The Pleasure of Devouring Marriage, Mexico, and *Gorditas Pellizcadas con Manteca* in Italo Calvino's "Under the Jaguar Sun"

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Abstract: Italo Calvino's "Under the Jaguar Sun" is an attempt to move beyond the Lacanian split of masculine and feminine jouissance to a Barthian sense of the pleasure based on the phonetics of language. Throughout the story, the main character's understanding of Mexico, pleasure, food, Other, and cannibalism are transformed resulting in the narrator and his wife's ability to consume and be consumed by each other. The story successfully breaks away from the constraints of language and as such imitates and achieves the pleasure of reading theorized throughout the story.

Keywords: pleasure of reading, Barthes, Lacan, Calvino, Mexico

Italo Calvino's posthumously published short story "Under the Jaguar Sun" is commonly read as an exploration of the pleasures and aversions related to the sense of taste.[1] Set in the early 1980s, Calvino's narrator is touring the area in and around Oaxaca, Mexico with his wife Olivia. He describes their visits to convents, churches, and ancient ruins. These visits often precede or coincide with their consumption of traditional Mexican foods and spices. Yet, Calvino, considered by many to be one of the preeminent postmodern writers for his playful intertwining of reality and fantasy as well as for subverting traditional techniques of storytelling[2], is not offering his reader a comforting travel essay. Rather, these descriptions function as a pretense for more sensational accounts of the erotic

[1] Calvino intended to write five short stories focusing on each of the senses. Only three were completed and published together with "Under the Jaguar Sun" as the title story (Weiss 188). In "The Name, the Nose" a Parisian dandy, a London rocker, and a primitive man each pursue women whose scents have aroused their sexual appetite. "A King Listens" narrates the paranoid thoughts of a King who refuses to leave the seat of his throne, lest he lose power, and who imagines every noise as a potential personal or political betrayal.

[2] For two good surveys of Calvino's progression from neorealism in *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* (1947) through his forays into structuralism with *Invisible Cities* (1972) to his seminal deconstruction of the novel in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), see Cavallaro and Weiss.

gastronomy of colonial nuns, ecstasy-inducing peppers, pre-Columbian Aztec cannibalism, spices that accentuate the taste of human flesh, and the narrator's own fantasy of being sacrificed.

On the surface, the more gruesome accounts of the unsavory acts of consumption seem to correlate to the narrator's ruminations about the potential demise of his marriage while those arousing generally accepted sensual and sexual stimulations favor his hope that his marriage will continue, or at least return to a more normal form of intimacy from their present "phase of rarefaction" (Calvino 10). But as many critics have shown, Calvino's accounts of the apparent oppositions between acceptable and unacceptable forms of cooking, eating, and communicating as well as those related to morality and religion, gender and sexuality, and European and Latin American society collapse under the weight of the Calvino's various depictions of couple's experiences in Mexico. Most critics conclude that "Under the Jaguar Sun" offers a reconciliation of these oppositions that leads to a new understanding of the relation between taste and knowledge. However we argue that by failing to take account of the importance Calvino places on the narrator's fascination with the new sounds of the Spanish words he is hearing, these interpretations fail to recognize that while these experiences do establish a relationship between knowledge and taste, they are also about the sensuality of language. To this extent, we show how Calvino seeks to articulate a different sense of pleasure, like Jacques Lacan's sense of feminine jouissance and Roland Barthes's notion of bliss, one that not only breaks down standard normative and narrative oppositions but also makes fluid the sensual pleasures of the sexuality, taste, and language.

There is plenty of scholarship on Calvino that employs Barthes's work as well as accounts of Calvino's own theoretical work and personal relationship with Barthes (cf., Badley, Cavallaro, De Laurentis, Gabrielle, Hume, and Weiss). Yet, none appear to use *The Pleasure of the Text* to analyze "Under the Jaguar Sun" as we do here. We employ Barthes' work to examine how Calvino's story attempts to move beyond the Lacanian split between a masculine and feminine jouissance to a Barthian sense of the pleasure based on the phonetics of language. We conclude by showing the ways in which the intertwining engagement with Mexico, its cuisine, and its culinary nomenclature in Calvino's story turns *poiesis* (poetry) into *praxis* (engagement) and at the same time how one's immersion into language can promote a more immediate and direct engagement with the cultural other.

"Under the Jaguar Sun" presents a variety of oppositions that are fundamental to the couple's experience and Calvino's textual strategy. One of first oppositions Calvino explores is the tension between the chaste and the carnal. Early in the story, the couple visits a convent where they view a painting of a chaplain and abbess. Though she is twenty years younger, the nun dies within a day of the priest's death from a "love so great" that "its spiritual sense sublimated but did not erase the physical emotion" (Calvino 4). Calvino, always in the voice of the unnamed husband, continues to intertwine descriptions of chase and carnal love between the chaplain and abbess into

the couples' visit to another colonial convent of nuns whose noble families provided maids for their daughters who prepared them salacious foods that "satisfy the venial whims of gluttony, the only cravings allowed them" (6). Though these culinary and eating habits may appear transgressive, Calvino situates them within a Catholic religious tradition of fantastic stories "of ecstasies and transfigurations, martyrs and tortures" (6) and of the church's "sacred architecture" that was "impelled by the same drive toward the extreme that led to the exacerbation of flavors amplified by the blaze of the most spicy *chiles*" (7). He then compares the architecture of the local Catholic churches and convents to these spicy chiles when he writes,

> Just as the colonial baroque set no limits on the profusion of ornament and display, in which God's presence was identified in a closely calculated delirium of brimming, excessive sensations, so the curing of the hundred of more native varieties of hot peppers carefully selected for each dish opened vistas of a flaming ecstasy. (Calvino 7)

Hence, for Calvino, the architectural contest parallels the one fought over cuisine, and the narrator realizes that both art forms revel in inducing ecstatic experiences of sight and taste.

Throughout the story, Calvino's narrator continues to make observations that undermine traditional binaries about what acceptable and unacceptable practices related to sex and food are but also in terms of the relationship between sex, food, politics, and culture.[3] Such insights often link the intake of food with a cannibalism that takes on a clear political, cultural, or sexual connotation. Calvino characterizes the intake of food as form of cultural cannibalism in a mostly positive manner when he defines tourism as the more authentic "digesting of the visited country" as compared to the less authentic act of consuming a television show about the country or "visiting the exotic restaurants of our big cities" that merely create a "counterfeit reality of the cuisine" similar to the very same studio scenes produced for television (12). Yet, we find a clearer political depiction of cannibalizing the other through Calvino's narrator's account of a tea party held for by the wife of a politician for wives of the political oligarchy that controls Oaxaca. His description of the event revolves around two perceptions. The first relates to sounds of the escalating cacophony of their conversations that begins by resembling the natural sounds of cascading water and chirping birds, until it crescendoes into "spectacular acoustical event" in which "their voices mingled with the tinkling of cups and spoons and of knives cutting slices of cake" (Calvino 17). The second focuses on the image of a "gigantic full-color picture" of the hostess that conveys an aura similar to

[3] Throughout his writings, Calvino playfully subverts binary oppositions with respect to a variety of established notions including time, space, truth, and identity. *Invisible Cities* offers one of his most mischievous yet lucid undermining of such binary categories.

propagandist portraits of Mao Tse-tung (Calvino 17).[4] Here, as in the historical subjugation of the Oaxacan people and territory, Calvino's account of the pastoral ideal is taken over by the political voices and instruments that slice up cake as they once divided this land amongst the colonial and postcolonial oligarchy from which these women descend. Calvino thus ties their clamorous conversations and dining with their appropriation of land and, consequently, the livelihoods of the political other-- the local population who will get no closer to political power than as waiters and waitresses serving these women their afternoon tea. Likewise, although the local matriarch may look nothing like Mao, Calvino's description of her overpowering portrait makes clear the authoritarian character of the event and the political food chain it celebrates.[5]

At the heart of the story, however, are the more substantial ways Calvino employs the consumption of human flesh as food to undermine traditional binary oppositions between self and other and then moves beyond them to expand our notions of the limits of time and space and political and social categories. The first sense the reader gets of this is indirectly, when during a meal of "*guacamole*," "*guajolote con mole poblano*—that is, turkey with Puebla-style *mole* sauce," and "*quesadillas*," Olivia, without saying a word, asks the narrator if what she is tasting is "*cilantro*" (Calvino 9). This pleases the narrator tremendously not only because "it showed that I was indispensable to her" but also because he realizes that she can only find pleasure in experiences that they share (Calvino 10). Although at this point neither husband nor wife are fantasizing about cannibalizing each other, they are linked as a singular channel of desire and pleasure through the act of consuming the same Mexican food and spices.[6] As much as this joint action breaks down the binary between self and other, the narrator also recognizes that the locale of their desires has fundamentally shifted from "the bed of our embraces" to the "dinner table" (Calvino 10).

Playing upon the reader's European presupposition of the uncivilized character of the pre-Columbian cultures, the story's first overt reference to the consumption of the other comes via a discussion of Aztec religious sacrifice and cannibalism (Calvino 12). Perhaps what upsets the couple's and the reader's sensibilities is the knowledge of two additional pieces of information about Aztec ritual sacrifice told to the couple by their guides Alonso and Salustiano. First, we learn it was the winners of ancient athletic competitions, and not the losers, who were sacrificed and that these sacrifices functioned not as form of punishment for losing but as a sign of honor and respect for

[4] This reference calls to mind the large portrait of Mao that still hangs on the outside wall of the Forbidden City facing Tiananmen Square.

[5] For a similar reading, see Hume, *Calvino's Fictions* 31.

[6] See Baisin for a thorough account of Calvino's prior literary depictions on the relationship between food and desire (99-117).

winning (Calvino 14). Second, we discover that the spices used in cooking these bodies did not hide but rather enhance, and again, honor the flavor of human flesh (Calvino 22). These reports of ritual sacrifice and cannibalism are fundamental to Calvino's attempt to shock the reader out of her cultural presuppositions. However, more than simply playing upon the dichotomy of the civilized European and the barbaric Aztec, Calvino's inverted account of what these ancients deemed honorable prepares the way for his more subversive representation of the inherent cannibalism that characterizes the modern institutions of marriage and love.

Salustiano's explanation of how the spices might enhance the flavor of human flesh sparks Olivia's appetite but it causes the narrator to focus his attention, as he has done previously, on the way her teeth and tongue are "mentally savoring" their next meal (Calvino 23). During their dinner however, the objects of his gaze turn into the instruments of his own cannibalistic consumption. Calvino writes:

> It was the sensation of her teeth in my flesh that I was imagining, and I could feel her tongue lift me against the roof of her mouth, enfold me in saliva, then trust me under the tips of the canines. (23)

The narrator does not simply play a passive role here. Rather, just as with the silent exchange over the taste of cilantro earlier in the story, he

> felt also that I was acting on her, transmitting sensations that spread from the taste buds though her whole body. I was the one who aroused her every vibration—it was a reciprocal and complete relationship, which involved us and overwhelmed us. (Calvino 23)

Olivia becomes unsatisfied and upset when she recognizes that their relationship is based only on the meals they share. She lashes out at his characteristic aloofness, and in an ironic twist that maintains rather than moves the couple beyond the consumptive character of their tepid relationship, Olivia calls the narrator "insipid" or tasteless-which he takes as a painful, unmistakably culinary insult (Calvino 25).

During the next day's tour of excavations the narrator realizes how to reset the balance of power in his marriage by turning the tables on Olivia by subverting the binary opposition between the eater and eaten. During their tour of the ruins, they see a *chacmool* statue. Salustiano suggests that the *chacmool* --- the reclining human figure upon which the sacrificed heart is placed --- can represent the executioner who delivers the sacrificial offering to the gods just as much as it can represent the executed who is offering his own heart (Calvino 26). Salustiano's explanation that same person functioned as "both sacrificer and victim" upsets the couple's presupposition about the sacrificial rituals that took place at the temples (Calvino 26). This knowledge leads the narrator to ask if these victims "could be eaten, only because they themselves were

eaters of men?" (Calvino 26). The narrator surmises that if this is true, the only way he can once again become palatable to his wife is to become "the one who ate her" (Calvino 26). To this extent, the narrator further realizes that like those who ate the flesh of others, "the most appetizingly flavored human flesh belongs to the eater of human flesh" (Calvino 26).

The narrator's revelations about how to erotically charge the couple's metaphorical cannibalism of each other is followed by his account of a meal of *"gorditas pellizcadas con manteca"* which we argue has important implications for understanding how Calvino moves beyond the reconciliation of binaries to a non-linguistic experience of pleasure that has gone unrecognized until now (27). The narrator connects the consumption of the humorously cannibalistically named Mexican dish of "plump girls pinched with butter" (or "Mexican meatballs" as he calls it) with his imagining that he cannibalizes or his wife (Calvino 26).[7] More importantly, the meal leads them to reconsummate their sexual relationship. For many Calvino scholars, this sequence of events functions as the apex of the story whose main intent, they argue, is to show both how the exposure to another culture may undermine or, at the very least, complicate many of the cultural presuppositions and binaries we hold with respect to eating, marriage, sex, cannibalism.

For these scholars, one's immediate sensual experiences with a new culture, including its art and architecture but more poignantly, its food, leads to a greater understanding and heightened perception of oneself, the other, and the world. Kathryn Hume, discusses the ways that "fusion of opposites" (*Calvino's Fictions* 22) throughout the story, including the various metamorphoses and transformations (of who is doing the eating or being eaten or who is performing the sacrifice or being sacrificed), lead us to greater awareness of the fluidity between our selves, the food we eat, the people we love, our own culture and those with whom we live and learn about through our travels (*Calvino's Fictions* 25-26). As much as the story may lend itself to "multiple readings" (*Calvino's Fictions* 31) of marriage, food, sex, politics, and culture, for Hume, what is central to the story is how it is the narrator's experiences of the world through his wife that provide him with a more sensational and secure relationship to world ("Sensuality" 174). This rings true on many levels. The wife's Spanish is better than his and as a result she is the one who communicates with their guides.[8] Her name, Olivia, reflects the story's main theme of experiencing the world though food. Thus, it is no wonder that he tastes seasonings through her. Yet, Hume's focus on Olivia as the intermediary

[7] This mistranslation from gorditas to meatballs plays once more on the idea of cannibalization. Gorditas are not meatballs, but rather thick corn tortillas (cf. note 19). Calvino's choice of the word "meatballs" emphasizes the cannibalistic, or at least, carnivorilistic, qualities of the name used to describe the food, and perhaps even the cultural cannibalism of referring to the food in terms of the Italian meatball.

[8] Calvino's wife, Esther Judith "Chichita" Singer, was herself an Argentinian translator.

between the narrator and the world implies that he never consumes ancient or contemporary Mexican culture immediately or fully. We disagree with Hume and later will show how his transformation at the Palenque Temples is fully his and only his own.

For Beno Weiss what is most important is the way in which these revelations about food and sexual desire help the narrator bridge the gap between pleasure and knowledge. In this sense, he agrees with Silvana Borutti's claim "that Calvino's intent was to suggest that taste is the sense in which we discover 'the nexus between pleasure and knowledge, between orality and intellectuality'" (Borutti quoted in Weiss 193). For Weiss then, it is no wonder that the original title for the story was to "*Sapore, Sapere*" or "Taste Means Knowledge." Dani Cavalloro agrees with Weiss. Not only does she hold that "Under the Jaguar Sun" offers "an unsettling juxtaposition of contrasts wherein sublime harmony is born of dissonance" (Cavalloro 179), she further contends that the "changes and fluctuations in the sexual relationship between the narrator and Olivia are paralleled by the gradual development of their knowledge of, and attitudes to, local cuisine and, via food, by an incremental understanding of each other" (Calvino 181). As "the ingestion of food also operates as a metaphor for the figurative incorporation of a radically alien, mysterious and even mystifying culture" (Calvino 182), the couple's new understanding of ritualistic sacrifice and cannibalism contributes to a greater appreciation of ancient Mexico, its cultural practices, and the cannibalistic nature of their own marriage. Finally, Jo Ann Cannon notes that Calvino's focus on "hearing, smell, and taste" in the three short stories "presents these senses not so much as an alternative means of perception of the world but rather as the means of access to a new world" and that Calvino's stories provide him with a way in which to move beyond the "written word" to the "unwritten world" (94).

All these interpretations suggest that Calvino understands knowledge as dependent on our senses, and more particularly, in the case of "Under the Jaguar Sun," our sense of taste. There are plenty of passages that support this contention. Likewise, it can also be said that it is only through the act of tasting or consuming food and each other that the couple can find pleasure. However, we contend that these interpretations do not go far enough and thus miss the important role that the sounds of the new language—Spanish—play within the overall story, and in the bond between the self, other, and world, that grounds the relationship between taste and knowledge.[9]

[9] This is also true of Baisin's claim that the couple's "thought of the *chacmool*" as "both victim and sacrifice" allows the narrator to realize that he can only become the object of Olivia's desire if he eats her. This provides the psychological impetus for him to play both roles in his fantasized sacrifice at the Palenque Temples and use the food they eat at their final meal as "the instrument of transgression of a fundamental taboo" (Calvino 123). Although these insights are important, Baisin never mentions the meal of the *"gorditas pellizcadas con manteca,"* which happens between the two events and which we claim leads Calvino to his insight into the fourth term.

Returning to the meal of *"gorditas pellizcadas con manteca"* what has been previously left unsaid is the importance of the narrator's realization that he will never reach a state of complete enjoyment of this new dish and of his wife if the experience consists of only of "three terms—me, meatball, Olivia" (27). The Lacanian character of this statement is striking.[10] For Lacan, the sexual relationship is impossible because "each sex is defined separately with respect to a third term. Thus, there is only a non-relationship, an absence of any conceivable direct relationship between the sexes" (Fink 105). This third term is Lacan's *objet petit a*, that is, the mother's body, or that part of the Real which makes us whole but to which we can never return once we enter into the Symbolic. The *objet petit a* is unnamable and, like this sense of wholeness, it is unreachable. In its place we substitute real or fantasized objects --- lovers, fetish objects, food, and even in some cases, meatballs --- that offer us a temporary fulfillment of our desires. So, whereas Lacan's third term is an object which "sets desire in motion" Calvino's third term, meatball, functions as the temporary substitute for Lacan's third term that only momentarily fulfills the couple's desire for each other (Evans 125). Strictly speaking then, for Lacan and Calvino, the word meatball refers only to the food that provides a temporary fulfillment of desire and, like the sensual pleasures gained through experiencing each other's bodies once again, the meatballs themselves are only a substitute for the *objet petit a*. As such, the meatballs are only an impetus to the kind of fleeting pleasure achieved through what Lacan calls phallic jouissance (Fink 111), wherein the link between word "meatballs" and its referent, the food itself, like the sexual liaison between lovers, provides only a momentary exuberance and always returns one to a state of unfulfilled separateness within the Symbolic which is ultimately insurmountable[11] when experienced as phallic jouissance. However, we argue that something beyond this occurs when the narrator begins to speak of the fourth term. This fourth term is the "name of the meatballs" itself, "*gorditas pellizcadas con manteca*" (Calvino 27). It is the sound of this name that the narrator maintains "was especially savoring" to the point where "the magic of the name continued" through the night and

[10] Hume, Weiss and Cavalloro, all recognize a Freudian character in the story's focus on the "oral and genital" stages, "oral eroticism" and "the association of sexuality with eating" (*Calvino's Ficitons* 21; Weiss 191; Cavalloro 192). But none of the critics, not even Cavalloro, offers a Lacanian of the text as we do here (cf note xii).

[11] Cavalloro is the only one we have found who offers a Lacanian interpretation of the impossible fulfillment of desire and meaning caused by this "hole or lacuna" (190) with respect to "The Name, The Nose," one of the companion short stories to "Under the Jaguar Sun." Although Cavalloro then asserts that this same "omnipresent feeling of unfulfillment" characterizes the "erotic quotes undertaken by all the male narrators of the three novellas" she never shows how this is the case for the title story, opting instead to tie this unquenchable search for fulfillment to *Difficult Loves*, an earlier collection of short stories by Calvino (Cavalloro 190-192). As will be shown, we suggest that Calvino aims to move beyond this gap through his focus on the phonetics and the sensuality of language.

provided "the inspiration that had blessed the finest moments of our joint life [that] came to visit us again" (Calvino 27).

Upon revisiting Calvino's use of Spanish throughout the text, one can recognize how Calvino's increasing emphasis on the Spanish words he is hearing culminates in his revelation about the fourth term and that this focus on the phonetic experience of the fourth term, rather than the overcoming of opposition, is at heart of "Under the Jaguar Sun." In fact, the story's first sentence that tells us "'Oaxaca' is pronounced 'Wa*h*aka"' (3), focuses the reader's attention to the sound of the Spanish words. Throughout most of the text, Calvino's narrator gives and then translates the Spanish words he hears. In order to focus his reader's attention Calvino italicizes many of Spanish terms he is learning.[12] This follows his long-established practice of employing "[g]raphic symbols, different print types, and unusual spelling … to supply a strong visual perception" (de Lauretis 417). The use of italics highlights the differences between the original Spanish words and their translation. Some of the words contribute to the reader's sense of the relationship between people ("'*Tenían sus criadas*,' […] 'They had their servants"' (Calvino 6)), other times to our understanding of a guide's explanation of a ritual ("'*los zopilotes,* […] The vultures"' that ate the remaining parts of sacrificed humans (Calvino 15)), and still others to our understanding of space (the "*zócalo,* the regular little square" of Mexican colonial cities (Calvino 21)), For the most part, however, the narrator directs the readers' attention to the new words for the various Mexican foods and spices he is tasting for the first time. Like the pleasures he experiences when tasting new spices, soups, meats, dips, and fruits, the narrator seems to equally savor the pronunciation of "*cilantro*" (9), "*sopa de camarones*—shrimp soup" (23), "*tamal de elote*—a fine semolina of sweet corn […] ground pork and very hot pepper" (3), "*guacamole*" (8), and "*nopales* (which we call prickly pears)" (12).

Throughout his story, this focus on these new Spanish words suggests that, to truly experience, understand, and find pleasure in the other (either as an individual or culture), one must not only move beyond a pure intellectual comprehension of the other, but further past those common sense experiences related most often to the sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound of a things to include the sensuality of the language that does not simply refer to things in the world, but creates its own sensibility with respect to our experience of the world and the things we find in it. To this extent, it can be argued that the reason Calvino abandons the story's original title, "*Sapore, Sapere*" is because his experience of the sensuality of the language moves one beyond the connection between taste and knowledge to a newfound wisdom that reaches more deeply into the experiential bonds between self, other, world, and language that he had recognized previously in his other novels and short stories.

[12] This practice is used both in the original Italian publication and English translation of the story but unsurprisingly not in the Spanish version.

In Lacanian terms, the fullness of this experience moves the narrator beyond phallic jouissance to a feminine jouissance that opens the self to the experience of an "unspeakable ecstasy" that is achieved only when the demarcations between the past and present, body and spirit, self and other, and language and meaning become fluid (Homer 105).[13] While recognizing that a state of fluidity between self, other, and world moves one beyond the boundary conditions of the Lacanian Symbolic to an experience of feminine jouissance, it is Roland Barthes' notion of jouissance as "bliss," as defined in *The Pleasure of the Text*, that speaks even more specifically to the role that the sensuality of language plays in Calvino's fourth term.[14] Like Lacan's feminine jouissance, Barthian bliss denudes the self of its individuality while undermining previously held cultural traditions or values (Barthes 14).[15] Barthes even cites Lacan in saying "'that bliss is forbidden to the speaker, as such it cannot be spoken except between the lines…'" (21) The ellipses in Bathes' quote show the extent to which words are insufficient. According to Graham Allen, for Barthes "the moment of bliss, in other words, occurs when the subject is confronted with language that undoes the social question of identity […] when the subject escapes into a language which denies the possibility of a statement of identity" (107). To this extent, "Under the Jaguar Sun" can be understood as a text of bliss when, like Calvino's narrator, the reader experiences this same sense of the loss of subjectivity as the narrator does when he loses himself in the sensuality of this new language of Spanish. Moreover, because it is a foreign language, it is literally unspeakable. We've observed that while the New World's language is Spanish, a Romance language of European origin, the words that most entice the narrator are the words that are of Nahuatl origin—the language of the Aztecs, and therefore of New World origin. Like the narrator himself, Calvino's text moves the reader beyond the "old languages" of the cultural past to one that is "unexpected [and] succulent in its newness" (Barthes 40, 42).[16] Most importantly, the key to experiencing this bliss is the way in which that new language is expressed in the unusual sounds of indigenous origin.

Barthes' notion of textual bliss has been most often interpreted as an alternative reading experience resulting from the innovative use of one's traditional idiom. Yet, in the context of a story centered on a protagonist's search for a clearer understanding of himself in relation to his wife and this new culture, Calvino's emphasis is not simply on

[13] Lacan asserts that only women, who are never fully defined by the Symbolic, can experience feminine jouissance (Homer 105). Given that we are discussing Calvino's male narrator, we are arguing that Calvino believes otherwise.

[14] For a fascinating comparison of Calvino's and Barthes' rejection of left (and right) politics for their reactionary positions on art and pleasure respectively see Weiss 5 and Allen 100-104.

[15]Conversely, Lacan's phallic jouissance and Barthes' text of pleasure are firmly rooted in the dominant ideology of those traditions and values. However, according to Barthes, whereas "[phallic] pleasure can be expressed in words; bliss cannot" (21).

[16] Some examples of the words mentioned in the text that are of Nahuatl origin are: *elote, tamal, guacamole, nopal, guajalote, huachinango, zopliote, mole* and *chile.*

the translated meaning of the Spanish words but on their evocative sound. Barthes concludes *The Pleasure of the Text* by focusing on the oral and, more specifically phonetic, character of textual bliss. Here, Barthes states that "to imagine an aesthetic of textual pleasure" one would have to consider a form of "*writing aloud*" (66). By this he does not suggest that this pleasure emerges from the way in which one expresses meaning through sound for this speaks to the phonology of language. Barthes emphatically asserts, "*writing aloud* is not phonological but phonetic" (66). That is, Barthes aligns bliss not with the ways in which sounds can be conjoined to create meaning but rather the relationship between the sounds of a language and the symbols- the words associated with those sounds. The text of bliss is one "where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, the tongue, not that of meaning, of language" (Barthes 66-67). To this extent, from the first sentence of the text, Calvino's narrator continually emphasizes the Spanish language—a language he never fully grasps but continually evokes in his quest to not only bridge the gap between pleasure and knowledge but also to allow his wife and him, individually and as a couple, to reach a state of spiritual ecstasy, and to bring the reader, ever closer to the experience of textual bliss.[17]

Beyond the fourth terms' magical capacity to reconsummate the couple's marriage, Calvino's description of the narrator's experience at the temples of Palenque on the subsequent day suggests that the narrator's newfound linguistic sensibility has allowed him to move from a state of estrangement to one of characterized by an ecstatic immersion in the world. In this penultimate scene Calvino describes how the narrator's "dizzy spell" from climbing up and down a series of temple steps, combined with the

[17] It should be noted here that our account of the narrator's experience argues against Cannon's claim that "Calvino … has no choice but to rely upon words to convey the unwritten world" and that "[t]he only way he can evoke this lost knowledge of the senses is by translating sensual perceptions to written signs" (96). Our analysis moves Calvino beyond his previous account of language's inability to make sense of the world in *Mr. Palomar*. Both in this novel and a later interview Calvino acknowledges the legitimacy of each perspective:

> These are two different attitudes, and I recognize the force of each of them. We cannot do without interpretation, without asking ourselves what something means, with embarking on an explanation. At the same time, however we know that for every explanation… too many things are missing, because we lack the entire context. Even if we succeed in establishing certain meaning with precision, these so-called meanings, in *our* context, are entirely different. (Lucente 250)

What we are proposing is that it is only with "Under the Jaguar Sun" that Calvino recognizes a way past the quandary of reaching understanding and knowledge via the interpretation of meaning and the translation of meaning is through a more immediate and corporeal experience of language and culture. For a counterargument contending that the narrator's experiences at the end of the story make it "impossible 'not to interpret,'" see Baisin 123.

spectacle of the tourists "loud in sound and color," and the "light of the jaguar sun" cause his initial faintness to turn into a full-fledged illusion that he is being sacrificed on one of the temple altars (Calvino 28). Surrounded by the various altars and temple reliefs, such as the one found in the Temple of the Sun that depicts sacrificial victims, the narrator embraces his transformation, exclaiming,

> The world spun, I plunged down, my throat cut by the knife of the king-priest, down the high steps onto the forest of tourists with super-8s and usurped, broad-brimmed sombreros. The solar energy coursed along the dense networks of blood and chlorophyll; I was living and dying in all the fibers of what is chewed and digested and in all the fibers that absorb the sun, consuming and digesting. (Calvino 28-29)

Consistent with the various ways we, and others, have suggested that the story undermines established cultural binaries, Calvino's description here clearly depicts the multiple ways in which the narrator's experience at the temple's altar allows him to overcome boundaries between past and present, self and other, and self and the world. Beyond this reading however, this passage, like the earlier reference to the fourth term also suggests that the narrator's overcoming of binaries allows him to reach the state of the "unspeakable ecstasy" of Lacan's feminine jouissance (Homer 105). As a sacrificial victim, he traverses space and time and coexists simultaneously in two times when he returns to pre-Columbian Mexico and remains in the present with the tourists wielding cameras. The sunrays that led to his initial faintness now cause his veins to pulse with a mixture of those elements—blood and chlorophyll—necessary to sustain both human and plant life. To this extent, just as he will become one with the priest who he imagines will eat his flesh, he also becomes fully integrated with the sun and plants which nourish his very being. With this fantastic experience, the divisions between himself and world, the past and present, sacrificer and sacrificed, and the eater and the eaten are not only erased but experienced as ecstatic.

As was the case in his earlier descriptions of being chewed by his wife, ritualistic sacrifices, *chacmools*, and the use of spices to enhance the flavor of human flesh, with the narrator's experience at the temples, Calvino returns to one of the story's major themes--cannibalism. The relevance of this theme should not be underestimated for as Gian-Paolo Biasin documents, a "treatise by Sahagún" on cannibalism was published with the original Italian version of Calvino's story (119). Biasin adopts Peggy Reeves Sanday's anthropological work that is, in part, based on this treatise, to explain the ways in which cannibalism functions as a "ritual meal" while sacrificial victims would be considered "divine food" (119-120). This offers its own insights into Olivia's "gourmet appreciation of human flesh" as well as her psychological need for "revenge" and

religious "desire to communicate with and feed the gods" (Biasin 119-120).[18] While this may all be true, Biasin's interpretation only focuses on Olivia's perspective as either an outside observer of this cultural practice or as the subject having agency over the practice. Yet, it never speaks to the overall way by which the narrator participates in the dual roles of the eater and eaten within the cannibalist binary and how this duality functions in a narrative where political, social, and cultural oppositions between the Americas and Europe persist. A case in point is the difference between the narrator's early gastronomic tourism and the complete cultural immersion he experiences at the Palenque temples. The narrator recognizes that his own initial form of gastronomic tourism offers a more insight into Mexican culture than that of visiting a exotic local restaurant or watching a television show about the culture would. All three of these experiences –visiting a local restaurant, eating in Mexico, and watching a television show –reflect a form of cultural colonization insofar as they emerge from the perspective of an outsider looking in, in this case, as a modern European who assimilates what he can of the other culture to his own cultural perspective while obfuscating, dismissing and, if necessary, dismantling and destroying what does not conform to his cultural paradigm.

Hence, contra Biasin, the narrator's multiple experiences as both the eater and eaten that culminate in his fantastic sacrifice (and implied consumption) at the Palenque Temples allows for a full integration of his European self with a spiritual awareness of and bodily immersion with this ancient culture. In this way, his experience appears to fulfill what Oswald De Andrade's modern nation-building "Cannibalist Manifesto" attempted to do for the modern Brazilian of the 1920s: to "challenge […] the dualities civilization/barbarism, modern/primitive, and original/derivative" in order to help "forge his specular colonial identity into an autonomous and original national culture" (Bary 35). As a European, the narrator is not a part of this new Latin American identity; nevertheless, his experience at the temples challenges these political binaries for him. He surrenders and allows himself to be devoured by the colonialized rather than be yet another European who devours the colonial culture. Thus the narrator's approach, in contrast to a typical European tourist, seems to align him with Andrade because, unlike other Europeans, he understands that, "Cannibalism unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically" (de Andrade). He sacrifices himself to unite and identify with Latin America. He is like a willing sacrificial victim of the past who gives up his power, in this case as a European, to surrender to the magnificence of Latin America.

After describing the narrator's fantastic experience at the temples, Calvino ends his story with a description of the meal where in the couple once again reaches a state of Barthian bliss. As they begin eating their teeth fall into a rhythmic pattern allowing them to transform from their human form into "serpents concentrated in the ecstasy of

[18] Baisin is referring to Peggy Reeves Sanday's *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*.

swallowing each other in turn" (Calvino 29). This ecstasy arises as their mutual consumption becomes part of a more encompassing awareness of

> being swallowed by the serpent that digests us all, in the universal cannibalism that leaves its imprint on every amorous relationship and erases the lines between our bodies and *sopa de frijoles*, *huachinango a la vera cruzana*, and *enchilada*s. (Calvino 29)

For the first time in the story and only after the narrator's recognition of the importance of the fourth term, none of the culinary terms are translated. In fact, Calvino abandons the practice of translating Spanish terms after acknowledging the revelatory character of the fourth term. In this manner, Calvino's story ends with the erasure of divisions between the couple's bodies and the untranslated menu of their meal— a testament to the importance he places on the sound of the Spanish language and its ability to traverse the boundary conditions that plagued the narrator throughout his trip to Oaxaca.[19]

Unbound by the former divisions between self and other, sense and knowledge, as well as constituted by time (history) and space (geography), Calvino's text proffers a way in which writing becomes a way to engage the world, the other, and most importantly, the world of other that moves us beyond our normal experiential framework to an ecstatic overcoming of the multiple boundaries between the world, language, people, space, and time. As Linda Badley suggests, Calvino's work "dramatizes the dialectic through which *poiesis* is realized in *praxis*, or the process through which a text becomes a medium of engagement" (76). What we have tried to show here is that Calvino's fourth term makes the reader aware that an engagement with a foreign language is not simply a matter of translating a term from one language into another in search of the meaning of specific terms. Rather, it is a form of engagement with a cultural totality that emerges from the experiential ground of the phonetic articulation of that society through the voice of its language.

[19] Insofar as the crux of our argument centers on the issue of translation in the context of the story, we have examined the text in Italian and read the English and Spanish translations. The translated words in the English translation and the original Italian story have similar effects. It makes sense for Spanish words and the Mexican cultural traditions to be translated and the indigenous foods to be explained. The Spanish translation of the story is uncanny in that it uses the words in Spanish but unlike in Italian and the English versions, these words are not italicized; in the Spanish translation version there is no use of linguistic codeswitching. Moreover, the story explains things that are familiar in an unfamiliar way. The *gorditas* are explained as *albondigas* or meatballs, but *gorditas* are not *albondigas*. The former is made out of corn and flat and circular and the latter one is made out of meat and is round. For the scholar who has only read the story in Spanish, she misses out on the bilingual nature of the original text, but like in the other versions, the Spanish language translation still breaks the boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar and thus illustrates the way in which the fourth term traverses the boundary conditions between language and experience. For these reasons we argue that our claims are effective in the original Italian and its English and Spanish translations.

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