phrase

When investigating these authors' use of the phrase, a few questions emerge. What were its cultural resonances in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? How did these authors arrive at this metaphor? Did they spontaneously coin it, or was it a known idiom?

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Let's start with the most basic: the phrase, *cemetery of the living*, is an oxymoron, something that seemingly cannot exist. *Cemetery* – from the ancient Greek *koimētḗrion*, or *dormitory* – indicates the place where the dead, not the living, are said to "sleep. "

It is impossible to isolate the history of Western cemeteries from their religious functions. In *Vocabulario portuguez e latino* (1713), *cemitério* is defined as "*um lugar sagrado, ou benzido pelo Bispo, em que enterram os corpos dos defuntos, mortos no grêmio da Igreja, & no qual docemente descansam, como dormindo, (que a morte dos fiéis é comparada com o sono,) & esperando a vinda do Salvador, & a ressurreição universal*" [a sacred place, or one blessed by the Bishop, in which dead bodies are buried, deceased in the bosom of the Church, & in which they sweetly rest, as if sleeping, (for the death of the faithful is compared to sleep,) & awaiting the coming of the Savior, & universal resurrection] (Bluteau, p. 233).[1] The cemetery, according to this definition, is a waiting room for the faithful dead. We might remember that it was one of the main sites used by Foucault to illustrate his concept of *heterotopia*: a place identifiable on the map, but which mirrors a world "outside" our physical reality; in this case, heaven, somewhere imaginable but not tangible. Until the late 18th century, the tendency in the West was to build cemeteries in the hearts of cities, close to churches. However, these spaces increasingly migrated to urban peripheries, as corpses were thought to carry disease, noxious to the living. Cemeteries thus "came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but 'the other city, ' where each family possesses its dark resting place" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25).

The creation of hospitals also served to isolate death from the living. The history of the cemetery runs parallel to that of insane asylums, another heterotopia cited by Foucault. For him, the pathologization of madness necessitated modern medical spaces to contain dangerous (and possibly contagious) mad populations. Though his history of madness cannot be mapped so neatly onto Brazil's own history of psychiatry, we note that in Brazil, during the last decades of the Empire and the first decades of the Republic, asylums and asylum-colonies were increasingly constructed on the *outskirts* of cities, absorbing parts of the poor, immigrant, and formerly enslaved populations that flooded into urban centers. In Galicia, the region's first asylum, Conxho, was built on top of a historic monastery in the 1880s on the outskirts of Santiago. Rosalía de Castro dedicates her book *El primer loco* (1881) and the poems "Los Robles" y "¡Jamás lo olvidaré!" – published in *En las orillas del Sar* alongside our target poem, "Santa Escolástica" – to the construction of this space and the environmental damages incurred in the process (Labrador Méndez, 2016, p. 75).

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this article are mine.

In short, throughout the 19th century, a hygienist vision of urban space promoted two parallel processes: the movement of cemeteries "of the dead" ("other cities, " as Foucault puts it) away from city centers; and simultaneously, the construction of asylums, prisons, and other institutions aimed at controlling the movement of deviant bodies – "cemeteries of the living."

In Lima Barreto's unfinished novel, the phrase first appears after a series of observations about his fellow patients who "*se rebolcariam no próprio excremento, se não fossem os cuidados dos guardas e enfermeiros*" [would be rolling around in their own excrement if it were not for the care of the guards and nurses]. This triggers a larger existential meditation on the possibility of experiencing such a "*depreciação da nossa natureza*" [depreciation of our nature] and "*quase morte em vida*" [near-death in life] (Barreto, 2017, p. 168), which in turn leads him to reflect:

> Parece tal espetáculo com os célebres cemitérios de vivos, que um diplomata brasileiro, numa narração de viagem, diz ter havido em Cantão, na China. Nas imediações dessa cidade, um lugar apropriado de domínio público era reservado aos indigentes que se sentiam morrer. Dava-se-lhes comida, roupa e caixão fúnebre em que se deviam enterrar. Esperavam tranquilamente a Morte. (Barreto, 2017, p. 169)
>
> [Such a spectacle resembles the famous cemeteries of the living that a Brazilian diplomat, in a travel narrative, says he saw in Canton, China. In the vicinity of that city, an appropriate public place was reserved for indigent people who felt they were dying. They were given food, clothing, and a coffin in which to bury themselves. They quietly awaited Death.]

Lima's comparison of the asylum to these "cemeteries" is a bit strange, if we consider the fact that the Chinese spaces are *literal* cemeteries of the living, where dying "indigents" prepare for their eventual burial. The image itself seems to be what speaks to Lima, as the phrase likely evoked the sad reality that many patients would live the rest of their lives in the hospital.

The travel narrative that Lima refers to here is Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa's *A China e os chins: Recordações de viagem* (1888), the result of Brazil's first diplomatic mission to China. In consulting this book, we find that it actually devotes very little attention to the "cemeteries" described by Lima as "famous." Lisboa cites them only briefly, as a counterexample to the prejudiced understandings of missionaries who found a "lack of charity for the dying" in Canton (more commonly referred to today as Guangzhou)

(Lisboa, 1888, p. 288-289). For Lisboa, these cemeteries instead reveal the opposite: that the local culture actually possessed deep-rooted practices of charity. He writes:

> Nas imediações de Cantão existia ainda há alguns annos um logar apropriado, de dominio publico, onde os indigentes que sentiam a approximação da morte encontravam um ultimo abrigo e soccorros, e até o féretro que devia conter os seos restos, para ao seo lado passarem á melhor vida sem incommodar o proximo. (p. 289)
>
> [In the vicinity of Canton, there existed some years ago an appropriate public place, where indigents who felt death approaching could find one final shelter, mercy, and even the coffin that was to contain their remains, and beside which they could cross over to a better life without disturbing their neighbor.]

In comparing Lisboa's and Lima's text, it becomes clear that the author of *O cemitério dos vivos* recycled language from *A China e os chins* – a fact that suggests he wrote this section of his unfinished novel with the diplomat's book open at his side. More interesting is Lisboa's use of our target phrase not to describe a perverse place, as Barreto and Castro do, but instead one of care and philanthropy. This cemetery puts a roof over the heads of "indigents, " so they may live out their dying days in dignity and eventually receive burial rites – considered vitally important for eternal salvation, and thus a Catholic barometer of the civility of the Chinese. The engraving that accompanies this text, reproduced below, depicts a strangely peaceful scene, as several people fabricate or sit beside their own coffins. The cross-legged man on the left almost appears to be meditating.

At the same time, Lisboa informs us in a footnote: "*Esses cemeterios de vivos estão hoje substituidos por vastos e commodos hospicios, fundados em quasi todas as grandes cidades pelos missionarios catholicos e protegidos pelo Governo chinez*" [These cemeteries of the living are today replaced by vast and comfortable asylums, founded in almost all large cities by Catholic missionaries and protected by the Chinese government] (p. 289). The cemeteries thus represent a model of charity that, by the time Lisboa wrote his book, was already rendered extinct by a new "modern" (read: Western) care system in Canton. In this way, the straw roofs depicted in the engraving indicate not just the poverty of these places, but also their primitive character.[2]

[2] Unfortunately, I have yet to locate other texts that cite these Cantonese cemeteries. I am grateful for the help of Yangyou Fang, who, researching Chinese sources available online, has also found no reference to these institutions. We did find that Canton's first psychiatric hospital was built in 1885, shortly before the Brazilian diplomat's trip. It is also worth noting the role of missionaries in exporting Western medicine to Asia (Young, 1973).

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Image from *A China e os chins* (Lisboa, 1888, p. 290)

Barreto claims to have found the idea of a cemetery of the living in Lisboa's book, yet clearly diverges from Lisboa's charitable depiction. For Lima, the image aids his larger critique of Brazil's twisted and unequal modernity. While he occasionally cites the hospital staff's care for patients – who, again, "would be rolling around in their own excrement if it were not for the care of the guards and nurses" – he primarily portrays the asylum as a place of Black social exclusion and failed republican ideals. We might then wonder: could Lima have been exposed to other uses of the phrase? In Lilia Schwarcz's biography of the author, she suggests he might have encountered the phrase in an article published in *A Razão* shortly before his hospitalization (Schwarcz, 2017, p. 392-393). Rosalía de Castro's use of the same image indicates an even longer history to be uncovered.

A geneology of the cemetery of the living

A deep dive into digitized newspaper and library archives (including Fundação Biblioteca Nacional's Hemeroteca Digital, Biblioteca Nacional Española's Hemeroteca Digital, HathiTrust, and GoogleBooks) leads us to uses of "cemetery of the living" in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English dating back at least to the 17th century. Already in 1656, the bishop Juan de Palafox uses the image of a "sepulcro de vivos" in his *Ano Espiritual*. In 1660, Antoine Baudeau de Somaize includes the following entry in his *Grand*

Dictionnaire des Prétieuses ou la Clef de la langue des ruelles: "*Boutique. – La boutique d'un libraire: le cimetière des vivants et des morts*."

While these examples suggest an even earlier history to be explored, I am interested in a *topos*, or motif, that appears to have emerged later: the *cemetery of the living* as a metaphor for naming and critiquing modernity and its disciplinary institutions. This usage seems to have its origins in cultural representations of the Bastille – an institution that "provided a lasting reservoir of metaphors and symbols on which the Romantic imagination could draw with fervor… a modern prison obsession that mirrors and challenges a society bent on coercing and oppressing" (Brombert, 1978, p. 45). Analyzing texts written by prisoners who, as early as the 17th century, characterized imprisonment as analogous to *live burial* or *death in life*, Monique Cottret notes how "the idea that the Bastille corresponded to catacombs" (Cottret, 1986, p. 107) solidified in the 18th century, providing a clear image of the horrors of monarchical France. The Bastille was not just an oppressive institution, but a "devourer of lives, " a "tomb-cellar-underground-funerary-pit-well-abyss, " where prisoners experienced "accidental death" (p. 122).

Scholars have shown how this link was appropriated in the cultural realms of theater (Macdonald, 2007, p. 101) and Gothic literature (Miles, 1995, p. 70). Simon Schama, in a chapter of his history of the French Revolution entitled "Buried Alive? Myths and Realities in the Bastille, " analyzes the 1780s as "the great age of prison literature":

> Hardly a year went by without another contribution to the genre, usually bearing the title *The Bastille Revealed* (La Bastille Dévoilée) or some variation. It used the standard Gothic devices of provoking shudders of disgust and fear together with pulse-accelerating moments of hope. In particular, as Monique Cottret has pointed out, it drew on the fashionable terror of being buried alive. This was such a preoccupation in the late eighteenth century (and not only in France) that it was possible to join societies that would guarantee to send a member to one's burial to listen for signs and sounds of vitality and to insure against one of these living entombments (Schama, 1989, p. 393).

The "cemetery of the living" metaphor seems linked to this cultural myth. In a 1794 speech to British Parliament, for instance, the English statesman David Hartley lists the many "tyrannical" instruments employed by the French monarchy, emphasizing, in particular, "the perpetual terrors and dungeons of a bastile, the horrid cemetery of the living; their only *Habeas Corpus*, either for life or death, being a *lettre de cachét*" (Hartley,

1794, p. 13). Taking the Bastille as our ground zero seems to fit with Foucauldian theory, which often draws on the conflicts arising around the French Revolution as a starting point for the emergence of biopower. In any case, we see here a significant use of our target phrase as a resource to denounce a prison.

In Brazil, the phrase was used in the press on several occasions to protest the construction of prisons, such as in Valença in 1832[3] and Funchal in 1849.[4] A century later, a journalist uses the metaphor to denounce conditions at the Ilha Grande correctional colony (*A Manhã*, Oct. 24, 1926, p. 1). Similarly, it is deployed throughout the West to describe the Siberian exile system, which in and of itself became a metonym for tsarist despotism. A French text from 1846 characterizes Siberia as a "cemetery of the living; a world of fabulous pains, a land populated by infamous criminals" (Custine, 1846, p. 130). So do the following verses published in Kansas in 1893, from the perspective of the daughter of a man exiled to Siberia: "Dost hear the sea's songs of thy dear birth place, / Siberia? Dost mind thee of those days / Of wan white faces and of chain-lank tread, / Within that graveyard of the living dead?" (Healy, 1893, p. 4). Russian literature itself may have played a role in disseminating the idea of death in life. Lima Barreto, for instance, makes several references to Dostoevsky's semi-autobiographical *The House of the Dead*, written about a Siberian prison camp. Anton Chekhov's short story "In Exile" (1892) describes a ferryman who returns from Siberian exile as if he were "no longer alive" (in Beer, 2017, p. 5).

We also find early examples of the phrase used to denote other types of disciplinary institutions, such as in 1803, when Catherine Cuthbertson, in her *Romance of the Pyranees*, describes a convent as a "burial place of the living" (Cuthbertson, 1812, p. 191). This book also serves as testimony to the spread of the topos across Europe, as the phrase appears translated into Spanish, 27 years later, as "cementerio de los vivos" (Radcliffe, 1839, p. 30).[5] Moreover, the convent example suggests a possible alternative origin of our phrase, predating the Bastille: the idea that women forced into convents to avoid social shame experienced "death in life."

If in the United States, 19th-century insane asylums were often likened to the Bastille (Rondinone, 2019, p. 26), in Brazil, Machado de Assis famously labels the fiction-

[3] "[...] em verdade não ha nada mais triste, mais deploravel do que a Casa, que se denomina aqui Prisão; disto só o nome ella tem; e não querendo fazer agora de pensado sua pintura, diremos somente he ella hum *cemitério dos vivos*, mas do qual se pode bem livrar qualquer que lá vá cahir, porque segurança he o que menos ella tem" (*O Valenciano: Jornal da sociedade defensora da liberdade e independencia nacional da Villa de Valença*, July 21, 1832).

[4] "Oxalá pois que [...] o Governo acuda a tamanho mal, ajudando a Camara Municipal do Funchal a construir uma prizão, que não seja um horrivel cemiterio de vivos" (Menezes, 1849, p. 140).

[5] Interestingly, Radcliffe, and not Cuthbertson, is credited in the Spanish version. This error seems to stem from the first translation to French, from 1809 (Chaudhuri).

al Casa Verde asylum, in *O Alienista,* the "Bastille of Human Reason." By the turn of the century, the cemetery metaphor, with its carceral resonances, came to describe other medical spaces, too. In the *Luso-African Almanach*, we find the idea that "*a pharmacia é o cemitério dos vivos; o cemitério é a vida dos mortos [...] Há no mundo duas espécies de animaes que se alimentam do sangue dos homens: o medico e a sanguessuga, sendo aquelle o protector d'esta*" [the pharmacy is the cemetery of the living; the cemetery is the life of the dead [...] There are two species of animals in the world that feed on the blood of men: the physician and the leech, the former being the protector of the latter] (Wooldz, 1899, p. 14). Similarly, in 1923, in Colombia, Luis Enrique Osorio published the novella *El cementerio de los vivos*, about the leprosarium of Agua de Dios.

In early 20th-century Brazilian newspapers, the phrase seems to refer most frequently to psychiatric hospitals. Consider the following sentence from *A Razão*: "*Vêde um homem que só soube usar da sua intelligencia, da sua força para o mal, ficou louco e lá vae para o cemitério dos vivos, pagar todo o mal que fez*" [Look at this man who only knew how to use his intelligence and strength for evil, becoming crazy and being sent to the cemetery of the living to pay for all the evil he committed"] (Dec. 15, 1917, p. 1). The same newspaper repeated this phrase in 1919, in the article cited earlier by Lilia Schwarcz, and again in 1920, when a journalist published the letter of Roberto Duque Estrada Godfroy, who had recently led the Madmen's Revolt of 1920 – a patient-led insurrection at the National Hospital of the Insane:

> um homem atirado á bastilha julianica, ao cemitério dos vivos, pelos fidalgos da época, pelos ZELOSOS parentes dessa grande victima, e lá nessa masmorra, nessa maldita prisão do Estado, a cargo do grande perverso Juliano Moreira, classificado de louco por esse Juliano, por esse grande criminoso, ao serviço de creaturas vaidosas e más que assim pensam e procedem. (*A Razão*, Mar. 9, 1920, p. 1)
>
> [a man thrown into the Julianic Bastille, the cemetery of the living, by the lords of the time, by this great victim's OVERZEALOUS relatives; and there in that dungeon, in that cursed state prison, run by the greatly perverse Juliano Moreira, classified as mad by that Juliano, that great criminal, who is at the service of vein and evil creatures who think and proceed in this way"].

Treating the "Julianic Bastille" and the "cemetery of the living" as synonyms, this journalist unwittingly links our *topos* to its history. Importantly, Lima Barreto was a

witness to the Madmen's Revolt while hospitalized in 1920.[6] Approved for discharge, he delayed leaving for several weeks. However, after witnessing patients marching through courtyards, setting fire to mattresses, and clamoring for the director's death, he wrote, "*Já tenho medo de ficar aqui*" [I'm scared to stay here] (Barreto, 2017, p. 109). The uprising was a catalyst for Lima to get out of there. Yet, the fact that both he and this report evoke this same image reveals not only an overlapping of interests, but also invites speculation on patients' use of the phrase behind hospital walls to denounce hospital conditions and channel their outrage. It is also worth noting that the asylum continued to be linked to this image for at least a decade after the insurrection. The 1930 article "*No 'Cemiterio dos Vivos'*" directly cites Lima Barreto as it seeks to unveil the "*deshumano e criminoso [...] abandono em que vivem os loucos*" [inhumane and criminal […] abandonment under which the mad live] (*A Noite*, Dec. 23, 1930).

Finally, I have traced one last meaning of our phrase: as a metaphor for the modern city – particularly relevant in Rosalía de Castro's case. A key precedent in the Spanish context is "El Día de Difuntos de 1836: Fígaro en el cementerio" by Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837), a foundational figure in modern Spanish literature, likely read by Castro. In the text, Madrid is described as a cemetery: "*Vamos claros, dije yo para mí, ¿dónde está el cementerio? ¿Fuera o dentro? Un vértigo espantoso se apoderó de mí, y comencé a ver claro. El cementerio está dentro de Madrid. Madrid es el cementerio*" [Come on, I said to myself. Where is the cemetery? Outside or inside? A dreadful vertigo took hold of me, and I began to see clearly. The cemetery is inside Madrid. Madrid is the cemetery] (Larra, 2018, p. 198).[7] This dramatic text, steeped in romanticism, resonates with later uses of our phrase, such as in the article "El Cementerio de los Vivos, " also written about Madrid (Gabaldón, 1901), or in the biography of the author Francisco Bilbao, far from his homeland and lost in Paris, "*un pueblo de ruina y de muerte… un inmenso cementerio de vivos*" [a town of ruin and death… an immense cemetery of the living] (Figueroa, 1894, p. 243). These examples depicting urban solitude complement uses of the phrase to decry the unhealthy conditions of modern cities. In 1884, *Diario do Brasil* offers the following image: "*Habitamos um soberbo paiz; respiramos um ar que é a vida, um ar delicioso, longe das cidades, cemitério dos vivos*" [We inhabit a superb country; we breathe an air which is life, a delicious air, far from the cities, cemetery of the living] (Mar. 4, 1884, p. 1). Similarly, comparing mortality rates in Santiago de Chile to those of other world

[6] For an account of the Madmen's Revolt, see the article I co-authored with Lilia Schwarcz, "A 'Revolta dos Loucos' de 1920: agência e insubordinação no Hospital Nacional de Alienados" (Blau Edelstein & Schwarcz, 2023).

[7] Even earlier, Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645) – surely a common reference for both Larra and Castro – evokes the image of a city-cemetery in poems like "A Roma sepultada en sus ruínas."

capitals, the Bacteriological Institute of Santiago classified the city as a "cementerio de vivos" (Maira, 1895, p. 150).

In summary, having reconstructed this genealogy across four languages, I offer a few generalizations: (1) since the late 18th century, the phrase "cemetery of the living" has frequently been mobilized to critique modernity; (2) with the notable exception of *A China e os chins*, the connotation is almost always negative; (3) this *topos* appears to have its origins in critical cultural representations of the Bastille, soon broadening to include other institutions dedicated to treating or controlling "problematic" bodies, including convents, asylums, and leprosaria; (4) it has also been used to portray the unnatural and unhealthy qualities of modern cities, where danger is displaced from bodies to the unlivable city itself; (5) finally, in some cases, the *topos* lends to romanticism, in representations of the individual against modernity.

Now that this has been established, we may return to our two authors.

"Animating marble" in Rosalía de Castro

Analyzing the Gothic literature of Ann Radcliffe, Robert Miles highlights the convent as a "cemetery of the living" that oppresses women while also offering them creative refuge:

> Radcliffe's heroines are irrepressible: no matter the horrors that befall them, or rather, as Austen understood, because of them, their genius flourishes. Lock them into a castle turret, and their imaginations soar with the sublimity of the scenery without; leave them camping out in a forested ruin, and they will probe behind the arras to discover blood-curdling mysteries. […] these are the enabling conditions of female creativity, and therefore genius. The convent thus has a double valence in Radcliffe: as a place of refuge it sustains the heroine's genius […]; as a final destination […], it is the cemetery of the living, a patriarchal Bastille where females are shorn of their expressive properties. (Miles, 2009, p. 51)

This dual function resonates with the works of Rosalía de Castro and Lima Barreto, in which the image demarcates an oppressive environment that is, simultaneously, the place where they write.

Barreto evokes this idea in an interview he gave to a reporter in his final weeks of hospitalization. When asked about his experience, he stated:

> […] o Hospício é uma prisão como outra qualquer, com grades e guardas severos que mal permitem chegar à janela. Para mim, porém, tem sido útil a estadia nos domínios do Senhor Juliano Moreira. Tenho coligido observações importantíssimas para escrever um livro sobre a vida interna dos hospitais de loucos. Leia *O Cemitério dos vivos*. Nessas páginas contarei, com fartura de pormenores, as cenas mais jocosas e mais dolorosas que se passam dentro destas paredes inexpugnáveis. Tenho visto coisas interessantíssimas. (in Schwarcz, 2017, p. 397)
>
> […the Asylum is a prison like any other, with bars and strict guards that barely allow you to reach the window. For me, however, the stay in the domains of Mr. Juliano Moreira has been useful. I have been collecting very important observations to write a book about the inner life of madhouses. Read *O cemitério dos vivos*. In these pages I will tell, in a wealth of details, the most jocular and painful scenes that take place within these impregnable walls.]

Here, like in Miles' evaluation of Radcliffe, Lima equates psychiatric confinement to imprisonment, at the same time that he describes it almost like an artistic residency. Creative refuge in the cemetery of the living produced *The Cemetery of the Living*.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves, and instead turn to Castro's "Santa Escolástica" [Saint Scholastica].[8] The poem opens with a juxtaposition between the impressive religious and artistic past of the "santa ciudad" [holy city] (Castro, 2014, p. 66) of Santiago de Compostela –final destination of the Camino de Santiago – and the ostensible ruin of its present. Several of our phrase's meanings resonate in the poem, especially those referring to the conditions of modern cities. The important difference is that, unlike in Larra's Madrid-cemetery, Castro places readers in a national periphery. To oversimplify complex historical processes: the industrialization of urban centers demanded labor and natural resources from rural peripheries like Galicia, already subjected to Castilianization since the Catholic Monarchs. For Germán Labrador Méndez, this accelerated draining of capital and bodies is the main theme of *En las orillas del Sar*: "modern temporality, its costs, " and the need for "other forms of duration" that may slow down such processes (Labrador

[8] All bracketed translations of Castro come from Geoffrion-Vinci's wonderful bilingual edition.

Méndez, 2020, p. 74-5). In a word, the book, far from nostalgic, seeks the spiritual means to navigate Galicia's damaging transformations.

In the poem, the "cementerio de vivos" is Santiago de Compostela, which Castro portrays as diseased, threatening to infect all within it. The poem's first-person narrator appears isolated in the city's "*desiertas calles*" [empty streets] and "*plazas silenciosas*" [silent plazas]. She describes a "*bochornoso calor que enerva y rinde*" [stifling heat that weakens and exhausts], a miasma-like "*soplo mortal*" [deathly gust] that makes "*el aire irrespirable y denso*" [the air smothering and thick] and turns Compostela into a "grave." The narrator is left alone, and forced to wander the city in a vital search for "*puro aliento*" [fresh air] (Castro, 2014, p. 64-66).

Her loneliness is not only the product of the emigration of workers and peasants to industrial centers, but also seems to reflect a lack of artistic peers. The narrator asks, "*¿Es verdad que hubo aquí nombres famosos, / guerreros indomables, grandes almas?*" [Is it true that once this place knew fame, / invincible warriors, mighty beings?] (p. 66). Given Castro's engagement in revitalizing the Galician cultural scene, the line could be read as speaking to the loneliness of the peripheral poet, who meditates on the city's history as she walks its streets and comes into contact with buildings and statues created by great artists of Galicia's past.

Here, it is worth briefly discussing Galician *regionalismo*. In the face of the centralization of publishing houses, newspapers, academies, museums, etc. in cities like Madrid – which drew artists and intellectuals away from smaller cities – the *Rexurdimento* sought to forge a local community of artists.[9] Rosalía de Castro's husband, Manuel Murguía, was also integral to this movement, helping to found cultural institutions such as the Real Academia Gallega. He was also a cultural historian, writing books such as *El arte en Santiago durante el siglo XVIII y noticia de los artistas que florecieron en dicha ciudad y centuria* (1884). In the preface, he laments the number of fine artists who left the region without leaving behind "*los mármoles que habían animado: cosa harto triste, porque en cuestión de bellas artes, no es tanto lo que vale un nombre glorioso para un país dado, como el hecho de la escuela que crea el artista, los discípulos que deja en pos de sí*" [the marble that they had animated: a sad fact, since with regards to the fine arts, a glorious name is worth less to a given country than the school that that artist creates, the disciples he leaves behind] (Murguía, 1884, p. 8-9). This evocation of the past, furthermore, takes on a political tone if we remember that he is writing in the wake of the coup that brought an end to Spain's short-lived First Republic, which both he and Castro supported. He

[9] To learn more about the professionalization of writing in Spain, see Martín (2009).

seems to attempt to recover a distant moment of local greatness in the face of the collapse of the republican project, a failure that also complicated efforts for Galician regional independence.[10]

Given that Castro's *En las orillas del Sar* and Murguía's *El arte en Santiago* were published in the same year – and potentially written in the same house – we might interpret "Santa Escolástica" as fruit of the same dialogue that produced her husband's book on the vital role of local art. In the poem, "statues and reliefs" created as objects of religious appreciation are not abstractly divine, but instead "*el encanto del artista*" [an artist's delight] – both the artist of centuries ago and the poet currently admiring the works. A historic building, similarly described as a "*incomparable obra del genio*" [peerless work of genius], is also depicted as "drawing itself" in the air ("*en el espacio dibujóse altiva*"), as the narrator's very gaze reconstructs the original artist's creative act – laying the groundwork for later comparisons between art and magic (Castro, 2014, p. 66).

The poem's title references the Saint Scholastica statue at the San Martín Pinario church in Santiago. The saint, who lived between the 5th and 6th centuries and founded the first Benedictine monastery for women, is here depicted ascending to heaven. The sculptor carved the marble, a rigid and noble material, in such a way that the clouds seem to move, lifting the saint.[11] Castro's poem mirrors this movement. Light streams through the stained glass, bringing the statue to life: "*como visión soñada, se dibujó en el aire / de un ángel y una santa el contorno divino*" [like a dreamed-of vision, in the air were drawn / an angle and lady saint in divine coupling] (p. 70). For Castro, this is not merely evidence of God, but the "*sueño admirable que realizó el artista*" [admirable dream achieved by the artist] – that is, the labor of an earthly creator.

As it happens, this person has a name: José Ferreiro Suárez, a sculptor (1738-1830) who certainly left "marble" behind in Galicia. Murguía describes Suárez in his book as a revolutionary figure, who "*trajo a su pueblo natal, no sólo procedimientos más racionales que los usados al presente entre nosotros, sino un buen gusto y sana tendencia, que hace del Sr. Suárez un digno adepto del arte y un legítimo sucesor de los mejores tallistas compostelanos del siglo pasado*" [brought to his birthplace not just more rational procedures than those used among us up to that moment, but also good taste and healthy habits, which make Mr. Suárez a worthy artistic talent and a legitimate successor to the

[10] Davies, 1984 and Labrador Mendez, 2020 offer insights into these topics. I would also like to thank Germán Labrador Méndez for his help in thinking through the politics of these two vital figures in Galician cultural history.

[11] Images of the statue may be found online. There is an excellent photo, for instance, on Paula Barreiro and Rafael Pérez's blog Viajando el Mapa, on the page "Visitar San Martín Pinario": https://viajandoelmapa.com/visitar-san-martin-pinario/ (Accessed Aug. 15, 2024).

best carvers from Compostela] (1884, p. 116-117). For Rosalía, contact with Suárez's Saint Scholastica triggers a series of reflections on the art's power to resolve the existential problems indicated throughout the poem: loneliness ("*¡Ya yo no estaba sola!*" [I was alone no longer!], p. 70), depression ("*todo cuanto en mí había de pasión y ternura, / de entusiasmo ferviente y gloriosos empeños, / ante el sueño admirable que realizó el artista, / volviendo a tomar vida, resucitó en mi pecho*" [Everything in me of passion and tenderness, / of fervent enthusiasm and glorious acts, / before this admirable dream, this artist's achievement, / returned to life, reborn in my soul], p. 72), the proximity of death (the use of verbs like "*resucitar*"), and the very need to wander (upon seeing the statue, "*se dobló mi rodilla, mi frente se inclinó / ante Él*" [I bent my knee and bowed / before Him], p. 72).

Suárez's rendering of a female saint's transcendence catalyzes the narrator's own transcendence. The poem's final line – "*¡Hay arte! ¡Hay poesía…! Debe haber cielo. ¡Hay Dios!*" [There is art! There is poetry…! Heaven must exist. There is God!] – exclamatorily speaks to Murguía's thesis that "leaving behind marble" spurs on local creative production. Castro takes this idea a step further by including divine transcendence at the end of this sequence. As Geoffrion-Vinci puts it, here, Castro "prioritizes humanity, specifically human capacity for the creation of beauty, over the divine. This is a shocking statement for its time [...] Castro asserts in this poem that God did not make man but rather the reverse. The artists created the sublime image of God and thus brought God into existence" (in Castro, 2014, p. 86). If Castro, in Labrador Méndez's analysis, seeks to halt the progression of a noxious modern temporality, here this is achieved by pausing and appreciating visual art, an experience that opens her up to connections between human creation and the divine. Through art, she spiritually escapes the cemetery of the living – which, again, is both the topic of the poem and the place where it was written.

O cemitério dos vivos

Hospitalized for alcoholism, Vicente Mascarenhas, the main character in Lima Barreto's autofictional *O cemitério dos vivos*, spends his days reflecting on his life outside the National Hospital for the Insane (his family, his studies, his son's illiteracy, the death of his wife), as well as on life inside the asylum (positivist science, his doctors' inflated egos, the phenomenon of madness). In other words, his thoughts move between the individual and the system. If the character's systemic criticism is astute, this is because it is grounded in real experience; Barreto used a diary he wrote while institutionalized at

the same hospital as source material for this unfinished novel. At times, the texts blur, as Vicente mirrors Lima and Lima slips into his character – who, unlike Barreto, is married and has a kid – at different points in the diary.

In his *Diário do hospício* [Asylum Diary], Barreto describes many "humiliations" suffered at the hospital. He felt stripped of his identity and privacy – losses that, Erving Goffman argues, are built into such institutions – as he was forced to disrobe in front of others, give up personal clothing items, wear a hospital gown, bathe in communal showers, and sleep in crowded rooms. He felt transformed into the racialized object of science, made to demonstrate the eugenicist theories of the time, the "*fraqueza da loucura mestiça – a psicose dos degenerados*" [weakness of mestizo madness – the psychosis of the degenerate] (Barreto, 1998, p. 15). He also complained about the patients. They flipped on a dime from calm to aggressive, quiet to talkative, "normal" to "crazy." Many were diagnosed with alcoholism like Lima, yet he saw himself as different: he did not experience psychosis, and furthermore, he was a writer and intellectual. Indeed, he appeals to his sanity throughout the diary, using it as motive to isolate himself, observing patients and staff from an almost scientific distance.

O cemitério dos vivos is even more forceful in its criticism of the hospital than the diary. Lima frequently draws on penitentiary descriptions of the asylum, noting, for example, the "nicknames" used by patients, "*como em todas as prisões, internatos e quartéis*" [like in all prisons, boarding schools, and barracks] (Barreto, 2017, p. 185). Demonstrating a sort of proto-Foucauldian comprehension of the alliance between medicine and the state, Vicente narrates the racist police practices that feed into the growth of the patient population. The police, he writes, make sweeping "*generalizações e as mais infantis. Suspeita de todo o sujeito estrangeiro com nome arrevessado, assim os russos, polacos, romaicos são para ela forçosamente caftens; todo cidadão de cor há de ser por força um malandro; e todos os loucos hão de ser por força furiosos e só transportáveis em carros blindados*" [generalizations, and the most infantile ones at that. They are suspicious of all foreign subjects with strange-sounding names. All Russian, Polish, and Romanian people are seen as pimps; every citizen of color is necessarily a malandro; and the mad are all treated as if they were raging lunatics, only transportable in vehicles with metal bars] (Barreto, 2017, p. 143-144). Hospital life, in turn, is described as a form of forced segregation: "*apesar de sentir-me perfeitamente são [...] teria forçosamente de ficar segregado mais de um ou dois meses, entre doentes de todos matizes, educação, manias e quizílias*" [although I felt perfectly sane [...] I would have to remain segregated for more than a month or two among ill people of all types, manners, manias, and quirks] (p. 145). These descriptions are heightened by a series of humiliating and even terrify-

ing scenes, such as when Vicente is subjected to the examination of a young doctor who wants to experiment with new treatments on his body.

In the book, Barreto often portrays hospital staff with surprising generosity: "*só posso dizer bem desses pobres homens, humildes camponeses portugueses*" [I can only say good things about these poor men, humble Portuguese peasants] (p. 185). Despite their sometimes cruel behavior, Vicente recognizes them as cogs in a machine. Interestingly, he expresses sympathy for one nurse who spent 40 years living among patients, pondering the health risks of daily exposure to madness: "*A insânia cria complicações, dores e sofrimentos que não ficam só naqueles que são atingidos, mas vão se refletir nos outros, talvez mais profundamente, deste ou daquele modo*" [Insanity creates complications, pain, and suffering that do not remain only inside those it first affects, but which are also reflected in others, perhaps more deeply] (p. 184). The insanity supposedly *contained* in modern asylums is therefore depicted as infecting all those drawn into its orbit, an idea linking back to the urban resonances of the "cemetery of the living." Like the modern city, the hospital is characterized by insalubrity and contagion.

The asylum is also portrayed as a psychological prison for someone like Vicente, who is used to constant intellectual stimulation, but here experiences little variation in daily life, forced here to "quietly await Death." He saves himself by turning the asylum into a creative refuge, a fact that is dramatized in the book, as Vicente loses himself in the hospital library, and also evident in the very writing of *O cemitério dos vivos*. In the interview cited earlier, Barreto describes hospitalization as artistically "useful, " almost like a writers' retreat, where he could collect "very interesting observations to write a book about the internal life of madhouses."

This cultivation of a public image parallels some of the gaps that exist between Lima's diary and his more radical novel. If in Lima's private writings, he at times speculates about the usefulness of confinement for treating his occasional alcohol-induced deliria, or even wonders if he might actually be degenerate, in *Cemitério*, Vicente more forcefully dismisses positivism, classifying the hospital as a "useless prison" poorly suited "*para varrer do meu espírito as alucinações que o álcool e outros fatores lhe tinham trazido*" [for sweeping out of my spirit the delusions that alcohol and other factors had shepherded in] (p. 145). If in the diary, Lima stands in a courtyard as he takes in the almost panoramic natural landscape surrounding the hospital, concluding that "all is sad" (p. 76), in the novel, Vicente generally observes this same nature from behind "entirely barred" windows (p. 171) – and furthermore, "*esse pátio é a coisa mais horrível que se pode imaginar*" [this courtyard is the most horrible thing that can be imagined] (p. 167). And if in *Cemitério*, Vicente says that "despite feeling sane" he has

been "forcibly segregated" to live "among all sorts of sick people" (p. 145), we know that Barreto, even after receiving permission to leave the hospital, *chose* to remain there for weeks. In short, we might say that in the process of generating autofiction, it is not only Lima Barreto who transforms into Vicente Mascarenhas, but the hospital itself that transforms into a *cemetery of the living*. His use of the metaphor is symptomatic of a radicalization that seems to have occurred after stepping away from the hospital, evident too in his *crônicas* "Os percalços do budismo" (*Careta,* Jan. 31, 1920) and "A lógica do maluco" (*Careta,* Oct. 8, 1921).

Fiction thus offers Lima the strength to hone in on his systemic critique. In fact, he dramatizes this power early in the diary, when he imagines himself in the place of famous authors who experienced political persecution:

> Todos nós estávamos nus, as portas abertas, e eu tive muito pudor. Eu me lembrei do banho de vapor de Dostoiévski, na Casa dos Mortos. Quando baldeei, chorei; mas lembrei de Cervantes, do próprio Dostoiévski, que pior deviam ter sofrido em Argel e na Sibéria. Ah! A Literatura ou me mata ou me dá o que eu peço dela. (p. 36)
>
> [We were all naked, the doors open, and I was very embarrassed. I remembered Dostoevsky's steam bath in the *House of the Dead*. When I stripped down, I cried; but I remembered Cervantes and Dostoevsky himself, who must have suffered worse in Algiers and Siberia. Ah! Literature either kills me or gives me what I ask of it.]

In a moment of extreme humiliation, Lima imagines himself in the place of great authors who turned their experiences as prisoners into literature.[12] This gesture runs parallel to Rosalía de Castro's revival of authors from Galicia's past in "Santa Escolástica." For both, it is possible to survive the cemetery of the living by summoning artists who once inhabited similar cemeteries.

[12] Interestingly, Maura Lopes Cançado, in her own diary written while hospitalized at Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional in Rio between 1959-1960, also turns to Dostoyevsky for consolation: "*Li numa revista um trecho de uma carta de Doistoiévski, escrita da Sibéria, durante sua prisão. [...] Pensava em Dostoievski. Porque Dostoievski, além de insulina, foi a única ajuda que recebi no sanatório da Tijuca*" [I read in a magazine a passage from a letter Dostoyevsky wrote in Siberia while in prison. [...] I thought about Dostoyevsky. Because beyond insulin, Dostoyevsky was the only help I received while at the Tijuca sanatorium] (2015, p. 152-3).

Final days and final thoughts

Early in his diary, Lima Barreto reflects on this being his second time at the asylum, expressing certainty that he would not "return a third time, " and that if he did, it would only be to die, transported soon thereafter to the nearby São João Batista cemetery (Barreto, 2017, p. 35). He thus evokes the real cemetery, where he would indeed be buried two years later, in 1922, after his premature death at age 41. Rosalía de Castro also died young, at 48, from uterine cancer, just one year after publishing *En las orillas del Sar*. Illness and imminent death appear as themes in several of the book's poems. We might be tempted to ask whether these authors are foreseeing or literarily rehearsing their own death. Certainly, this seems to be the case of José Mariano de Larra, author of "El Día de Difuntos de 1836, " briefly cited earlier, who committed suicide shortly after imagining Madrid as a cemetery.

Instead of engaging in such speculation, however, it is more insightful to consider the power these authors find as they portray this limbo between life and death. By tracing Lima Barreto and Rosalía de Castro's use of this *topos* within a broader genealogy that spans from the French Revolution through to the present – as artists and musicians continue to return to this image[13] – we may affirm that invoking the *cemetery of the living* means entering, consciously or not, into a history of activism from the peripheries and cries in the dark. In the case of our authors, it distills their attempts to exploit the world's uninhabitability for its creative potential.

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[13] In 1984, Ricardo Arturo Jarrín, of the Ecuadorian movement "Alfaro Vive, Carajo", wrote *El cementerio de los vivos* about his experience as a political prisoner. More recently, Venezuelan artist Oleñka Carrasco, in her photography book "Le Cemetière des Vivants" (2019), reflects on the life and death of marginalized people in large urban centers (here, Cairo). In 2022, the band Alto Mando Sierraño released the song "Cementerio de los vivos, " telling the story of a young man in Mexico City, who, driven mad by poverty, commits a crime and ends up in jail.

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