Masculine and Feminine - Paz's Picture of Perfect Life

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Chapter 5
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'Pillars', a poem in the collection *A Tree Within* that begins with a sensual sentiment of John Donne ("And whilst our souls negotiate there,/we like sepulchral statues lay"), contains a startlingly explicit reference to the carnal aspects of the physical union between the poet and his wife.

Knotted bodies
are the book of the soul:
with eyes closed,
with my touch and my tongue,
I write out on your body
the scripture of the world
A knowledge still nameless:
the taste of this earth (*The Collected Poems* 613).

For Paz body and soul are not diametrically opposite and mutually exclusive aspects of being. On the contrary body and its attributes lead to the realization of soul and its transcendental qualities. When locked in erotic experience, what the poet succeeds in doing is the writing of 'the
scripture of the world'. It is a 'nameless' knowledge because what has got a name is finite or limited. Knowledge springing from physical union of bodies leads the poet to an awareness of the essential mystery of the existence itself. So it is nameless; it is not finite or limited. At the same time, this knowledge reinforces the sense of what it means to be human - it has 'the taste of this earth'. The poet continues with the celebration of the sensual union of bodies and writes,

   Between the end and the beginning,
   a moment without time,
   a delicate arch of blood,
   a bridge over the void.
   Locked, two bodies
   Sculpt a bolt of lightning. (The Collected Poems 613)

What the poet signifies here must be the orgasmic moment in the union - 'a moment without time' - when time is extinct for the couple. 'It is a bridge over the void' because the couple come to know the wisdom of the other shore as a result of the sexual encounter. The awareness that they have effects a 'sea change' in their conscience - it is like 'a bolt of lightning', sudden and quite overwhelming.
It is really doubtful whether there is another writer in modern time who is as much explicit and emphatic as Paz is in the celebration of sensual beauty of the body and erotic union of male and female. It is obvious to any reader of 'Pillars', an ecstatic outpouring of the erotic experience.

"Night, Day, Night", another poem celebrating love and eroticism, presents the beloved in terms of nature's majestic forms; the lover also assumes similar forms. The beloved is a "leafy canopy" and the lover wants to assume the form of 'the wind' and 'the sun'.

Under the leafy canopy of your hair,

your forehead:

    a bower,

a clarity among the branches.

I think about gardens:

to be the wind that shakes your memories
to be the sun that clears through your thicket! (The Collected Poems 617).

The title "Night, Day, Night" is suggestive of the grand cyclical changes in the universe. Paz seems to believe that the grandest attribute
of the universe is to be found in feminine nature in its sensual manifestation. So Paz writes:

Your body
a backwater in the shadows
Stillness. Vast noon
barely throbs
Between your legs time, stubborn, flows (*The Collected Poems* 619)

The last line is startling in its explicitness of expression. Paz continues to write about 'vein of sun', 'living gold', 'grooves' and 'green constellations'. "The triangular insect moves through the grass at three or four millimeters an hour." "For an instant you held it in the palm of your hand... and reverently you let it go.

Go back to the Great All (619)

Sex experience enables one to transcend the limitation of human being. For Paz it helps one to go back to the source of everything - "The Great All."

For the poet, 'an intangible village sleeps under' the eyelids of the beloved: avid whirlwinds... are the changing forms of desire and are always the
same: The poet unravels the mystery of existence - that of life and death - enveloping every human being. There are the apparent changes that are superficial beneath which there is the unchanging primeval source of creation - eros.

face after face
of the life that is death,
of the death that is life. (621)

Paz is intensely conscious of the complexity of love. As the poet says in "Letter of Testimony."

Love is an equivocal word,
like all words.
It is not a word,
said the Founder:
it is a vision,
base and crown
of the ladder of contemplation. (625)

Love is the be all and end all of life and it opens door to highest type of awareness possible for a human being ("base and crown of the ladder of contemplation"). Love is many things for many people - "It is an
accident", "it is born of that which is perfection," for the others: a fever, an aching, a struggle, a fury, a stupor, a fancy." Paz traces the geneology of love.

Desire invents it
mortifications and deprivations give it life
jealousy spurs it on,
custom kills it

A gift
a sentence

Rage, holiness

It is a knot: life and death.

A wound

that is the rose of resurrection. (The Collected Poems 627)

For Paz, when we speak of love, we speak of life, we speak of everything essential to us ("speaking it, we speak ourselves"). Paz believes that love leads us to the ultimate wisdom or perfect knowledge.

To love:

to open the forbidden door, the passageway

that takes us to the other side of time.

The moment:
the opposite of death,
our fragile eternity. (629)

The poet believes that 'love takes us to the other side of time,' where time is an eternal present. It must be similar to the moment of enlightenment. If love leads us to the world of transcendence, then we become immortals. The consummation of love is the moment when we experience what eternity is. It is fragile because it is human. In the poem 'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta,' Paz wrote:

Shiva and Parvati
We worship you
not as gods
but as images
of the divinity of man
You are what man makes and is not,
what man will be
when he has served the sentence of hard labour. (A Tale 85)

Love helps us to transcend time and experience what eternity is ('our fragile eternity').
To love is to lose ourself in time
to be a mirror among mirrors. (*The Collected Poems* 629)

'Time is evil' and 'the moment is the fall.' It must be what Eliot described as "awful daring of a moment's weakness."

to love is to hurl down:
interminably falling,
the coupled we
is our abyss. (629)

Paz perceives love as "Axis/of the rotation of the generations." In the act of love, 'the girl turns into a fountain' and 'her hair becomes a constellation'. A woman asleep is an island and blood is the 'music in the branches of the veins' and touch is the 'light in the night of the bodies.'

Paz contrasts the solitude of one when alone with the sense of abundance of two in erotic encounter: "The one is the prisoner of itself . . . . it only is, it has no memory . . . .

to love is two
always two
embrace and struggle,
two is the longing to be one,
and to be the other, male or female (*The Collected Poems* 631)

When the one meets the other and becomes two - what is formed is 'fountain of vision' and 'arch over the void'. The meeting of the masculine and the feminine is the 'bridge of vertigoes' and mirror of mutations.'

In the third section of the poem love is seen as 'timeless island' surrounded by time and 'clarity besieged by night.' The paradoxical nature of the act of love is hinted at: In love, one loses oneself and gains one's self.

To fall

is to return

to fall is to rise (635).

In the act of love one loses one's individuality and tastes of divinity and eternity thereby gaining richness of existence.

"To love is to die and live again and die again: it is liveliness" (633).

The poet believes that the highest type of activity or the noblest kind of attribute of human being is love:
I love you
because I am mortal
and your are (633).

For the poet, love is the source of inspiration; it is the fountain of creativity; it is what makes poetry happen. Paz sings:

In the garden of caresses
I clipped the flower of blood
to adorn your hair
The flower became a word
The word burns in my memory. (The Collected Poems 633)

As Paz hints at in innumerable contexts, love’s encounter leads one to Perfect Wisdom. It is what erases contradictions and paradoxes from existence, from life.

Love:

reconciliation with the Great All
and with the others,
the small and endless
all. (633)
Love saves one from the monotomy of monologue. With words of water, fire, air and earth, the couple 'invent the garden of glances'. "High above the constellations always write the same word; we here below, write our mortal names." We remain what we are because we have no garden of Eden, the Garden of Perfection.

We are exiles from the Garden
we are condemned to invent it. (The Collected Poems 635)

Then the human condition has an attribute of its own. We are destined to forsake the garden for the world.

We are condemned
to leave the Garden behind:

before us

is the world. (The Collected Poems 635)

The paean of love entitled 'Letter of Testimony' has a coda which proclaims:

Perhaps to love is to learn
to walk through this world. (635)

Love enables the poet to be silent like the Oak and to learn to see. Paz then points at the fountain of inspiration in his creative life as a poet,
Your glance scatters seeds.

It planted a tree

I talk

because you shake its leaves. (635)

The very analysis of these three poems will show how frank and forthright is the attitude of Paz when dealing with man-woman relationship. Without even an iota of inhibition and emotional constraints, Paz sings in praise of erotic love as the source of creativity and also as the sure means to profound realization. In his treatise on India, In Light of India, Paz points to the nature of being in erotic love as follows: "In love's encounter the two poles entwine into an enigmatic knot; embracing as couples, we embrace our destiny." His search for and union with his soul mate Marie-Jose and its transformative power in his consciousness are analysed in the light of the nature of the Spanish language as follows: "I was searching for myself, and in that search I found my contradictory complement, that you (tu) that becomes I (yo), the two syllables of the word "yours" (tuyo) (In Light 27).

In his treatment of love and eroticism, Paz sounds very much like an Indian poet. With a joyous abandon that reminds the readers of classical Indian writers who treated sex and erotic experience, Paz writes
about the sensual encounter between man and woman. There are innumerable instances for this in his poems. In his prose treatise also, Paz appears as a liberated writer who is happy to refer to sensual beauty, aspects of erotic encounter and unabashed meeting of the bodies of lovers. Paz is the best example for a writer with post Freudian attitude to sex which is not seen as taboo.

In his description of the initial experience in India in *In Light of India*, Paz writes about "women with feline grace and dark shining eyes" whom he saw in Bombay (4). He saw "the veiled women with eyes as deep as the water in a well" (6) and "women with amber-colored skin, hair and eyebrows as black as crow's wings, and the huge eyes of lioness in heat" (9). A few pages later Paz writes about "the apparition of a girl like a half-opened flower" (10).

In his treatment of philosophical and religious movements also, Paz is equally at home in his description of the intricacies of the world of ideas as he is in brief references to love and eroticism. Paz notes that the philosophical antecedent of Sufism is a Spanish thinker named Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) "who taught the union with God through all this creations" (42). Paz records that there are affinities between Ibn Arabi and Neoplatonism and mentions about 'an exalted eroticism' in *The Interpreter*
of Desire, the poems of the Spaniard. Paz comments: "The union of opposites, whether in logic or in mystical experiences, has both a carnal and a cosmic aspect: the copulation of the feminine and masculine poles of the universe" (42).

It is said that, Ibn Arabi experienced a genuine epiphany when he saw a Persian woman in Mecca, who showed him the way toward the union of human and divine love. In this context Paz writes: "Love opens the eyes to understanding . . . . . . everything that we touch and see is divine" (In Light 43).

In his treatment of Akbar, Paz notes that in his youth, Akbar was devoted to Persian poetry, especially that of Hafiz who was influenced by Sufi pantheism with its exalted eroticism. While presenting Catarina de San Juan, the most important religious visionary of Mexico, Paz observes that her vision of her relationship with Jesus was amorous one as she describes these visits of Jesus to her cell "as though they were the visits of a lover" (In Light 84). Paz presents Lalla, a woman prophet who lived in fourteenth century India who composed poems combining yoga with "the exalted erotic mysticism of the Sufi poets" (86). While commenting on the diversity of flavors in Indian cuisine, Paz mentions that as part of the Tantric feast, 'foods are mixed in forbidden combinations' and "the
ceremony ends with ritual copulation among the participants, men and women" (87).

Commenting on the nature of language used by classical Sanskrit poets of ancient India and the French writers of the second half of the eighteenth century, Paz observes that both of them never used vulgar words in their depiction of love and eroticism. "They almost always avoided explicit mention of the genitals" (In Light 147). Incidentally Paz mentions that the reticence of the authors is not due to morality; "it is aesthetic, a question of taste" (147).

In the section entitled "The Apsara and the Yakshi" where Paz analyses classical Indian literature, Vidyakara's anthology of poems in Sanskrit language is introduced and commented on. Here Paz records that Vidyakara, a Bengali Buddhist monk in the eleventh century, shows "a precise literary taste and an open and tolerant spirit" (149). Paz observes with obvious relish: "Erotic poems, dealing with a love that is inseparable from the body and its encounter with other bodies, form the major part of the book" (149). More than twelve pages are devoted for the description of this anthology; twenty three poems are also translated by Paz and included in the treatise, In Light of India.
Paz gives a fine example for the suggestive nature of poetry as well as the sensual and erotic themes celebrated by many classical poets when he translates the following poem from Vidyakara's anthology.

When the ankle bracelet is still
ear rings and necklaces jangle;
when the man grows tired,
his determined lover relieves him (*In Light* 154).

In this context Paz differentiates between Western eroticism and Indian. Since the end of the eighteenth century, "Western eroticism has been largely concerned with infraction and violence" (154). Indian erotic poetry in Sankrit doesn't see eroticism are violence or transgression; it displays 'the whole range of pleasures' (154). Eleven pages later, Paz again compares Western eroticism with Indian. As he observes, the key word of Western eroticism is 'violation' whereas in India, the key word is 'pleasure'. Paz continues: "Similarly, in Christian asceticism, the central concept is redemption; in India, it is liberation" (165).

Paz notes that "the poets resort to suggestion, saying it without saying it" (154) and translates a poem celebrating erotic appeal of feminine beauty.
Beauty is not
in What the words say
but in that which they say without saying it:
not naked, but through a veil
breasts become desirable (In Light 160).

Here the poem reveals the secret of poetic appeal by celebrating the sensual charm of the feminine appearance. The suggestive power of poetry is similar to the feminine beauty through a veil. The aesthetics of Paz is expressed through erotic imagery.

Classical Indian poetry abounds in the depiction of various shades of love and eroticism. It is a central element in Indian ethos; even gods in Indian mythology are no exception. With characteristic insight Paz writes that the Indian divinities are sexual and that the activity of the universe is seen as 'an enormous divine copulation' (170). In contrast the God of the Bible is a neuter God, unlike Zeus and Vishnu, Venus and Aditi. In a revealing sentence, Paz points out why eroticism is a central fact in Indian mythology, literature and even cosmology: "In a tradition of gods and goddesses in a perpetual state of heat, it is impossible to condemn sexual love" (170).
Paz quotes from Atharva Veda: "Desire(kama) was the first to be born; neither gods nor [departed] ancestors nor men have reached [equalled] him: [he is] superior to all and the most powerful" (9.2). And in another hymn: "Desire arose in the beginning, which was the first seed of thought" (19.52).

The role of sex and eroticism in Indian tradition is masterly assessed by Paz in the section 'Chastity and Longevity.' He notes that in Indian ethos, sexual pleasure is regarded as valuable. As Paz notes, "For Hindus, it is one of the four goals of man" (In Light 170). Desire (kama) is a cosmic force, one agent behind the movement of the universe. Like the Greek God Eros, desire is also a God. "Kama is a god because desire, in its purest and most active form, is sacred energy: it moves humanity and all of nature" (170). So it is obvious that Indian heritage subsumes a vision of sexuality as cosmic energy and regards human body as a fountain of creative energy.

For Paz sensual beauty is one of the most charming aspects in nature. Obviously Paz regards erotic pleasure as one of the important aims implicit in human existence. He regards love as the key that opens the hidden mystery of human nature and the universe. Love and eroticism lead human beings forward in their quest of life and helps them
to have perfect wisdom. Paz had deeply studied 'Vajrayana' - Tantric Buddhism - according to which ritual copulation of man and woman leads to enlightenment or liberation. The revelation that everything is void, 'Sunyata', and also an insight into the plenitude of the void stem from eroticism which is a part of Tantric Buddhism. It is not surprising that Indian ethos with its idea of desire (Kama) as the procreative and driving force behind the universe and means of enlightenment like Tantra and Tantric Buddhism deeply attracted and influenced him. Poems of Paz present many contexts where Paz takes the position that the erotic encounter between man and woman holds very important possibilities. Paz implicitly believes that erotic experience is inseparable from the fulfilment of human life. The poet's concept of perfect life envisions love and eroticism as the central fact of human existence. For Paz, nothing human is alien to him, least of all sex and erotic enjoyment. Many poems of Paz can be cited to illustrate this aspect of his creative output.

The poem 'Mutra' contains an allusion to a 'girl who appears in the street and is a stream of quiet freshness' (A Tale 15). It is significant to note that the girl is pictured here using positive and life giving attributes like 'stream' and 'freshness'. Both words indicate life, vitality, creativity,
change and growth. Here the girl stands for life and abundance; she is the source of everything positive in life.

'Balcony' pictures Paz in Delhi where he gets a vision: "I saw for an instant true life / It had the face of death" (24). Then the poet realizes the illusory nature of everything ('what you have lived you will unlive today'), but finds comfort in this thought

I don't deny myself
I sustain myself (A Tale 25).

For him there is the possibility for sustaining his life. It is erotic in nature as the following lines subtly suggest:

If I stretch out my hand
the air is a spongy body
a promiscuous faceless being. (A Tale 24)

'On the Roads of Mysore' records the poet's experience when he visited Mysore. The sight of the women elicits this response in his mind.

In spite of the famines, the women are well-endowed
full breasts and hips, jewled and barefoot. (37)
For Paz the sight of women with 'full breasts and hips' is a positively welcome thing, which is to be appreciated. So Mysore becomes 'a land good for dreaming and riding horses.' The line is strongly suggestive of sexual symbolism. Horse is, "In the symbolic tradition, an embodiment of power and vitality" (Hans Biedermann 177). It is seen as an image of victory especially in relation to sex. For Paz erotic relationship between man and women is the most natural and most spontaneous activity that leads to fulfilment in life.

The poem 'Vrindaban' presents a saddhu who watched the poet 'from the other shore'. Paz says that

Perhaps he saw Krishna
Sparkling blue tree
dark fountain splashing amid the drought
Perhaps in a cleft stone
he grasped the form of woman
its rent
the formless dizziness. (A Tale 55)

As Paz pictures the saddhu, it is not enough that he saw Krishna in the form of a sparkling blue tree. Similarly he might have had a vision of 'the form of woman' 'in a cleft stone' and experienced its rent as 'formless
dizziness'. If the vision or religious experience of the saddhu is to be complete, it should embody the vision of a woman as well as Krishna. One is incomplete without the other. The masculine god - Krishna - and the form of woman are mutually inclusive in the vision of Paz.

"The Wind From All Compass Points", an autobiographical poem using techniques similar to that of surrealism, contains a powerfully suggestive context where Paz reminiscences about his erotic experience, probably with his wife Marie-Jose.

Down there
the hot canyon
the wave that stretches and breaks your legs apart
the plunging whiteness
the form of our bodies abandoned. (A Tale 70)

The obvious sex symbolism cannot be missed as it clearly suggests the consummation of sex act. In the notes on this poem, Paz writes about the relationship between love and eroticism. "Love is inseparable from eroticism but it crosses through it unharmed" (108).

The same poem depicts the divine couples - Shiva and Parvati - in amorous encounter.
At the top of the world
Shiva and Parvati caress
Each caress lasts a century
for the god and for the man
an identical time (A Tale 72)

In Paz's world view, divinities are also seen as engaged in amorous pursuits just like human beings. To be complete, to be fulfilled in life, erotic experience is the sure way - this is the concept of complete life in the world of Paz.

In 'Maithuna', a poem celebrating the exalted experience of erotic encounter, Paz explicitly alludes to some positions of love making using intensely suggestive imagery.

Burgundy tongue of the flayed sun
tongue that licks your land of sleepless dunes (75).

In unmistakable idiom, Paz immortalises the experience of last night. Here, carnal aspects of the copulation are brought out using explicit imagery that coalesce into beautiful, ethereal interlude:

Last night in your bed
we were three:
the moon you and me (A Tale 80)

It is with joyous abandon that Paz writes about sex act. The poem 'Axis' contains overt depiction of copulation.

Through the conduits of blood
my body in your body

spring of night
my tongue of sun your forest

your body a kneading trough (83).

Here the poet celebrates the physical side of the erotic love using the explosive power of surrealistic imagery. Paz presents a powerful evocation of the sublime heights to which a couple can rise in erotic love.

'Sunday on the Island of Elephanta' deals with the poet's visit of the island with his wife. 'Invocation' the second section of the poem is addressed to Shiva and Parvati to whom Paz says,

We worship you

not as gods

but as images

of the divinity of man (85).
Here also, gods and divinities have significance in so far as they are "images of the divinity of man." So the four arms of Shiva becomes four rivers "where the lovely Parvati bathes." When the sea beats under the sun, it is the laughter of Shiva. When the sea is ablaze, it is because Parvati steps on the waters. The poet and his wife have nothing to ask of the gods 'that comes from the other world' except "the barefoot light on the sleeping land and sea."

"A Tale of Two Gardens," a complex poem that moves through significant places, people, events and experience in the life of Paz, presents a moment in the life of the poet when he saw "the other face of being/the feminine void/the fixed featureless splendor." Then the poet 'crossed paths with a girl.' After a passage through many countries and experience, the poet finds a self-contained autonomous world in his erotic experience with his wife. There he gets an insight into perfect wisdom and experiences the plenitude of the void. The poet is explicit and emphatic in his affirmation of the overwhelmingly powerful nature of erotic experience:

I forgot Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti in your breasts
I found them in your cry
Maithuna,

two in one

one in all

all in nothing

Sunyata

the empt plenitude

emptiness round as your lips! (A Tale 94).

It is to be noted that the penultimate section of the long poem visualizes Shiva and Parvati in erotic love. The concluding stanza is a profound exploration of concepts of time, ego, reality of the world, and illusory nature of things in the light of Buddhist logic. The poet writes about the scattering of images and memories so that he gets this revelation:

The signs are erased:

I watch clarity (95)

Here the poet alludes to the wisdom that comes from the other bank which is perfect wisdom - 'Prajnaparamita'. Nagarajuna and Dharmakirti taught about that Perfect Wisdom. But what Paz learns in his erotic communion with his wife is more important than philosophic concepts like 'Prajnaparamita' and 'Sunyata'. There cannot be a more convincing evidence for the importance that Paz gives for the erotic fulfilment of man
and woman, than this long poem that pictures Paz and his wife in the context of Nagarjuna, Dharmakiriti and 'Sunyata'.

Paz is really fond of using suggestive imagery evoking sexual associations. In the poem 'Vrindaban' Paz writes.

Perhaps in a cleft stone
he grasped the form of women
its rent
the formless dizziness (A Tale 55).

In the same poem Paz expresses his credo:

"I am hungry for life and for death also" (56).

The purpose of human life is to live. To live is to experience varied sensations and emotions. The quest for life that Paz expresses through his poems reminds the readers of the attitude towards life shown by Krishna through his example.

The 'Indianness' in the treatment of love and eroticism by Paz

It is well known that India had been 'the other' in the creative life of Paz for more than forty years. His tryst with Indian ethos, culture, philosophy and art had its sublimated manifestation in the form of poems
(East slope, Toward the Beginning) and prose works (In Light of India, The Monkey Grammarian). Paz wrote that his Mexican identity helped him to understand India better.

A close study of his works would reveal that in his portrayal of love and eroticism also, he shows an attitudinal similarity with Indian ethos. There is nothing of misogynistic in Indian tradition. Its sculpture, poetry and philosophy glorify the feminine as the Great Goddess or 'Sakthi' without whom the universe cannot exist. It is in sharp contrast to the tradition of semitic religions that portray a Patriarchal and masculine God who is completely independent of a feminine counterpart.

Western tradition and especially the semitic religions associate sex with sin and fall as is evident from the story of Adam and Eve.

In the West, a frank and open appraisal of sex and its central role in human life began with the theoretical works in psychology of Sigmond Freud. His theory that sexual urge is the driving force for human creativity - he called it 'libido' - revolutionised man's awareness of sex and its manifold influence in life. With Freud, sex was increasingly seen as the energy which, when sublimated, finds expression in art and literature. Hitherto, it was relegated to the background and even suppressed or forcibly kept in oblivion. All on a sudden, in the 20th century it was
'discovered' and highlighted by Freud making the Post Freudian world of literature and art overtly sexual or erotic content.

Paz is a poet who glorifies and celebrates sex and erotic experience. Many poems from *Salamander*, *East slope* and *Toward the Beginning* can be cited to show how uninhibited Paz is when he deals with masculine feminine relationship. With a joyous abandon, Paz glorifies it and at the same time points out its, philosophical dimensions.

Reading such poems, an Indian would be reminded of the peculiar way in which spiritual experience is treated in Indian classics. Spiritual experience is often modelled on the metaphorical concept of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure was seen as the externalization of highly mysterious and subtle power that pervades the entire universe. In Indian tradition, it is called 'Kama' which was supposed to be the power behind the projection of the world, evolution of manifold beings and their activities. In other words, the universe, with its different forms and beings, is projected and transformed and on account of the mysterious working of the sex drive (Kama or desire). So, in Indian tradition, 'Kama' or Desire has a cosmic significance.

It is obvious that Indian tradition bears ample testimony to the all pervading influence of love or eros on personal level: witness the ecstalic
way in which poets like Jayadeva (Gitagovindam) celebrate the feeling of love and the painstaking dedication with which sculptors carved out erotic poses in quite unabashed manner. Sculptures in Ajanta and Ellora are a living testimony to the central place love or eros enjoyed in classical ages.

Paz's treatment of love is also in tune with this Indian temperament as is evident from many poems included in Salamander (1958-1961) and East Slope (1971). The keynote of many of the poems is the celebration of sensual love and its overwhelmingly positive influence in human life. Readers don't come across any inhibition on the part of the poet when he treats human love in poems. On the contrary, the dominant tempo is that nothing is taboo in life. The poet seems to say that everything human, including erotic love, is dear to him. In the poem "Clear Night" (included in Salamander) which is dedicated to Andre Breton and Benjamin Peret, Paz writes,

Everything is a door
all one needs is the light push of a thought
Something's about to happen (The Collected Poems 95)

The poem presents the three who wait in the Cafe 'd' Angleterre. "The damp footsteps of fall" can be heard outside; a prostitute crossed the street and disappeared.
'The three' in the cafe remain witness to the changes outside brought out by the fall that 'walked toward the center of Paris/with the certain steps of the blind.' Suddenly the poet realizes the possibilities of human existence: "Everything is a door . . ." (The Collected Poems 95)

The poet says a big YES to life which is evident from the line "I read the signs on the face of that moment"

The living are alive

Walking flying ripening bursting

the dead are alive (95).

The poet perceives 'grapes that fall between the legs of night' and comes to this realization:

The city opens like a heart

like a fig the flower that is a fruit

more desire than incarnation

the incarnation of desire (95).

The poet is ever conscious of the possibilities open as part of human condition which is expressed in the refrain of the poem: "Something is about to happen."
The poem presents "a teenage couple" comprising "a blond Cupid's arrow" and 'a redhead'. The four letters of the word 'Love' burned on each finger of the boy. The poet is reminded of the 'student tatoo chinese ink and passion throbbing rings' and the refrain reveals the significance of the couple in the thematic context of the poem.

"Everything is a door"

Love is a force that belong to a class of its own in its power to effect changes in human condition. It is the magic wand that changes a frog to a prince. So everything in the world of lovers belong to a unique category.

They speak to each other in a language of fire

their struggles and loves

are creations and destructions of entire worlds

(The Collected Poems 99)

It is self evident that the poet welcomes life (with its infinite possibilities) with a big 'Yes'.

Earlier, in his major poem 'Sunstone', Paz visualized love as the fountain of life, creativity, vitality and the very quality that makes what it is, in short, the very essence or substratum of the entire creation. Paz wrote:
to love is to battle, if two kiss
the world changes, desires take flesh
thoughts take flesh, wings sprout
on the backs of the slave, the world is real
and tangible, wine is wine, bread
regains its savor, water is water
to love is to battle, to open doors (The Collected Poems 23).

Paz expressed the power of love to transmute the ordinary into incomparable in the same poem:

the world changes if two, dizzy and entwined, fall
on the grass:
the sky comes down, trees rise, space becomes nothing but light and silence, open space for the eagle of the eye (25).

For Paz it is love that ennobles the existence; Paz does not regard love as a Platonic idea. On the contrary, love expresses itself in erotic encounter between man and woman. It is physical love that transforms the world of the lovers.

In western love poetry, there are some glowing examples of a poet being inspired by his lady love to dizzying heights of inspiration that leads
to ecstatic poetic utterances which have stood the test of time. To take only two examples from two countries and ages: Petrarch (1304-1374) was divinely inspired by Laura (witness verses in 'Laura in Life' and 'Laura in Death') and Swift (1667-1745) had his Stella as an inexhaustible fountain of inspiration. In a similar vein, Paz is inspired by a lady whom he immortalises in the poem 'Across':

I turn the page of the day
writing what I'm told
by the motion of your eyelashes (The Collected Poems 127).

With a clarity that startles the reader into its significance, the first stanza points to the overriding importance of the feminine inspiration in every moment of the poet's life. The poet and his lady love are not lovers in the ideal world where contemplation of love and expression of sweet sentiments in a dreamy language fill their day and night. On the contrary, they experience erotic pleasure ('I enter you') of game of love ('I want proofs of darkness, want / to drink the black wine'). The poet celebrates the physical love using metaphysical language. Theological allusions are employed to sing in praise of erotic experience.

A drop of night

On your breast's tip:
mysteries of the carnation (The Collected Poems 127).

The poet believes that there is no need to be reticent about the role of body in love's encounter. For Paz love is not an abstract concept; it is the encounter of two bodies in the act of love. The union of the two is a fusion of one self in the other. In the act of love, the poet loses his self as he merges into the self of his beloved. Consequently he experiences an expansion and gets an "insight ('I open them inside your eyes').

Closing my eyes

I open them inside your eyes (129).

The culmination of the sex act leads the poet to the very mystery of life as is evident from the last stanza:

With a mask of blood

I cross your thoughts blankly

amnesia guides me

to the other side of life (129).

As a consequence of the sex encounter, the poet is led out of the fret and fever of life and gets an insight into the true nature of existence and true essence of being.
In the context of the unabashed celebration of the erotic relationship of human beings as depicted by Paz, it is worthwhile to compare it with the treatment of a similar theme in Indian tradition. For Paz, the inspiration for poetry comes from his sensual relationship with his lady love. In the celebrated Sanskrit poem *Saundaryalahiri*, the Great Goddess, was attracted by the cry of the Dravidian infant and breast feeds him which instantly turns him into an inspired poet (*Saundaryalahiri*: 75). Figuratively speaking, poets are like forsaken infants who cry for the milk of poetry. Either in a very mundane, concrete and sensual as in the case of Paz or in a very metaphysical and divine manner as in the case of the poet mentioned in *Saundaryalahiri*, the inspiring influence of the feminine principle leads to a blossoming of the individual making him creative and quite fulfilled. In Indian tradition, the central idea depicting the poet as being inspired by the goddess when the latter breast feeds him, can be traced back to Vedic days:

The Rishi prays for the milk of the goddess Saraswati (7-1-10).

It is to be noted that the ideas in *Atharvaveda* and *Saundaryalahiri* primarily present the feminity of the goddess in the role as a mother in a transcendental realm whereas in the poems of Paz the feminity is sensual and libidinal.
'Discor', another poem that treats erotic theme from *Salamander*, contains a passionate meeting between the poet and a lady in a metaphoric language.

Whispers and rapid steps
dim passage, long sigh

...stairway that leads nowhere
Leads no where, forever leading (*The Collected Poems* 135).

In this passage the poet confronts 'a sudden mirror' and 'fixed present'. The second stanza is explicit:

Abolition of time

Wounded mirror and perpetual wound (135).

The poet comes to a "room full of faces and lips and names" where the sense of being alive is sharp.

From the poetic context and the connotation of words, it is obvious that the sensual encounter between the poet and the feminine source of inspiration is metamorphosed in the narrative of the poem as 'passage', 'room', and 'mirror.' The culmination of the encounter fuses the past and future into the present effecting 'abolition of time'. That moment is 'a
moment long as a howl', as the poet says (p.135). When that moment is over, the poet realizes that 'it leads nowhere'. But this is the only path leading the poet forward, though no definite destination is arrived at. The poet is overwhelmed by the

Your body of grass your body of silver
throne of the night and spur of the day (The Collected Poems 135).

It implies that the love and eroticism which he experienced inspires him day and night; it helps him to blossom. As he says,

"Blood rains on your dry soul" (135).

The poet realizes "dampness of desire and the peace of desire" after experiencing "timeless hour" and "naked nakedness". It is a fairly obvious allusion to the climax of erotic encounter and its aftermath in the temper and outlook of the couple. Eventually both of them achieves salvation through intense sensuality.

We leave night and are lost,
mirrors abolished in a fixed present (17).

The poet's conception of a complete life subsumes erotic life and its harmonious fulfilment. Paz acknowledges the centrality of sex in life. His
celebration of love and eroticism is quite uninhibited. It is spontaneous, natural and expansive. Paz sings in praise of love and eroticism. With gusto and elan, Paz traces the contour and unfolding of erotic experience involving man and woman in many poems in Salamander, East slope, Toward the beginning and A Tree Within. It is clear evidence for the affirmation of the overwhelming importance of love and eroticism in Paz's attitude towards life. Love and eroticism play a central role in Paz's picture of complete life.

The anthology A Tree Within (1976-1987) contains a long poem - "Letter of Testimony" - which is a clear poetic utterance of poet's attitude towards life. For the poet the act of writing is a fusion of dialogue and monologue ("I write: / I talk to myself / I talk to you"). Here Paz sees love as "a permutation, barely an instant in the history of primigenial cells and their innumerable divisions" (629) and presents love in a strikingly beautiful image of feminity.

Invention, transfiguration:

the girl turns into a fountain

her hair becomes a constellation

a woman asleep is an Island (The Collected Poems 629).
Here feminine nature is seen as having a mysterious power embodying an enigma too great to be unraveled easily. The girl becomes a 'fountain' (source of water which is the source of life) and her hair becomes a constellation (as expansive as the universe). A woman asleep is seen as an 'Island' which is insular, enigmatic, enveloped in solitude and inviting exploration of adventurous navigators. History of the world in modern period is largely the history of the exploration of islands and continents by sailors goaded by the quest for adventure. History of the Americas is precisely shaped by the outcome of such expeditions. When Paz views a woman as an island, he consciously or unconsciously present an image which is closely related to the history of the region. A woman is an island inviting the exploration of man; the fulfilment of both lies in the encounter and exploration which is inseparable from love and eroticism.

Paz sees sex as a means to transcend solitude. Sensual encounter liberates one from the prison of itself.

The One

is the prisoner of itself,

it is

it only is

it has no memory
it has no scars

to love is two
always two,
embrace and struggle,
two is the longing to be one
and to be the other, male or female,
two knows no rest
it is never complete,
it whirls
around its own shadow,
searching
for what we lost at birth,
the scar opens:

fountain of visions,
two : arch over the void (The Collected Poems 631).

According to Paz, 'one' is the 'prisoner of itself' which indicates a vegetative life ('it only is'). 'To love is two' with 'the longing to be one' and the scar opens: 'fountain of vision.'

According to Paz

Love, timeless island
island surrounded by time (631)

and

To love

is to die and live again and die again:

it is liveliness (631).

Paz writes about "pleasure wounds" which turns into 'flowers', then: 'The flower became a word' (631).

It is a clear reference to the inspiration for writing in his life which is love and its fulfilment in erotic relationship. Love enables him to blossom, to 'flower' which becomes 'a word'. The word inspired by love is his writings. Love is the source of inspiration for the poet.

Then love is assigned with a great scope and role in the following lines:

Love:

reconciliation with the Great All

and with the others,

the small and endless

all (633).
The deeper implication of love and sex is that it reveals the very mystery of existence. It opens the insight into the interrelatedness of the multitude of names and forms in the universe (‘reconciliation with the Great All and with the others, the small and endless all’). Love and eroticism help Paz to have an integrative vision encompassing the diversity of 'the others' 'the small' and 'endless all.' This conviction of Paz is similar to ideas in certain religious practices that prevail in India - Tantra, Saktism and Vajrayana.'

In Tantric school of religion and in Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana) sex act is used as a means to unravel the mystery of life and the universe. The highest form of Saivism is Tantra. It is also known as Saktism or Goddess-worship. For spiritual realization in this practice, five separate actions are followed:

The drinking of wine and liquor of various kinds (madya);
the eating of meat (mamsa); the eating of fish (matsya); the eating of parched or fried grain (mudra); sexual union (maithuna) (Monier Williams 192).

For Paz love is the 'reconciliation with the Great All' which means that love leads him to a well integrated vision of life. Obviously love or sex occupies a very high pedestal in the world view of Paz. It is endowed
with a theological dimension when Paz perceives it as the key to reconciliation with the Great All which is the substratum of the Universe or Creation. In the Philosophy of Paz, love enjoys an eminence and is equal in importance to what beauty is for Keats. If Keats is a poet of Beauty, Paz is a poet of Love.

Readers of the poems of Paz can never miss the overriding importance of love and eroticism in the world view of the poet. Sensual beauty is the most fascinating attribute of human beings and the fulfilment of them lies in the erotic experience involving man and woman. For Paz, love unlocks the mystery of life and the universe. It leads human beings forward and helps them to blossom in life; eventually it leads to Perfect Wisdom or the wisdom of the other shore. In other words, it is love that leads to enlightenment in the world of Paz.

Paz can never conceive of a life devoid of love and eroticism. The erotic relationship between the masculine and feminine, a theme celebrated in many poems of Paz, holds the central place in Paz's conception of perfect life. As Jason Wilson observes in Octario Paz:
Paz's great theme is the redemption of the divided alienated individual through love or union with the Other, a completion of the isolated individual in a passionate couple that offers hope of a collective salvation (4).