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THE ROMANTIC CONCEALMENT OF DESIRE: COLERIDGE'S AND WORDSWORTH'S POETIC VOICES

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Abstract

The present study poses an interpretation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" and William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" so as to evince the subject of desire as the ulterior motif of these texts, even though the poetic voices of these works attempt to conceal such a theme. This reading interprets both poems as compositions that share the same thematic line as William Blake's "The Book of Thel" and John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Consequently, the close reading of the poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge will be presented.

Keywords: Coleridge, Wordsworth, romanticism, desire

OCULTAMIENTO ROMÁNTICO DEL DESEO: LAS VOCES POÉTICAS DE COLERIDGE Y DE WORDSWORTH

Resumen

El presente estudio plantea una interpretación de “El arpa éolico” de Samuel Taylor Coleridge y “Versos compuestos unas millas más arriba de Tintern Abbey” de William Wordsworth con la intención de evidenciar el tema del deseo como el motivo oculto de estos textos, aun cuando las voces poéticas de estas obras aparentemente intentan ocultar este tema. Esta lectura comprende ambos poemas como composiciones que comparten la misma línea temática que “El libro de Thel” de William Blake y “Oda a una urna griega” de John Keats. En consecuencia, se presentará la lectura detallada de los poemas de Wordsworth y Coleridge.

Palabras clave: Coleridge, Wordsworth, romanticismo, deseo

THE ROMANTIC CONCEALMENT OF DESIRE: COLERIDGE'S AND WORDSWORTH'S POETIC VOICES

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Introduction

Throughout these pages, an analysis of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" and William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" will be proposed. Although both poems are usually approached from the angles of biography and the romantic veneration of Nature, this study poses the subject of desire as a connecting thread between them. This motif also concerns other key figures of this literary period, a fact that would reinforce the suggested reading of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's texts. Thus, in order to highlight the theme of desire as the ulterior motif of the poems' speakers over other traditional understandings, two other works will be briefly discussed in the introduction, William Blake's "The Book of Thel" and John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

In "The Book of Thel", William Blake overtly exposes the theme of desire, since the name of its homonymous protagonist in Greek precisely means that, which poses Thel as a personification and a symbol of desire and reflects the poet's views on this feeling. Despite being the youngest of Seraphim's daughters, Thel is destined "To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day:" (Blake 1988: 3, l. 3), a line that stresses the ephemerality of the feeling. This inconstancy is alluded again in the speaker's subsequent comparison of Thel with other ephemeral elements:

... a reflection in a glass; like shadows in the water.
Like dreams of infants. Like a smile upon an infant's face,
Like the dove's voice, like transient day, like music in the air;
(Blake 1988: 3, ll. 9-11)

Impermanence is further underlined in Thel's conversation with the Cloud, which recalls the sentence by Socrates that summarizes Heraclitus' statement that all things move and nothing remains (Plato 1963: 67), as part of the latter's doctrine of flux. The transience of desire stems from its

paradoxical nature, as it dies with its own fulfilment; in other words, the wish to satisfy one's longed for object, when fulfilled or achieved, leads the drive that originated it to its own destruction. This process is metaphorically analogous to Thel's ultimate purpose on life, to become food for worms once she perishes. In this premise, the paradox of desire is presented again as the fulfilment of Thel's purpose entails her dissolution. As Thel strolls through the underworld she finds her own grave. Sitting there, she hears a voice coming from it, one that could perfectly be her own once she (desire) is dead; one that moans about the senses as a source of corruption. Desire is a purely sensitive feeling that, once satisfied, exhausts such sensitivity, staining the wholeness of its purity, while the senses, after the banishment of desire, only perceive corruption, remorse and regret.

Albeit not enounced with the same openness, desire is explored by the speaker of John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", following a similar argumentative line than that of Thel that, in fact, offers a much clearer conclusion. This thematic line was neglected by some of the critics of the poem, for instance, Matthews, who considered the allusion to the "Piping Shepherds" a "pointless conceit" (1971: 162). Matthews' error resides in his oversight of the implications and significance of the piper's unheard melodies (Keats 1983: 114, l. 11). This melody refers to ideal music, to the archetype of music; an allusion that becomes evidently clear in the poem's maxim: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (Keats 1983: 114, ll. 49-50) This motto is likewise the site of further critical blunders, as Gilfillan's declaration that Keats "seems to have been averse to all speculative thought" (1971: 306), a dismissive comment towards Keats' reasoning powers much in the same vein that Matthews' "[Keats'] fancy having thus got the better of his reason" (1971: 237).

Both critics seem to neglect the speaker's insistence in alluding to the Platonic doctrine that, arguably, is essential to the understanding of the poem and its rendering of Plato's ideals. As Wigod states, "More than any other of the odes, the implicit subject of the Ode on a Grecian Urn is the ideal itself (1957: 113). Archetypes are alluded in the poem not just in its straightforward mention to the gods of Arcady but in the purity of the urn's depiction. However, Keats' poem uses the doctrine of Platonic archetypes at his whim to ground a certain tautology. He sets up a direct relationship between truth and beauty, derived from the assertion that all which is beautiful or true is by definition archetypal. Truth is beauty since *it is*, and all that composes the being is true since the being is the only real entity,

unborn, immortal, immutable and simple: everything else is just a mere illusion. The trick is double as it consists, first, in establishing that if truth is beautiful, the beautiful has to be true (in absolute terms), and secondly, that after having constituted a similar relationship previously, one that equates beauty with desire through the speaker's comments on the lovers, then desire is truth and truth desire.

The urn is a symbol in and of itself, not only since it alludes to pagan rites or to spring—romantic symbol *par excellence*—but because desire is trapped in it, a craving that produces frustration. The urn, static and intact, offers to the lover one security at least: that of unfulfilled desire.

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (Keats 1983: 114, ll. 17-20)

The fixed nature of the urn would allow the depicted lover to remain a suitor for eternity, always happy. The relations that are established at this point convey to the lover—and to the reader—that the former's beloved will remain beautiful since she will be young forever. Thus, youth equals beauty and due to the fact that she will remain so, he will eternally love her. In other words, only what is beautiful and young can be loved; there is no beauty nor love in old age. This is the type of transitive reasoning that the speaker offers.

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young; (Keats 1983: 114, ll. 25-27)

Love will always be eternal as long as desire is not satisfied; that is, similar to the form in “The Book of Thel”, it can only endure if unfulfilled. This is similar to Peter Levine's description of the romantic stance on love, which often suggested “that passion could only by sustained if time somehow stopped” (2002: 92). After its satiation the only sensation that remains is “a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, A burning forehead, and a parching tongue” (Keats 1983: 114, ll. 29-30). The line of argument that binds Blake and Keats' texts with the poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge is desire, one that drives men beyond their own moral convictions, even overriding their convictions in some cases. In fact, as Levine argues, the use of settings and mythology from Classical Rome and Greece by Keats and

other romantics precisely responds to their desire to pursue the celebration of the ideal of Beauty as independent of morality (2002: 85-86). In Blake's poem melancholy can be identified; in Coleridge and Wordsworth, their speakers experienced qualms and even a slight feeling of bitter remorse; but Keats' narrator shows no moral reform, no reluctance.

Perhaps the only doubt that such an audacious poem awakens is whether, when mentioning the sacrifice (Keats 1983: 115, ll. 31-34), the narrator is also referring to marriage. If the sacrificial altar equates compromise, in the case of the romantic man it would represent the death of liberty for the sake of satisfying desire.

Coleridge

The poem "The Eolian Harp" (1796/1973) has been the object of multiple interpretations, for instance that which sees the harp as a metaphor of the romantic heart and the characteristics that a true poet must exhibit; a more traditional standpoint in that it serves the purpose of establishing a symbolic image that will be pursued in different texts and periods of Romanticism. The present reading intends to uncover some of the concealed characteristics that the true romantic poet does not usually reveal.

The common theories about the poem draw upon biographical data for the deciphering of the work's interpretative elements, despite their futility. Written in 1795 and published a year later, the poem portrays Coleridge's expectations concerning his wedding with Sara Fricker, addressing the pleasures of marital love—in a conversational form—but diverting from said dimension and evolving into a poem that deals with the relationship between mankind and nature. The traditional standpoint refers as well to the object that gives name to the composition, explaining its physical and symbolic characteristics. Metaphysical interpretations generally mention a pantheism or an intimate relationship between the poet and Nature—in this case capitalized—and the search for the Divinity through the natural elements (Abrams 1971: 434, Holmes 1982: 104, Ashton 1997: 107). Strangely enough, these interpretations resemble closely those made about "Tintern Abbey".

The conversation between the speaker and Sara is apparently innocent, but a more perverse interpretation can be glimpsed if the poem is approached from the romantic understanding of desire deployed in poems like "The Book of Thel" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The poetic voice finds himself on the brink of a new life, at the end of the race that led him to obtain the object of his desire. He is in a spot which, according to romantic

rhetoric, couldn't be more ideal; however, something disturbs him. One of the principles of Romanticism, enunciated in the *Lyrical Ballads*, proposes that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth and Coleridge 1911: 228), which is impossible since, as Locke among others defended (Russell 1972: 604-617), the "transcription" of emotion into a language understandable to others forces it to lose its spontaneity, its authenticity and veracity. On the contrary, if emotions were not codified into the imperfect and artificial machine of language, it would be impossible to communicate them. This has always left the romantic poet in a state of incomprehension by the rest of his fellow beings. The poet assumes the part of the misunderstood party, facing a disjunction regarding close relationships: either he manages to deceive his interlocutor, in which case he would gain the other's approval, affection and even love; or he is unable to do so. In the first instance the interlocutor would lose the poet's respect and, therefore, cannot be the object of love; whereas in the second context, the interlocutor would have been able to see through the poet's mask and in no case would be able to love him, and might even end up despising him. This situation in which he is immersed in either case leaves the poet again in the role of the victim, which provides him with enjoyment but does not satisfy his desire. Sooner or later, the romantic poet would want to satiate his cravings even if this implies, as usually, to sacrifice his rhetoric.

Once this situation has taken place, the poet would resort to his eloquence, trying to blame his victim by shielding himself in the idea of being a free spirit, in his unique capacity to understand reality better than mere mortals and in his impossibility of changing. In order to remain an "honour'd Maid" (Coleridge 1973: 102. 65), it is safe to assume that Sara has rejected the poet's sexual advances, and the poet, thwarted, has come to the veranda to watch the sunset, while she seats by his side.

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
 Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
 To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown
 With white-flower'd Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle,
 (Meet emblems thy of Innocence and Love!) (Coleridge 1973: 100, ll. 1-5)

In this first part there is already a distancing between the poet and his lover, perhaps even bitterness, since he feels compelled to explain to her the things they are observing. Such explanation is made evident due to the use of parentheses, in the manner of air quotes, and by the use of the word

rejection would eventually turn into consent will generate a delightful wrong. At first, like the lute, she will present herself as shy, but with a minimal sign of consent this initial flirtation will turn into the consummation of desire. The introduction of the concept “tempt to repeat the wrong” reinforces the substantiation of the proposed speculations. One might wonder why the interaction between the wind and instrument would be considered wrong; this only makes sense if these lines are predicated on the new dimension created by the metaphor, once it has overcome its literal meaning.

Such a soft floating witchery of sound
 As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
 Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
 Where Melodies round honey-dripping flowers,
 Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise, (Coleridge 1973: 101, ll. 21-25)

This passage might seem rather obscure for the interpretations that defend the love for simplicity, as it distances itself from all that is natural and ordinary. However, it makes sense if understood as the poet’s attempt to force the conversation into the grounds of romantic pose by drawing his lover’s attention to these pleasing images. On the one hand, he is insisting that she should listen, and thus, remain silent; and on the other hand, he is starting to speak in wildly imaginative and unusual, if not incomprehensible, terms to her. The last assertion can be deduced from the speaker’s previously mentioned arrogant assumptions, in which his explanation of the symbology of flowers suggests that Sara’s knowledge of the realm of fairies and elves is fairly limited. What corroborates his selfishness—and his desire to remain misunderstood—is that in this case he does not attempt to justify it, not even in a condescending manner as he did at the beginning of the poem. The intricacy of this baffling speech serves to hide from Sara a very cryptic sentence: “O! the one Life within us and abroad” (Coleridge 1973: 101, l. 27). Here, the reader beholds the revelation of the truth concealed in the narrator’s discourse even when Sara seems unaware or unwilling to react to it. The line suggests that the poet is not completely content with the current state of affairs. He recognizes that he has two lives, the inner and the outer, a condition that exposes his duplicity. But far from saying it for showing contrition, he states it carelessly as if it was a condition of which one can or should be proud, or at least, as nothing that should cause embarrassment.

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
 Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
 . . . Methinks, it should have been impossible
 Not to love all things in a world so fill'd;
 Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
 Is Music slumbering on her instrument. (Coleridge 1973: 101, ll. 27-34)

The insulence is made evident as he talks with self-confidence and passion about his own duality, going a step forward: he might be introducing another confession, one that may point to infidelity. This can be interpreted in several forms: either he has been unfaithful already or, in accordance to the romantic and poetic nature of a free spirit, he would cheat on his lover sooner or later. Another option results from the reading of the poet's frustration, voicing a veiled threat that suggests that he has alternatives in mind if she continues to reject his advances. One of the cultural traits of love, in this case romantic (though the limits of the term are not distinct), is its character of exclusivity, that is, if one loves a person in such a way one cannot feel the same towards anyone else. In that sense, love and fidelity go hand in hand. At this point we should not consider that the loved one is different from the desired one. In concordance with the tradition in which the poet is included, neither the feeling of love nor the acts consequently derived from it should be shared with someone different than the loved one. Therefore, if the poet, in an attempt to incite Sara to jealousy, confesses to her that he usually thinks that it should have been impossible "Not to love all things in a world so fill'd" (Coleridge 1973: 101, l. 32), it is possible that she will be inclined to yield completely.

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
 Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
 Whilst through my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold
 The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main.
 And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
 Full many a thought uncall'd and undetain'd,
 And many idle flitting phantasies,
 Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
 As wild and various as the random gales
 That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
 (Coleridge 1973: 101-102, ll. 35-44)

Although the section starts by addressing Sara as his "Love", he makes it clear that he prefers solitude, being the only state in which he can find the

peace and tranquillity he yearns for. Analogous to the effect produced by the repetition of the words which allude to silence, the alliteration “tranquil muse upon tranquillity” manifests that it is an element worthy of consideration. In that moment of reflection, the poet would want to be left alone, but Sara’s presence encourages him to continue talking about himself, as he finally compares his poetic self with the harp. In this comparison he discharges himself from all responsibility: if he is merely a passive instrument, he would have no control over the consequences that an “intellectual breeze” may foster; it presents him as innocent of such thoughts, and of the actions performed under their influence.

And what if all of animated nature
 Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
 That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the Soul of each, and God of All?

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
 Darts, O belovéd Woman! nor such thoughts
 Dim and unhallow’d dost thou not reject,
 And biddest me walk humbly with my God. (Coleridge 1973: 102, ll. 45-53)

At this moment it seems that the poetic voice crosses a line that does not please Sara, as he has gone too far to unburden himself from guilt by pretending to project his personal condition upon the rest of mankind, by placing the responsibility of men’s actions into the abstract “intellectual breeze” and by almost committing a heresy as a result of establishing a correspondence between that breeze and God. However, there is another implication in Sara’s reaction. The speaker has described the harp as a coy mistress that progressively yields to the advances as the subtle pressure of the wind traverses across it. The fact that the poet invokes the harp again, this time encompassing everyone, automatically includes Sara as well, thus identifying her directly with the aforementioned sexualized harp. This could be understood as another approach by the unsatisfied poet to bend his lover’s will to his desires. An invitation to abandon her coyness and yield so that, by letting herself become the passive harp, they can eventually produce that beautiful music. Sara’s understanding of the devious method accounts for her disapproving look:

Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!
 . . . For never guiltless may I speak of him,
 The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
 I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;
 Who with his saving mercies healéd me,
 A sinful and most miserable man,
 Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess
 Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!
 (Coleridge 1973: 102, ll. 54, 59-65)

Before Sara's rebuke, the poet retracts and seems to apologise for his statements, attempting to calm Sara. However, there is another reproach hidden in his comments that these thoughts are not entirely unfamiliar to her, but as she is a "Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!" it is her duty to lead him once again to the fold. Said remark does not only criticise her docility and obedience but also suggests that she is not being completely honest. Immediately he chastises himself, stating that he is the miserable possessor of a vain philosophy and an un-regenerated mind; however, this cannot be but an ironic comment, since he has exposed his theory and seems pleased with it. Under this perspective the last lines are turned into lines of false gratitude, full of contempt, bitterness and tiredness. Such idea might be reinforced by the absence of capitalization of the pronoun "him" (twice) and the possessive "his" when referring to Christ.

Wordsworth

Countless pages have been written about William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798/1969). The interpretations of the poem usually focus on three objectives, which in multiple occasions are superimposed. The most common one is limited to describing what is related in the poem with no real symbolic elucidation. Remembering his days of youth, Wordsworth laments the impossibility to describe accurately what he was then and recalls the poem's specific site as a mixture of feeling and passion untainted by maturity and the knowledge of the world—understood as the combination of pain, apathy and cynicism derived from aging. However, the narrator strives to maintain that a mature age and its wisdom compensate for the innocence lost. Said reparation has been granted by having attained a profound sense of the understanding of nature, and for some authors at this point there can be already found a pantheism or theology, or an understanding between the poet and God (Beatty 1922: 97, Barth 2003). Against this rendition there could be

presented an objection, when indicating that the reference to the abbey could have a meaning in combination with the fact that the building is never mentioned in the poem. Readers must consider why the “lines” are not written in the abbey itself but a “few miles above” (Wordsworth 1969: 259).

The second objective centers particularly on the poem’s origin,¹ the specific circumstances of the journey and the company of travelers, a reading that does not require any critical bibliography, as the necessary documents that verify Wordsworth’s visit—along with his sister—to the described zone are indeed available. Critics congratulate themselves when they corroborate said biographical fact, which appears as the title’s appendix, is true; becoming exultant when, by the end of the poem, the lines immediately can be associated with Dorothy, his sister. This type of reading often includes references to Wordsworth’s previous visit to the abbey, only five years before. Likewise, information concerning the poet’s private life or certain facts about British or world history are used to justify a proposal concerning the poem’s first lines.

A third approach concentrates on different formal aspects: for instance, in reference to the debate between the poem’s identification with an ode or with a conversational poem; if the arrangement of the poem as part of the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* is intentional, if it was written deliberately for said publication or not. These elements do not contribute in any form to the analysis here posed. However, the reader should know that in some cases said approach may be used to the extent that it sheds light upon the poem’s interpretative elements.

A fourth interpretation establishes the narrator not as a worshiper of Nature in a metaphysical sense as the Godhead, but as an admirer of nature in its most physical form. Considering the insight on the manner in which Blake’s and Coleridge’s poems deal with desire, a second reading of Wordsworth’s work, in which the initial interpretations may have been understood and rejected, can lead us to a different reading of the poem, which reveals unexpected turns in the poet’s narration. In the case of “Tintern Abbey” the references are more elaborated than those of Coleridge. The reader is once again required to remain oblivious of biographical references—which in this case greatly diminishes the poem’s

¹ In “The Frontiers of Criticism”, T. S. Eliot warns the reader and critic of poetry against the tendency to assume that a poem only has a single and valid meaning (1990: 113) and to believe that one can understand a poem merely by tracing its biographical or literary origins (1990: 114).

interpretation—as it is necessary to consider the possibility that the words “Friend” or “Sister” (both capitalized) do not refer to Wordsworth’s sister (Wordsworth 1969: 262, ll. 118-119, 124). If the analysis proposed is upheld without this consideration, the reader might even find hints to an incestuous relationship.²

The first stanza (Wordsworth 1969: 259-260. 1-22) does not seem to offer more variations on this interpretation than on those more popular and valued that speak of the poet of nature. Beyond the exaggeration, already commented in the rhetoric of the life that supposes the disproportionate suffering inflicted in the poet by the passing of time—as much as by what cannot be recovered as by the duration of long period passed—it is not essential to corroborate Wordsworth’s journey along the banks of the Wye. A reflection composed by the last three lines of the first part is significant, in that it creates a connection with Coleridge’s poem; similarly to how the poet of “The Eolian Harp” yearns for a contemplative solitude in the mountains, the poet of “Tintern Abbey” is diverted from his narrative course to advance a relation with the lonely hermit.

But oft, in lonely rooms, and ‘mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration: —feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As may have had no trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life; (Wordsworth 1969: 260, ll. 26-34)

The reflection with which this fragment begins directly addresses memory, as the poet talks of the remembrances dear to him. These thoughts appear during night-time, in the loneliness of empty rooms and in the hours of weariness so as to provide him respite and satisfaction. Regarding the theme and nature of such memories, the reading of the poem focused on

² Incest between siblings has been identified as a recurrent and significant theme in the English Romanticism (Richardson 1985: 738). In the works of Romantic poets, this motif usually concludes “with a death that divides the siblings, a death related to the consummation . . . of their love” (Richardson 1985: 740). Beyond the realm of fiction, Bateson suggested the existence of incestuous feelings between Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy (1960: 153-162).

nature offers an explanation in the natural environments that oppose the industrial cities that romantics so despised.

His little, nameless, unremembered acts
 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
 To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world
 Is lighten'd: (Wordsworth 1969: 260, ll. 35-42)

However, there is a slight distinction in the essence of these remembrances that points to a different direction. There are some small acts of love, without name or possibility to be remembered, that should not have relevance in the life of a good man, and those owed to a more significant present that lighten the weight of the tedious world. The former are of unremembered pleasure, probably referring to one-night stands, women whose names he does not remember. The latter are of sublime character, probably referring to more significant relationships. The narrator is reminiscing about acts of physical enjoyment, evoked in his urban solitude and in whose recreation he finds entertainment, as a form of self-satisfaction.

— that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on, —
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (Wordsworth 1969: 260, ll. 42-50)

The acts of sublime nature are depicted as a relief that resembles an orgasm, since the burden is lessened and one reaches the clarity of “that serene and blessed mood”; but the other ones are not less pleasurable to him, the small and nameless acts that produce “sensations sweet /Felt in the blood and felt along the heart” (Wordsworth 1969: 260). If this interpretation is accepted, both the kind-hearted deeds—and their remembrance as the gift of sublime essence—and the intimate meetings

could be interpreted, alongside the rest of the poem, as a confirmation that the poet's coveted past is a period of sexual character.

If this
 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft —
 In darkness, and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart —
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
 O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the wood
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!
 (Wordsworth 1969: 260-261, ll. 511-59)

The previous fragment, despite diverting the interpreter's attention by mentioning, once again, the river as an element of nature, subscribes the idea that in the darkness of the city the poet resorts to what he names "unprofitable stir". The cunning of hiding his intention consists, perhaps, not only in using a metaphor to represent his "acts of love" as natural phenomena, but also in synthesizing them and the natural environment where they were performed in a hypallage. In this way, the possible sexual meaning of the poem is concealed, enabling the author to declare his innocence in the case of being accused.

The picture of the mind revives again:
 While here I stand, not only with the sense
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
 That in this moment there is life and food
 For future years (Wordsworth 1969: 261, ll. 63-67)

These lines deal, yet again, with the reminiscence of past pleasures, but also reveal the existence of enjoyment in the present. The use of metonymy has been recurrent by equating pleasure with "that which provides it", a superimposition of rhetorical figures is what hinders the discernment of the poem's dark framework. It is here where it becomes evident that the poet is addressing or referring to someone, an individual that usually is inferred to be his sister, but it is also possible to be otherwise.

. . . when like a roe
 I bounded . . .
 Wherever nature led;

. . . For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by,
 To me was all in all. . . (Wordsworth 1969: 261, ll. 69-77)

Now the metaphor is conspicuously presented, his young self is compared with the roe; the zeal and eagerness with which the desired object is pursued; the immaturity that might explain why five years are so relevant; the coarse and rude pleasures of youth; the animal motions, now exhausted, that concentrated all his interest.

. . . The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite: a feeling and a love, (Wordsworth 1969: 261, ll. 78-82)

In the lines, read under this light, there can be found in the descriptions of nature some nuances that subtly present sexual overtones, some of the most evident ones including “the deep and gloomy wood” and the “sounding cataract”; the kind of metaphors that can later be found in the third canto of Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” (34-36).

. . . — That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, . . . other gifts
 Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. . . .
 . . . And I have felt
 . . . A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.
 (Wordsworth 1969: 261-262, ll. 85-90, 95-104)

Now it is the time of maturity, of accepting that the years of passion have passed as claimed by the narrator, who in spite of losing youth’s “dizzy raptures” and its “aching joys” has received abundant rewards. However, what he now describes as a reward neither seems to be positive nor appears to compensate the loss of the wonders described up to this moment in the narration. This acceptance of his future destiny, of his

serenity, recalls the final thought of “The Eolian Harp”, in which there seems to be more sarcasm than true happiness or gratitude. Perhaps the poetic voice has finally settled, even got married, and now laments the freedom lost; or the speaker, in spite of being committed or engaged to someone, still yields from time to time to youthful dalliances and, perhaps, this new meeting, disguised by nature and sheltered by the affirmation of his sister’s presence, is illicit. Regardless of the accuracy of the previous scenarios, if the connection with the “Harp” still appears to be weak, an incontestable reference to Coleridge’s poem is made when he states to have felt “A presence that disturbs me with the joy” a “motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things...” This is a distinct allusion to the “intellectual breeze” that bestowed upon Coleridge’s speaker letters of marque for his unfaithfulness.

. . . Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being. (Wordsworth 1969: 262, ll. 104-113)

In a moment of audacity or of profound honesty he confesses to himself to be a lover of all the things that he previously claimed to have rejected. In addition, and similar to Coleridge’s speaker, he admits that all those feelings—acquired through the senses—however imperfect they might be, still constitute his moral compass. Outside of the offered interpretation, references to Descartes are evident in two lines: “All thinking things” (*res cogitans*) and “Therefore am I...” (*ego ergo sum*), as well as the notion of the lack of reliability that the senses provide concerning the perception of reality, which, as a whole, point out that these might not be accidental.

For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
 Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
 My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while

May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; (Wordsworth 1969: 262, ll. 117-126)

At this point the reader that has followed the present interpretative line faces two possibilities: either to believe that the word “Sister” refers, indeed, to the speaker’s sister, or that it is used in a more ecumenical sense. The reading here opts for the second option but does not reject that the first might be possible. The poetic voice resumes using Nature to justify the acts he is suggesting his companion to engage in.

. . . ’tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e’er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. (Wordsworth 1969: 262-263, ll. 126-137)

The conversation is now fully disclosed and, when addressing his friend, it is evident that there is something that might be considered wrong in what they are doing. On the one hand, the narrator attempts to justify the fact that those feelings are right; if that were the case, he would not need to demonstrate their propriety. On the other hand, the speaker advises his sister to disregard the judgments that he expects to receive for finding in her his former pleasures—identified as immature and gross—and for using nature as an excuse for his actions, since doing so would provide a context where the encounters fuelled by desire can take place, enabling them to go from joy to joy, from pleasure to pleasure.

And let the misty mountain-winds be free
 To blow against thee: and in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,

Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
 (Wordsworth 1969: 263, ll. 139-145)

The narrator urges his friend to yield to the pleasures that he remembers from his youth, predicting good fortune if she decides to act irresponsibly and carelessly. He also affirms that, when older, she will find the memories resulting from those actions satisfying; adding, in a melancholic and gloomy demeanour, that if she finds herself desperate or sombre in the future she only needs to reminisce about these moments that will procure her joy and solace, as much as they comfort him in the loneliness of the city.

If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance,
 . . . wilt thou then forget
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; And that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
 Unwearied in that service: rather say
 With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal
 Of holier love. (Wordsworth 1969: 263, ll. 146-158)

In the case that she is a friend or a lover to-be, it seems as if the speaker, with the intention of seducing her, is attempting to convince her that it is right to surrender to passion. Under this perspective his previous advices and comforting suggestions now show his arrogance, as he identifies the memories' relief with what they have done and the places where she has been with him; mitigating it by stating that, even for a life-time adorer of nature, the landscape is now more beautiful thanks to her presence. The alternative option, and without incurring in speculations regarding incest (this would not alter the analysis performed up to this point), presents a narrator that offers counsel to his sister, encouraging her to be freer, to have lovers, and to heedfully disregard the judgments, mannerisms and fashions of society. If this scenario is correct, it can be considered odd that a brother would confide to his companion that which he does in the darkness of the city, recommending that she creates memories that will allow her to do the same in the future. Lastly, it is not very convincing that he would say to her

that, in those future moments that he foreshadows, she should think of him concerning these juvenile pleasures.

Conclusion

The present study has proposed a reading of Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" and Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" that depart from the canonical interpretations, which have mostly focused on the biographical facts surrounding the composition and the poets' praise of Nature, central to the poetics of Romanticism. Instead, the analysis has attempted to provide an alternative reading in both cases that highlights the articulation of the theme of desire by the poetic voices of each composition. The significance of such thematic line for the English Romanticism has been explored in the introduction through the reference and brief commentary of two additional texts composed by key figures of the period, William Blake and John Keats. The interaction between the ideas concerning desire deployed in "The Book of Thel" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" enable us to reflect upon the tension that exist between the ephemerality of desire, especially once it is satisfied, and the endurance of an ideal that can never be achieved or fulfilled; this is precisely what informs the anxiety Coleridge's poetic voice towards the stability of a committed relationship.

In "The Eolian Harp", the conversational pattern of the poem masks under the rhetoric of the romantic poet the speaker's sexual advances towards his lover. The ingenuity of the poetic voice progressively emerges as he conceives various arguments for her beloved to finally yield to him. The poet resorts to various strategies deployed in successive (and apparently unsuccessful) attempts, being the most significant of them the conceit in which both he and his lover are rendered as instruments that will only unlock their most beautiful melodies when played by an external agent. Serving as an invitation for Sara to respond positively to his advances but also as an excuse for his own behavior as he presents himself as a passive entity whose feelings, thoughts and desires are the product of an external all-encompassing force. When his arguments exceed the limits of moral propriety, he assumes a self-deprecating guise in the attempt to appease his beloved, rejecting his transgressive ideas in an act that cannot but come as disingenuous; a superficial and dishonest repentance in which his arrogance and frustrated desire transpire.

In a similar fashion, the poetic voice of "Tintern Abbey" resorts to the praise of Nature to disguise a celebration of the sexual dalliances of his

youth, reveling in the memories of those episodes years afterwards. The poem, also designed as a conversation or confession, renders this process of remembrance and the events recollected as an attempt to either recommending the same course of action to his sister or, like in the proposed reading of Coleridge's poem, convincing a possible sexual partner to satisfy his desire.

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RELIEF IN IGNORANCE, SHATTERED SUBJECTIVITY: A LACANIAN READING OF SUBJECTIVITY IN ANTON CHEKHOV'S "THE BET"

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Abstract

This paper provides a psychoanalytical account of subjectivity. It engages in a Lacanian reading of subjectivity in Anton Chekhov's "The Bet" (1889), whose protagonist, the lawyer, illustrates Jacques Lacan's ideas about subjectivity and the subject. In the story, the lawyer develops a fragmented sense of subjectivity and experiences alienation from the society and all its allegedly logical and supposedly eternal norms, as well as loss and lack in his very being. The story reveals that subjectivity is unstable and constructed within and through language and that remaining a normal person, from the society's perspective, requires not pondering over and beyond the language, but remaining stuck in it and never suspecting its authenticity and reliability. By contemplating whether the society's ideologies are everlasting and what are or might be over them, the lawyer expects the society's ideologies to bring bliss to human and thereby he develops hatred and despise towards them all. The ideas of Jacques Lacan about the development of subjectivity in the course of the mirror stage and the Oedipal crisis are drawn upon.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Alienation, Anton Chekhov, Lacan, Mirror Stage, “The Bet”

ALIVIO EN LA IGNORANCIA, SUBJETIVIDAD DESTRUIDA: LECTURA LACANIANA DE “LA APUESTA” DE ANTÓN CHÉJOV

Resumen

El presente trabajo ofrece un estudio psicoanalítico sobre la subjetividad, a partir de una lectura lacaniana de la subjetividad en el cuento “La apuesta” (1889) de Antón Chéjov, cuyo protagonista, el abogado, ilustra las ideas de Jacques Lacan sobre la subjetividad y el sujeto. En el cuento, el abogado desarrolla una noción fragmentada de su subjetividad y experimenta alienación de la sociedad, con todas sus normas supuestamente lógicas y eternas, así como pérdida y carencia de su propio ser. El cuento revela que la subjetividad es inestable y construida dentro y a través del lenguaje y que mantenerse como una persona normal, desde la perspectiva de la sociedad, requiere no trascender el lenguaje, sino quedarse aferrado a él, sin cuestionar su autenticidad y fiabilidad. El abogado, al considerar si las ideologías de la sociedad son eternas y qué hay o podría haber sobre ellas, espera que las ideologías de la sociedad aporten dicha a los humanos y, por ello, desarrolla odio y desprecio hacia todas ellas. Se parte de las ideas de Jacques Lacan sobre el desarrollo de la subjetividad en la fase especular y en la crisis edípica. **Palabras clave:** subjetividad, alienación, Antón Chéjov, Lacan, fase especular, “La apuesta”

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1. Introduction

Lacan was an avid follower of Freud. He came to grasp the main ideas of psychoanalysis via Freud's main theories. In some phases of his career, Lacan chose his own way in psychology as he analyzed facts through distinct lenses which provide a psychological typo for each human being from infancy to adulthood. Lacan restudied Freud in his own lenses to shed light on some of his flawed metapsychology. In contrast to Freud's ideas, Lacan's main focus was on language and speech which illuminate most of his theories and specially aiding this essay to unfold theories of subjectivity. In fact, no psychologist other than Lacan can delve into the inner world and dark sides of characters. One can analyze numerous personality elements using psychoanalysis, but it also aids us to pore into different attitudes and personalities of fictional characters. This essay endeavors to put lenses on the two main characters of the short story "The Bet" by Anthon Chekhov applying Lacan's ideas and theories of Other, Subjectivity and his three phases or stages that will be fully discussed during this research. In *A Brief Outline of Psycho-analytic Theory*, it is claimed that the most prominent notion in object relation theory is that human being is the main focus and object of his/her interactions with others that would be their caretakers (Quigley 1998: 8). In fact, from the imaginary stage, the subject loses his own identity when encountering the alienating image of the self. He knows

himself by his mother or the mirror image that could be anyone in his life. Therefore he recognizes himself according to the other.

2. Analyzing Lacan’s Theory of Subjectivity, the other and Language in “The Bet”

Deborah Brown argues that Descartes did in fact have a conception of a single, integrated human being and that in his view this conception is crucial to the success of human beings as rational and moral agents and as practitioners of science (Brown 2006: 1). On the contrary, Lacan often insists that his use of the term ‘subject’ is the very antithesis of the traditional understanding of the subject. He is rather well-known, in fact, for proclaiming a “subversion of the subject” (Lacan 1977: 281–312). By subjectivity, Lacan does not mean a coherent, autonomous and complete being, but quite the contrary, a being disjointed and fragmented to its core, plagued with an unbaiting loss and lack in the heart of its existence, that is, this lack is the expense of its subjectivity. One can easily trace this lack of subjectivity in both the characters of the lawyer and the banker. Whether perusing the wealth or emphasizing on a not so much precious argument about the priority of life imprisonment or death sentence for the criminals, the young lawyer is ready to deprive himself of fifteen years of his life’s freedom. On the other hand, the banker is ready to importune on a silly bet that would voluntarily take one third of a man’s life and confine him in a cell. Knowing the vanity and disgrace of this terrible bet, the banker’s damaged subjectivity could not prevent him from doing that deal.

In Lacanian theory, there are two important moments in the development of the subject: the mirror stage and the oedipal crisis. In the mirror stage, the child gets a first idea of the *I* and enters the imaginary order. With the oedipal crisis, then, the child enters the symbolic order. The Lacanian subject undergoes splitting and alienation and has no stable self. During the years of imprisonment, the lawyer loses his own self and grabs another identity, he delves into numerous personas, sometimes he totally loses himself and sometimes he gains his ego until eventually he gains what he is searching for, and that is the aim of life. As Chekhov presented in the story, the lawyer’s self and subjectivity changed during his years of imprisonment:

In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on. In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the

prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies - so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. (Chekhov 1889: 3)

What can be deduced from this part of story is that the lawyer's unstable *I* or the self, according to Lacan, was pumping out all through these years. This duality of the character and searching for a fixed identity that always encounters with a hole in it disturbs the lawyer more than the banker. Therefore, the more he attempts, the more he encounters the lack in his subjectivity. His accomplishment at the end of the story is the acceptance that this unified whole is always accompanied with a little hole in it. This seclusion was of prime importance in reaching the *I* for the lawyer as he acts as the Other for the banker. The lawyer's desires all through these years, including music, books, and freedom were actually the banker's desires.

According to James Mellard, the genesis of the Lacanian subject "can be outlined best in notions of a pre-mirror phase, a mirror phase, and a post-mirror phase" (1991: 27). Before the mirror stage, the child has no idea of itself as a "separate unit," but still remains undifferentiated from the mother's body and the physical world around it (Williams 1995: 65). The most important function of the mirror stage is the development of a unified body image. However, this experience involves misrecognition and alienation, since the child identifies with an image, or rather with "the very reflection of a reflection" (1995: 66). The child looks at its image in the mirror, ascribes certain characteristics to this image and transfers these characteristics to itself and consequently, considers itself as having those traits: totality and unity. Stin Vanheule and Paul Verhaege, who distinguish between three phases of Lacanian thinking, come to the conclusion that "Lacan qualifies [adult] humans as agents who actively identify with elements from others by considering others as mirrors of themselves. Consequently, the experience of subjective identity is fundamentally alienated, inevitably constituted by alien elements derived from the other" (2009: 402).

In other words, subjectivity emerges and is gained only at the price of recognition of being separate and different from the other, which is the exact meaning of what Lacan calls alienation and lack. In Chekhov's story, the lawyer decides to look at himself in the mirror that there is no other in it, and

as mentioned above, his true subjectivity had been acquired at the expense of observing himself apart and far away from other members of the society. His true other was the books he had been reading all these years and he has been fantasizing himself to be in direct real contact with them. In the letter found by the banker towards the end of the story, the lawyer noted:

For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books, I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women ... Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the stormclouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God ... In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms. (Chekhov 1889: 6-7)

The lawyer discovered his true self in the others which are the books he made no affinity with when he was outside of the cell. Accepting the lack that the other holds, he gained a subjectivity that was not complete but enough to lead him to his knowledge of the self.

Lacan's subject is an aftermath of language, but an aftermath that remains external to, and not reducible to, language. Language is transformed to the subject through the *Other* and the lawyer's other were the books he was reading and finding the meaning of his life in them. Here, it is worthwhile to draw a distinction between Lacan's idea of the *other* spelled with small letter 'o' and the *Other* with a capital 'O'. The *other* is used "to refer to the other . . . of the imaginary dyad" (1977: 568), in that, it refers to the image the subject identifies with, and aspires towards. This small other can be other human beings that the lawyer knew himself with all the years before imprisonment. The concept of the *Other*, however, is much more complex: "The most important usages of the Other are," according to Moi, "those in which the Other represents language, the site of the signifier, the Symbolic Order or any third party in a triangular structure" (Lacan 1988: 98). Broadly speaking, it can be asserted that the mother plays the role of the *other* in mother-child relation in the imaginary phase with whom the child identifies and feels

complete satisfaction since it (mis)recognizes her as its ideal, the first and foremost cause of unification and enjoyment. While this *Other* is a third party, anyone or anything outside the dual mother-child relation, which thrusts the child into the symbolic order, reveals the world of differentiation and separation to the child, inculcates the norms necessary for living, and being accepted to continue living, in the society the child would and has to live, and thereby, much to its chagrin, confronts it with the ruthless fact that there is and will be no complete unification and enjoyment and that whatever he experienced as satisfaction out of being with its mother had been illusion and deception. However, to compensate for laying bare this fact and leaving the subject with a permanent and ever-elusive satisfaction, the symbolic offers numerous substitutes and promises that they will bring joy, comfort and satisfaction to the subject. That would be neither the piano and nor the people, but the lawyer's books.

The child enters into the imaginary order as soon as it develops the capability of identification (Mellard 1991: 59). Mellard quotes Anika Lemaire who explains that according to Lacan the core of the imaginary is a dual relationship, a duplicate in the mirror, a sudden encounter between consciousness and its Other turning into each other and fade into the reflections (16). The imaginary, thus, is an "essentially narcissistic space" (Williams 1995: 59), where the child misrecognizes everyone and everything as an image of itself whereby it experiences unity, unity in its existence and oneness with its world, especially with its mother. Nonetheless, the fact is that the child can differentiate itself, as *I*, from the other, but is unable to distinguish the other from the Other, that is, the mother as its ideal and the mother as a separate being in the outer world. Lacan himself remarks that the imaginary order "is particularly satisfying for the subject, connoted in psycho-analytic experience by the term narcissism" (1988: 74). The development of the subject begins only with the entry into the imaginary world. Now, the child has the first conception of an *I*, but it will experience subjectivity, that is, a sense of identity only when it enters into the symbolic order. This sense of *I* has not yet taken on autonomy, that is, the sense of being a separate *being* from the others. So, it is still bereft of subjectivity. This gradual process happened to both the banker and the lawyer as the years passed, the lawyer would find his subjectivity and his *I* in the books and languages he sinks himself in. They were apart from the real world and the banker comes to the gradual recognition that money is not everything in the world, that human emancipation speaks first. The lawyer was like a mirror for the banker who beholds his own image in it although he couldn't accept

the consequences. Yet at the end the lawyer was more successful in finding his true self apart from the others he desired all through his life.

The child enters the symbolic with the oedipal crisis (Mellard 1991: 16). In doing so, the child must be capable of symbolization. The acquisition of symbolization is bequeathed to the child with language acquisition. Language holds a pivotal role in Lacanian theory, especially when it comes to the unconscious, which, according to Lacan, is structured like a language. As Lacan famously puts it in “The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious”, what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language” (2008: 187). Lacan’s conceptions of language are heavily influenced by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the forerunner of structuralism and first to discuss the arbitrariness of the sign. However, while Saussure held that the sign (signifier) is subordinated to the concept (signified), Lacan inverts the relationship and puts the signifier (S) over the signified (s) and draws a fraction between the two (189). This idea of language has been stressed upon in “The Bet” as the lawyer claims that now that he knows different languages, he indeed knows the world better as he states in his first letter:

My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake, I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them! The prisoner's desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden ... (Chekhov 1889: 4)

By acquiring the knowledge of different languages, the lawyer endeavored to manifest his unconscious whether through knowledge or his letters to the banker. In the discussion of the lawyer’s fragmented sense of self, it is interesting to note that even his job– distinguishing the authenticity and fallacy of something – signals pondering which, in this case, leads to split. Hence, he has the schism already in his profession (D’hoker 2004: 224). The lawyer is working on the intricate problem of finding his real self. As this essay will show, he does not go ahead vigorously and effectively, and instead of solving the problem he is rather making it worse, which gives the choice of his job an ironic touch.

Naturally the lawyer’s situation gets worse rather than better. Brendan McNamee explicates that “[s]elf-obsession goes hand in hand with self-

division: a self looking, a self being looked at" (2005: 76). With this, he states nearly the same as Lacan, who claims that "I am not, wherever I am the plaything of my thought" (1977: 200). What McNamee means is that the one who is pondering over himself holds the passive and active role at the same time, and thus the one who is looking at himself is inevitably fragmented. The only possible solution is to resist looking at or thinking about oneself, "[t]he disappearance of the 'I', or better say, the disappearance of the 'I' looking at the 'I', is the dissolving of self-division" (1988: 77). On the contrary, looking at and pondering over himself is exactly what Chekhov's character does. As Izarra puts it, the lawyer's main occupation is searching through his inner self to illustrate the complicatedness of the human subject, and how reason leads to chains of causes and effects" (2006: 182-83). The lawyer, in the first five years, orders neither wine nor tobacco. Instead, he asks voraciously for "novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on" (Chekhov 1889: 6). In "The Bet", the lawyer thinks endlessly about himself during his incarnation, and thus it is not surprising that he cannot solve his problems of self-division and – consequently – of alienation. It should not go unsaid that the lawyer, by formulating his thoughts about himself, is actively creating his identity, or better say, shattering the constructed identity by language.

The lawyer acquires a *split* personality since he has already detected the hallucinatory nature of social ideologies and whatever they offer as salvation and bliss. This is reflected in his letter to the banker in which he says: "I despise your books, despise all worldly blessings and wisdom. Everything is void, frail, visionary and delusive as a mirage" (6). This letter holds many ideas about the subject, the symbolic and its ramifications of the subject as well as their interaction. Accordingly, the subject is obedient and law-abiding as long as he is constantly subjected to, and under the surveillance of, social ideologies due mainly to two reasons. Firstly, in constant interaction with the society, the subject is always bombarded with the values and doctrines established by social rules and he is made to erroneously take them for bliss and the true goal of life. And secondly, due to this ongoing and unending contact with social rules, the subject is robbed of his thinking. In other words, these rules leave no room for the subject to think, because the subject is highly liable to question their rectitude, as this is the case with the lawyer. Hence, the probability that someone might fall apart grows when (s)he enters the symbolic stage. As a result, when the unconscious comes into existence we are exposed to fragmentation. Given this situation, we can reach the conclusion that we have to restrict ourselves under the yoke of the symbolic,

if we want to experience to be real people since it is only under its influence that the subject is able to, however fallaciously, assume an integrated, whole identity.

However, the banker has long steeped in the labyrinth of the symbolic which is social ideologies. There are a number of instances in which the lawyer distinguishes the fake nature of these ideologies and consequently becomes profoundly a non-believer of the authenticity of these rules, on the one hand, and comes to realize that he has been fooled by these ideologies hitherto. That is why he expresses his unbridled abhorrence to the society, its conventions and its allegedly foremost dominance of human over beast: as the lawyer, in the ending parts of his letter, points clearly out this aversion and writes “and I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage” (7). Social rules have always indoctrinated him to believe that complying with these rules, firstly, is tantamount to attaining bliss and salvation and, secondly, is the prerequisite of being considered a normal member of the society and transgressing them at any level of severity and under any pretext will not be tolerated and deserves punishment. As a result, the perpetrator is doomed to become a spurned member of the society. Moreover, social ideologies indoctrinate the subject not to question their reliability and authenticity, instead the only thing they require the subject to do is to obey them blindly. So, these rules create a fallacious aura of mystery and holiness around themselves and make the subject give his full confidence and consequently his full allegiance to them.

The character of the lawyer reveals that there is no stable, essentially integrated self or at least none we have access to in reality since we have acquired, as Lacan stipulates, our subjectivity at the cost of losing our unity with the outer world and fragmented from it, and further, from ourselves. The novel proposes that identity is something created through the symbolic which is inaugurated by language acquisition, so it is something unstable and highly capricious. The lawyer creates his identity both in immersing himself in books and also in musing over his relationship with language and the influences it has exerted on him. At the end, of course, it is the reader who creates the lawyer’s identity. If we accept the idea that identity comes into existence through language, then inevitably we must consider identity changeable. Human’s identity is subject to the play of differences. Nevertheless, the lawyer is obsessed with looking for a real self and this obsession is the direct result of overthinking about the authenticity of the doctrines he has acquired through language, but his search only leads him to

new and deeper experiences of fragmentation and alienation. His search to find his supposed integrated self cannot be successful, since a self that is constructed through language by its very nature has already shattered and disjointed and is always elusive.

If we understand the changeability of identity as an expression of postmodernity – which suggests itself, having introduced Lacan's subversion of signified-signifier relation – then the lawyer illustrates that not accepting postmodern reality with its fast changes makes it even more difficult to cope with the situation. However, the lawyer also illustrates human longing for authenticity and stability. This is the last dilemma this essay points out. The lawyer has shown us the way out of this spiral and its ramifications. Thus, if we want to be happy with the situation, we have to eschew pondering over the authenticity of social ideologies.

The lawyer's confusion about, and increasing disbelief in, his self affects his relationships with other people and mars his appreciation of his authentic and autonomous subjectivity. In the same way as he cannot define his self, he cannot rationalize his relations to other people. As a result, he was pleased with his distance from the society since this action serves as a contrast and as a source of identification, a raw material for an ideal ego he was looking for in his interaction with other people. In so doing, he sees through the Other, the social ideologies, with which he, as a member of the society, has brought up and which has taught him how to think, see, feel, and even how to live. This Other, the lawyer comes to understand, is nothing short of some sets of rules and regulations established by human, precisely speaking the rulers, to be able to control the acts and thoughts of the society so as to rule over them. Thus, social ideologies, the lawyer perceives, are not the true and authentic doctrines to bring about salvation to human being, but simply, the tools of restricting people's thoughts. They are after taking their own advantages most. Accordingly, the lawyer loses his confidence in this Other and identifies most with ghosts, beings who simultaneously belong to two different worlds and still to none of them. The lawyer shares the mirage's elusiveness and he experiences situations where he is the signifier and signified at the same time, just like a mirage. Considering himself closer to the ghosts than to human Others, the lawyer is still influenced by other people because it was through the passage of the Other, the symbolic, that he entered into the world of differentiation and attained his subjectivity. Therefore, keeping himself away from the 'Other' leads to a new beginning in the lawyer's life. Nonetheless, there are no true beginnings for the lawyer. He constantly goes on to adapt a new role to play, which again leads to

fragmentation and alienation and thus to the next level in a spiral that leads him away from authentic experiences.

3. Conclusion

The present essay has suggested that the lawyer in Chekhov's "The Bet" illustrates certain of Jacques Lacan's ideas concerning subjectivity and the subject. We have seen that the lawyer's musings lead into a vicious circle. The lawyer is split. His isolation from the society brings about his brooding about himself that in turn exacerbates fragmentation rather than it helps the lawyer to find an answer about his self. Prior to his incarceration by the banker, the lawyer used to pursue a purposeful life and think that this is the outcome of his appreciation of the unanimity of his self. However, during his imprisonment, he comes to realize that he was putting on a masquerade which blurred his vision of the reality and of the true nature of his self. This suggests that there is accumulation at work as well as fragmentation. His different selves, the one during his communication with the society and the one derived from his solitude, are contradictory and he is in high confusion about himself and his self. This confusion and contradiction with his earlier presuppositions about his self and identity exacerbates to his alienation. In order to eschew temptations of alienation and to find authenticity he seeks refuge in indulging himself in his books whose field is extended from philosophy to religion, to art, literature, math, logic and even, to language. Also, he uses his book and his solitude as raw material to create an ideal ego but the outcome is otherwise. Yet, in the long run, reading his books increases his alienation from the society and, above all, from himself and his self. The lawyer cannot come into contact with his self and experiences that he lacks authenticity and instead he is besieged by and suffers from a shattered subjectivity. He is put in darkness in front of his subjectivity, which is *blurred* and *deformed* by his extreme obsession and involvement with his books.

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EL EPICUREÍSMO DE PÍO BAROJA

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Resumen

Este artículo estudia la filiación epicúrea del novelista español Pío Baroja. En la primera sección, se analiza su visión pesimista de la vida, rastreando esta actitud en su tesis doctoral sobre el dolor y en las influencias del irracionalismo de A. Schopenhauer y del nihilismo de F. Nietzsche en su pensamiento. A continuación, se comenta una autodefinición incluida en su ensayo biográfico *Juventud, egolatría* (1917), titulada “*Epicuri de grege porcum*”, donde el escritor expone su afinidad personal e intelectual con el epicureísmo. Una crítica negativa a sus primeras novelas, motivada por su anticlericalismo, pudo ser el principal detonante de esta definición de sí mismo como epicúreo. Se explica brevemente, a continuación, la tradición y las razones de la expresión horaciana *Epicuri de grege porcum* como crítica infundada y juego irónico de palabras. Luego se examinan los principios epicúreos presentes en las novelas de Baroja a través del análisis de dos relatos (“La vida de los átomos” y “Las coles del cementerio”) incluidos en su primera obra, *Vidas sombrías* (1900). Probablemente para estos cuentos tomó inspiración en Lucrecio o en la literatura académica y filosófica que trataba sobre el materialismo. Se concluye que Pío Baroja, presentándose como epicúreo, mostraba un autorretrato sincero de su ideal de vida.

Palabras clave: Pío Baroja, epicureísmo, *De rerum natura*, *Epicuri de grege porcum*, *Vidas sombrías*.

THE EPICUREANISM OF PÍO BAROJA

Abstract

This article studies the Epicurean affiliation of the Spanish novelist Pío Baroja. In a first section, his pessimistic view of life is examined by tracing this life attitude in his medical Dissertation about the pain. The influence of A. Schopenhauer's irrationalism and from F. Nietzsche's nihilism on his dissertation will be studied. Then, the writer's self-definition, included with the title of "*Epicuri de grege porcum*" in his biographical essay *Juventud, egolatría* (1917), will be considered: in this essay, the novelist expresses his personal and intellectual affinity with Epicureanism. A negative review on his first novels, because of his anticlericalism, may have been the main trigger of this Epicurean lifestyle self-assertion. The tradition and reasons for the Horatian expression *Epicuri de grege porcum* as an unmotivated disqualification of Epicurus and an ironic pun is also examined. Afterwards, some Epicurean principles present in two passages ("La vida de los átomos" and "Las coles del cementerio") of his first novel, *Vidas sombrías* (1900), are analyzed. These narrations were probably inspired by Lucretius or by some scholarly and philosophical essays engaged to Materialism. Pío Baroja wrote a sincere and reliable self-portrait of his life ideal.

Keywords: Pío Baroja, Epicureanism, *De rerum natura*, *Epicuri de grege porcum*, *Vidas sombrías*.

EL EPICUREÍSMO DE PÍO BAROJA*

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1. El pesimismo de Pío Baroja

Pío Baroja (1872-1956) nació en San Sebastián en el seno de una familia burguesa. Su padre, un ingeniero de minas de talante liberal, fue escritor aficionado. En 1887 comenzó en Madrid la carrera de Medicina y a los 21 años defendió su tesis doctoral, titulada *El dolor. Estudio de psicofísica* (1893), ante un tribunal en el que estaba Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934)¹.

Tras ejercer como médico poco más de un año (1894-1895), abandonó la práctica médica para regentar en Madrid la panadería “Viena Capellanes” de su tía Juana Nessi. Pero no permaneció mucho en el oficio y probó fortuna con la especulación bursátil. Hacia 1902, insatisfecho también con el negocio de la bolsa, comenzó a dedicarse profesionalmente a la literatura, entrando entonces en contacto con algunos escritores, como Valle Inclán (1866-1936) Azorín (1873-1967) o Ramiro de Maeztu (1876-1936), que luego conformarían la denominada “Generación del 98”.

Era huraño y poco sociable, pero también acogedor y entrañable, según testimonio de Julián Marías (1998)². Su sobrino, el antropólogo Julio Caro

* Agradezco a Carmen Caro Jauregualzo su amabilidad al facilitarme los datos bibliográficos relativos a las ediciones de Epicuro, del *De rerum natura* y de las *Vidas y sentencias de filósofos ilustres* de Diógenes Laercio que se conservan en la biblioteca familiar de los Baroja en Itzea. Agradezco también a los revisores y a la redacción de *Littera Aperta* sus correcciones y sugerencias críticas.

¹ De ella dice Baroja (1982: II,321) en su autobiografía lo siguiente: “Esta tesis no valía gran cosa. Se titulaba el *Dolor*, y no tenía nada absolutamente de original [...] Evidentemente no habían leído (*sc.* los miembros del tribunal) mi tesis, y tampoco valía la pena”.

² El filósofo Julián Marías (1914-2005) conoció personalmente al escritor. Impartió una conferencia (1998) sobre Baroja en el Instituto de España, dentro del curso “Antepasados vivos” (1998-1999). Su carácter un tanto huraño, sobre todo en su juventud, pudo tener su origen en algunas experiencias vitales que le causaron honda impresión y amargura (Mainer 2021). Siendo niño, asistió a un ajusticiamiento público en Pamplona que le horrorizó (Baroja 1982: II 151-52). Y, de adulto, su hermano mayor, Darío, murió de tuberculosis. Al primer suceso parece aludir en su tesis (1896: 8): “El hombre normal halla un placer en la audición de una página musical inspirada, el que tiene una hiperestesia del oído encuentra un dolor [...] En el mundo psíquico se observan las mismas diferencias, para algunos ver matar á un

Baroja (1914-1995), en una entrevista concedida en 1976 al programa “A fondo” de Televisión Española, reconocía que no cultivaba la vida social. Prefería el retiro en su mesa de escritor. Pero recordaba que no siempre fue así. De joven llevó una intensa vida social en tertulias, con editores, con otros escritores. Pero a partir de los cuarenta y tantos cambió y, aunque mantenía una tertulia en su casa de Itzea (Vera de Bidasoa, Navarra) y, cuando estaba en Madrid, otra en su casa de la calle Ruiz de Alarcón, se centró más en su mundo, abandonando el trato social y el arte de figurar.

Su obra revela un acendrado inconformismo con la sociedad española de su tiempo y transmite, en consecuencia, una visión ácida y lamentable de la existencia humana.

Baroja fue, como Gregorio Marañón (1887-1960), un médico humanista. Pero, al contrario de Marañón, arrinconó su carrera por su vocación literaria. Fue un escritor de sólida formación científica, que, tras sus estudios académicos, fue colmando sus inquietudes filosóficas. Ya en su tesis, editada en 1896, cuyo tema, “el dolor”, parecía un claro y temprano anuncio de su preocupación por el sufrimiento humano (Saz 2007: 77), citaba el aforismo del *Ecclesiastes* I 18: *et qui addit scientiam, addit et laborem*, y aludía a pensadores pesimistas, como A. Schopenhauer (1788-1860):

Es un prejuicio inexacto y no una realidad, el suponer que el fondo de nuestra vida afectiva, la resultante del acto de vivir, es el placer como creen los optimistas; ó el dolor como afirman Schopenhauer, Hartman y los demás pesimistas que los siguen (Baroja 1896: 6).

La tesis compaginaba ocasionalmente fisiología y psicología para indagar en las razones, gradaciones y diferencias del dolor espiritual o moral en los individuos:

Entre el dolor y la inteligencia, hay una relación que Richet explica de esta manera: “El dolor es una función intelectual tanto más perfecta, cuanto más desarrollada está la inteligencia” (Baroja 1896: 16).

La aserción de Richet puede muy bien ser cierta respecto al dolor moral y en los individuos sanos; así la sensibilidad moral aumenta en razón directa de la inteligencia. El autor del *Ecclesiastes* entre los hebreos, y Sakia Muni en la India, tenían capacidad inmensa para experimentar el dolor, y entre los modernos Byron, Leopardi, Heine, han vivido mas atormentados que los

caballo en una plaza, ó á un hombre en un patíbulo, constituye un placer; para otros es un dolor intenso. Efectivamente estas manifestaciones morbosas, de hombres que se separan del tipo normal, se consideran como síntomas de una causa única: la degeneración”.

individuos normales, por sentir mejor que estos las mas pequeñas aflicciones de espíritu, porqué lo que para otros eran accidentes sin importancia de la vida, para ellos eran amarguras de una realidad llena de impurezas (Baroja 1896: 17-18)³.

Entre los filósofos que más leyó⁴, ya en Madrid, primero, como empresario y, luego, como literato, estuvieron los alemanes E. Kant (1724-1804)⁵, A. Schopenhauer (1788-1860) y F. Nietzsche (1844-1900)⁶. Estos dos últimos le influyeron mucho, acentuando su visión pesimista de la existencia. Pensaba, como Schopenhauer, que la vida carecía de sentido y no albergaba gran confianza en el hombre⁷. Era escéptico sobre las promesas de la religión⁸ y, de hecho, fue enterrado por deseo expreso en el cementerio civil de Madrid, mostrando así evidencias de su concepción nihilista de la vida.

2. Una autobiografía singular: *Juventud, egolatría*

En 1917 publicaba una peculiar autobiografía, *Juventud, egolatría*. En tiempos de guerra, cuando el mundo giraba en torno a la conflagración,

³ Estos párrafos pueden tener cierto valor autobiográfico, si los comparamos con estos que escribe Baroja (1975: 10-11) en *La sensualidad pervertida*: “Yo creo tener una sensibilidad más aguzada que el hombre corriente y normal. No sé si la palabra sensibilidad es la más adecuada para mi caso; sensibilidad parece indicar una facultad de impresionarme exclusivamente psíquica; mi facultad de impresión es tan psíquica como sensorial”.

⁴ En su tesis, menciona también a Descartes (1896: 7), a Spinoza (7) y a Goethe (14-15). Baroja había leído las *Vidas de los filósofos* de Diógenes Laercio traducidas, interesándose, sobre todo, por los planteamientos científicos de los presocráticos Heráclito y Protágoras. En cambio, recriminaba a Sócrates y Platón su idealismo, pues se olvidaban de resolver los enigmas de la naturaleza (Iglesias 1963: 28).

⁵ En *Juventud, egolatría* dedica este elogio al filósofo alemán: “Matanzas de miles y de cientos de miles de hombres las ha habido siempre, la *Crítica de la Razón pura* no se ha escrito más que una vez” (Baroja 1917: 13).

⁶ Entre los planteamientos doctrinales de Schopenhauer hay un sustrato epicúreo relevante, puesto de manifiesto por Guyau (1878) y Masson (1884: 130-31). Para el pensador alemán, el mundo es fenoménico y la razón no puede alcanzar a Dios. La lectura de Schopenhauer causó en el joven Nietzsche una honda impresión durante su época de estudiante en Leipzig (ca. 1865). Y este, a su vez, en Baroja. De hecho, uno de sus cuentos se titula “*Nihil*”. Sobre el influjo de Schopenhauer y Nietzsche en Baroja, pueden leerse Saz (2007: 53-76), Abad Nebot (1996) y García Gual (2011: 41-52).

⁷ Es famosa su frase: “Por instinto y por experiencia, creo que el hombre es un animal dañino, envidioso, cruel, péfido, lleno de malas pasiones, sobre todo de egoísmo y vanidades” (Baroja 1982: I 45).

⁸ Sobre la actitud de Baroja hacia la religión ha escrito Bretz (1979a: 171-87).

afirmaba en el prólogo Pío Baroja:

Los libros de literatura se leerán igual que antes. Es más extraordinario que el hombre haya inventado *La Odisea*, el *Don Quijote* o el *Hamlet*, que no el que sepa producir millones de heridos, de muertos y de prisioneros. (Baroja 1917: 12)

Explicaba allí las razones que le impulsaron a escribir su biografía en estos términos:

Me habían encargado escribir una autobiografía de diez o quince páginas . . . mis cuartillas han aumentado y engordado, como el perro de Fausto, y han dado origen a esta obra . . . Para mí esta es una obra de higiene. (Baroja 1917: 14-15)

Y, al final, comentaba la finalidad y el grado de sinceridad de su obra como sigue:

. . . yo, en este respecto (*sc.* “de la ejemplaridad en la vida”), no he tenido una vida ejemplar; no he llevado una vida pedagógica que sirva de modelo ni una vida antipedagógica que sirva de contramodelo; tampoco tengo un puñado de verdades en el hueco de la mano para esparcir las a todos los vientos. Entonces ¿para qué hablo? . . .

Muchas veces, al dueño de una casa, se le suele preguntar:

— En este cuartucho cerrado ¿tiene usted algo?

— No; nada más que trastos viejos — contesta él.

Un día el amo de la casa entra en el cuartucho y se encuentra con una porción de cosas inesperadas, cubiertas de polvo, que va sacando fuera y que generalmente no sirven para nada. Es lo que he hecho yo.

Estas cuartillas son como una exudación espontánea. ¿Sinceras? ¿Absolutamente sinceras? No es muy probable. Instintivamente, cuando se pone uno delante de un fotógrafo, finge y compone el rostro; cuando habla uno de sí mismo, finge también.

En un trabajo así corto, el autor puede jugar con la máscara y con la expresión. En toda la obra entera, que cuando vale algo es una autobiografía larga, el disimulo es imposible, porque allí donde menos lo ha querido el hombre que escribe, se ha revelado⁹. (Baroja 1917: 18-19)

La obra, a medio camino entre el género biográfico y ensayístico, aporta algunas claves de la personalidad y pensamiento del escritor vasco que han pasado tal vez desapercibidas. Bretz (1979: 430) consideraba que, a pesar del escepticismo manifiesto por el propio Baroja sobre la “absoluta sinceridad”

⁹ Este sería el caso de su obra *Desde la vuelta del camino: memorias* (1982).

de sus opiniones, el escritor se expresaba “con absoluta franqueza”. Saz (2007: 100), en cambio, opina que *Juventud, egolatría* es un ensayo y que este género, que desde Montaigne se considera cercano a la autobiografía, no tendría para Baroja mayor valor autobiográfico que cualquier otro texto suyo. De ahí la afirmación final del autor en su prólogo de que “el disimulo es imposible” (Baroja 917: 19) en la obra completa de un autor. Por tanto, concluye Saz, es “probable que se encuentre mejor al verdadero Baroja en su enorme producción novelística” (Saz 2007: 100).

Entendemos, en cualquier supuesto, que Baroja se sincera, al menos, en parte y deja, como en toda su obra, vislumbrar sus gustos, preferencias, reticencias y fobias, máxime cuando jugó siempre la carta de la sinceridad, según Julián Marías (1998).

En la parte inicial de la obra, “Nociones centrales” (1917: 23-49), Baroja viene a desvelar claves vitales, filosóficas y estéticas esenciales de su producción literaria. De hecho, la sección precede a la segunda, titulada “Yo, escritor” (1917: 53-91). En la noción novena, bajo el título “*Epicuri de grege porcum*”, escribe este encomio y adhesión hacia el “viejo filósofo” Epicuro:

Yo también soy un puerco de la piara de Epicuro: yo también tengo entusiasmo por el viejo filósofo, que conversaba con sus discípulos en su huerto. La misma invectiva de Horacio, al alejarse de los epicúreos (*Epicuri de grege porcum*), está llena de gracia.

Todos los nobles espíritus han cantado al viejo Epicuro. ¡Oh Epicuro, honor de la Grecia!, dice Lucrecio en el libro tercero de su poema¹⁰.

Yo he querido vengar a Epicuro, a este filósofo verdaderamente sagrado, a este genio divino..., afirma Luciano en su *Alejandro o el falso profeta*¹¹.

Lange, en su *Historia del materialismo*, pone a Epicuro como un discípulo y un imitador de Demócrito¹².

No soy yo hombre de bastante cultura clásica para tener una idea exacta del valor de Epicuro en la filosofía. Todos mis conocimientos acerca de éste y de

¹⁰ Es traducción de Lucr. I 3: *o Graiae gentis decus*.

¹¹ Baraibar (1889: 370) aduce la cita. Fue seguramente la traducción que leyó Baroja. Recuerda García Gual (2002: 253), en su esencial monografía, una anécdota de esta obra de Luciano que evidencia bien la malquerencia de embaucadores y milagrosos hacia los epicúreos, pues estos denunciaban sus mentiras: “Una cosa muy ridícula hizo Alejandro: encontró las *Máximas Capitales*, de Epicuro, el más hermoso, según creo, de los libros que contiene en resumen las sabias sentencias de aquel gran hombre, lo llevó al medio del ágora y lo quemó sobre palos de higuera, como si quemara al propio filósofo, y arrojó las cenizas al mar, y además dijo este oráculo: ‘Danzar mando en el fuego las Sentencias del viejo ciego’”.

¹² Lange (1877: I 115), en efecto, así lo afirma. Esta relación era conocida ya en la Antigüedad (Usener 1887: 173-75, *frags.* 232-34).

los antiguos filósofos, vienen del libro de Diógenes Laercio¹³.

De Epicuro he leído el magnífico artículo de Bayle en su *Diccionario histórico-crítico*¹⁴ y el libro de Gassendi, *De vita et moribus Epicuri*¹⁵. Con este bagaje soy de los discípulos del maestro.

Podrán decirme los sabios que yo no tengo derecho a llamarme discípulo de Epicuro, pero cuando pienso en mí me viene espontáneamente a la imaginación el título grotesco que Horacio dio a los epicúreos en sus *Epístolas*, título grotesco que a mí casi me parece un honor: cerdo de la pira de Epicuro (*Epicuri de grege porcum*). (Baroja 1917: 35-36)

Los dieciséis capítulos de “Nociones centrales” están distribuidos como en tres apartados que podríamos llamar “físico” (1-9), “ético” (10-11) y “estético” (12-16). Los nueve primeros exponen, en gran medida, las razones por las que el materialismo es la mejor filosofía en opinión de Pío Baroja; los dos siguientes se centran en la naturaleza de la maldad humana y los restantes prestan atención, sobre todo, a la música como arte culto, inofensivo y universal. Y resulta relevante que “*Epicuri de grege porcum*” sea el que cierre, a modo de culmen, todo el apartado filosófico o físico.

Hay en la noción inicial, “El hombre malo de Itzea”¹⁶ algunas pistas, cuando Baroja escribe lo siguiente:

quizá alguno (*sc.* el cura, la sacristana o la presidenta de las Hijas de María) había leído un librito del padre Ladrón de Guevara, titulado *Novelistas buenos y malos*, que se repartió en el pueblo el mismo día que yo llegué a él y que dice que yo soy impío, cleróforo y deshonesto. Viniera de un conducto o de

¹³ Baroja sentía gran aprecio por esta obra, al punto que se hizo con una edición incunable de 1485 (Brescia: Imp. Iacobum Britannicum). Contaba además con otra renacentista también en latín (Lyon, 1559), una bilingüe grecolatina (Leipzig: Ed. Ioannis Pauli Krausii, 1759) y la traducción española de Josef Ortiz y Sanz (Madrid: Ed. Imprenta Real, 1792).

¹⁴ Bayle (1740: 364-376) escribió, como afirma el escritor donostiarra, un artículo muy denso y lleno de notas eruditas. Se dice que el cardenal Melchor de Polignac (1661-1741) escribió su *Anti-Lucretius* (1747), cuando Pierre Bayle (1646-1707) se burló de él citando a Lucrecio (Fusil 1917: 11).

¹⁵ Esta obra de Gassendi (1656) ayudó mucho a la rehabilitación ética de Epicuro durante los siglos XVII y XVIII. Para Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), la vida de Epicuro, aunque gentil, fue la propia de un buen cristiano que no pudo ver la luz de Cristo, pero que alcanzó parte de la verdad gracias a sus postulados físicos. Gassendi influyó mucho también en los *novatores* españoles, como demostró Quiroz Martínez (1949) en su monografía sobre los inicios de la filosofía moderna en España.

¹⁶ Pío Baroja compró la casa palaciega “Itzea” en 1912, cuando era ya un escritor de éxito, a las afueras de Vera de Bidasoa. Tenía la ilusión de que fuera la residencia familiar veraniega y un reflejo de su propia persona y de sus aficiones (Mainer 2021).

otro, el caso, para mí importante, fué que en Itzea había un hombre malo, y ese hombre malo era yo. (Baroja 1917: 24)

El jesuita Pablo Ladrón de Guevara (1861-1935) publicó en 1910 la obra *Novelistas malos y buenos juzgados en orden de naciones*, una guía literaria para leer novelas conforme a la moral católica. En ella hacía una crítica muy dura a Baroja, que lo ponía en la picota ante los sectores más extremados. Decía así en su segunda edición aumentada:

BAROJA, PÍO. Contemporáneo. No le cuadra el nombre de Pío, sino el de impío, clerófobo, deshonesto. Novelas: *El Mayorazgo de Labraz*. En ella encontramos razón de sobra para los lindos apelativos con que hemos sustituido el suyo, impropio, de *Pío*. Aquí él, lo mira todo con los anteojos de su impiedad y clerofobia.

— *Camino de perfección* (pasión mística), muy mala¹⁷. (Ladrón de Guevara 1911: 55)

En las nociones siguientes Baroja parece emprender una defensa muy personal de su actitud agnóstica y materialista contra quienes tan agriamente lo critican y perjudican. Y así, por ejemplo, en “Dogmatofagia”, afirma:

A mí, cuando me preguntan qué ideas religiosas tengo, digo que soy agnóstico — me gusta ser un poco pedante con los filisteos—; ahora voy a añadir que, además, soy dogmatófago. (Baroja 1917: 27)

En la cuarta, “*Ignoramus, ignorabimus*”, sigue y aclara el porqué de su escepticismo:

Esta posición agnóstica es la más decente que puede tomar una persona. Ya no sólo las ideas religiosas están descompuestas, sino que lo está lo más sólido y lo más indivisible. Ya ¿quién cree en el átomo? ¿Quién cree en el alma como nómada? ¿Quién cree en la certidumbre de los sentidos?

El átomo, la unidad del alma y de la conciencia, la certidumbre de conocer; todo es sospechoso hoy. *Ignoramus, ignorabimus*. (Baroja 1917: 28-29)

Dado que las verdades que se han considerados absolutas están en duda, la actitud incrédula hacia los dogmas, ya científicos o religiosos, es la más adecuada. Ahora bien, Pío Baroja reconoce que el materialismo ha sido capaz de hacer avanzar la ciencia al basarse en un método experimental, ajeno a intereses teológicos. De ahí que, en la quinta noción, “Sin embargo, nos

¹⁷ Baroja había publicado en *Camino de perfección: pasión mística* en 1902 y *El mayorazgo de Labraz* en 1903.

Nunc ratio nulla est restandi, nulla facultas, 110
aeternas quoniam poenas in morte timendum.

En los siguientes capítulos, “Archi-europeo” (Baroja 1917: 32-33) y “Dionysiaco o apolíneo” (Baroja 1917: 34), Baroja describe más su personalidad que su pensamiento. En el primero afirma sentirse “muy europeo” y, en el segundo, que ya no se deja arrastrar ni por la irracionalidad, ni por el entusiasmo como en su juventud. Encuentra ahora, más calmado de espíritu, armonía en la razón. Baroja se sirve, como patrón de medida, de los conceptos opuestos de “dionisiaco” y “apolíneo” que Nietzsche acuñó para definir dos tipos de vida antitéticos: el desenfrenado, entregado a las pasiones, y el racional, comedido por la sensatez. Baroja termina afirmando que “en lo uno y en lo otro hay gran atractivo” (Baroja 1917: 34).

Estas nociones preceden al capítulo que nos ocupa, “*Epicuri de grege porcum*”, en el que, en nuestra opinión, Baroja se define a sí mismo sincera y coherentemente, dando a entender que el *summum bonum* o equilibrio entre los dos extremos lo encuentra en el epicureísmo antiguo. La ἀταραξία de los epicúreos era, en efecto, el resultado de la satisfacción moderada de las necesidades corporales (dionisiacas, diríamos) y de las anímicas (apolíneas), entendidas las unas y las otras como pasiones o dolores, que el estudio científico de la naturaleza pautó y cura (García Gual 2002: 166-171).

El epicureísmo y el escepticismo, ambas filosofías helenísticas, son las doctrinas más antiguas del materialismo y del agnosticismo que Pío Baroja asume como propios. Tiene una comprensión epicúrea o materialista de la realidad (Física) y escéptica y agnóstica de lo trascendente (Metafísica). No parece extraño este planteamiento en un médico, cuya profesión se fundamenta en la experiencia sensible²¹. Fueron estas filosofías disidentes las que en la Ilustración, tras un proceso que comenzó en el Renacimiento, cortaron el nexo que el platonismo y el aristotelismo mantenían entre física y metafísica, entre el mundo y la divinidad, entre fe y razón.

²¹ La vinculación del epicureísmo con la medicina moderna tiene un antecedente significativo en el manual de P. Zacchia (1584-1659), *Quaestiones Medico-Legales* (1621), que incluye numerosos pasajes de Lucrecio. Zacchia fue el médico de cabecera (*Protomedicus*) del papa Inocencio X (1644-1655). Este manual médico, en tres volúmenes, es considerado el primer tratado de medicina legal moderna. Recordemos también que la segunda traducción portuguesa del *De rerum natura* fue hecha por Antonio José de Lima Leitão (1787-1856), un “doutor em medicina pela escola de Paris” (Gordon 1985: 217-18, n.º. ref. 426).

3. *Epicuri de grege porcum*: razones y fuentes de la expresión

A lo largo de su vida, Epicuro (341-270 a. C.) recibió un sinnúmero de infamias²²: que prostituyó a sus hermanos, que era sodomita, que vomitaba por gula todos los días, que era petulante y otras del mismo estilo (D. L. X 1-5). Para muchos, oponentes de otras escuelas, milagrosos y chuscos gobernantes, los acólitos del Jardín eran –simplificando– gente que no rendía culto a los dioses, que predicaban el retiro de la política y, ante todo, que buscaban la felicidad en los placeres mundanos. El cerdo encarnaba, quizá por excelencia, este comportamiento hedonista en la Antigüedad (Macías y Caracuel 2015: 170-74). Era perezoso, glotón y lujurioso. No tenía otros intereses más sutiles. Sin embargo, a diferencia de Aristipo (435-350 a. C.), que defendía como *summum bonum* la búsqueda del placer inmediato, Epicuro, en realidad, ofrecía una ética mucho más racional y sensata. En su opinión, la felicidad humana nacía de la satisfacción moderada de las necesidades físicas y, sobre todo, de las anímicas, como el miedo a la muerte, a los dioses o las pasiones de gloria y poder, que solo la contemplación y estudio de la naturaleza (Lucr. I 148) pueden colmar.

Así y todo, la primera alusión a Epicuro como cerdo se debe al satírico coetáneo Timón de Fliunte (320-230 a. C.). En dos de sus versos, según noticia transmitida por Diógenes (X 1), le zahería llamándole “el más impudente” (García Gual 2002: 46, n. 3). Mucho después, el erudito y polígrafo Plutarco (*ca.* 50-125), sacerdote de Delfos y auténtico látigo de los epicúreos²³, se mofaba de la felicidad epicúrea en una obrilla burlesca titulada *Grilo*. En ella, Grilo, uno de los compañeros de Ulises, es convertido por Circe en cerdo y se siente tan a gusto con su nueva naturaleza que prefiere mantenerla a recuperar la humana (Usener 1887: LXX-LXXI, *frags.* 456 y 517, y García Gual 2002: 254). Pero la expresión emblemática de esta pulla la alumbró algo antes Horacio (65-8 a. C.) en su *Epistula* I 4, 15-16:

Me pinguem et nitidum bene curata cute uises,
cum ridere uoles Epicuri de grege porcum

La carta dirigida a Albio Tibulo (54-19 a. C.), el poeta elegíaco, es básicamente una invitación de visita, pues Horacio le echa de menos. Si viene, podrá bromear de lo gordo que está, como buen puerco de la secta de Epicuro. Horacio cerraba su epístola así de forma ingeniosa y jocosa. Tibulo,

²² Usener (1887: LXVIII-LXXVI) estudia en las fuentes primarias las acusaciones y ofensas que se vertieron contra los epicúreos.

²³ Escribió muchos tratados polémicos contra los seguidores de la Escuela de Jardín, de los que se han conservado solo tres: *Que no se puede vivir placenteramente según Epicuro*, *Contra Colotes* y *De si está bien dicho lo de “Vive ocultamente”*.

sin ser un adepto declarado del Jardín, denostaba, como ellos, la codicia, el militarismo y, a veces, la vida urbana (Albrecht 1997: 704-5). Horacio, en cambio, simpatizaba más claramente con el epicureísmo, sobre todo, con el adaptado por Filodemo de Gádara (110-35 a. C.) a la mentalidad romana (Siles 2021: 119-20). Por eso, culminó su carta no con una invectiva contra los epicúreos, como parece entender Pío Baroja, sino con una confirmación autoirónica de su pertenencia a “la piara de Epicuro” (Moralejo 2008: 251, n. 142), pues era rechoncho, como se esperaba fuera un epicúreo²⁴.

Esta novena noción de Baroja parece, así pues, una defensa sincera de Epicuro y de sí mismo, en tiempos en los que el irracionalismo y nihilismo de Schopenhauer y Nietzsche, ambos de ascendencia epicúrea, eran objeto de controversias y fuertes críticas. Habría escuchado –¿quién sabe? –, dada su fama de materialista y descreído, algún impropio o comentario malintencionado, de esos tan viejos como Epicuro: de ateo, de materialista, de epicúreo, si no alguno más erudito, como la expresión misma de Horacio o parecida. Pero, como hiciera el Venusino, Baroja hizo del propio impropio su lema de autoafirmación, respondiendo orgulloso a las imputaciones.

4. “La vida de los átomos” y “Las coles del cementerio”, como cuentos materialistas

La presencia del materialismo clásico en la obra de Pío Baroja se manifiesta también en su primera obra, la colección de cuentos titulada *Vidas sombrías* (1900)²⁵, Baroja recrea, al menos en dos ocasiones, premisas epicúreas expuestas por Lucrecio.

Escribe al final de “Las coles del cementerio” el siguiente comentario:

Las coles del amigo de Pachi, que son las coles del cementerio, tienen fama de sabrosas y de muy buen gusto en el mercado del pueblo. Lo que no saben los que las compran es que están alimentándose con la sustancia de sus abuelos. (Baroja 1966: 130)

A Pachi, el sepulturero, los parroquianos lo consideraban un “réprobo”. Pero tenía sus virtudes: era diligente en su trabajo, congeniaba con el médico y tenía encandilados a unos pocos asiduos a la taberna con sus anécdotas y con sus aforismos, dignos de Hipócrates. Al morir Justa, la tabernera, siete de sus hijos quedaron mal atendidos en manos de varios vecinos, persuadidos

²⁴ Un comentario sobre ambos hexámetros y la tradición del término latino *grex* como rebaño y escuela filosófica puede leerse en Mayer (1994: 135-36).

²⁵ En su día, la crítica vio en esta primera obra un anticipo del ideario filosófico y político desplegado después por Baroja en toda su producción (Baquero 1979: 467).

por el boticario, el vicario y el alcalde, quienes despreciaban al enterrador. Un día decidió hacerse cargo de los siete niños y darles una vida digna. Se los llevó a su casa, ubicada dentro del cementerio, y comenzó a cultivar allí hortalizas de forma intensiva.

Baroja utilizó escatológicamente el principio epicúreo de conservación y renovación de la materia que Lucrecio versificó en pasajes como este (I 540-50):

Praeterea nisi materies aeterna fuisset, 540
 antehac ad nihilum penitus res quaeque redissent
 . . .
 at quoniam supra docui nil posse creari
 de nihilo neque quod genitumst ad nil revocari,
 esse inmortali primordia corpore debent, 545
 dissolui quo quaeque supremo tempore possint,
 materies ut subpeditet rebus reparandis.
 Sunt igitur solida primordia simplicitate
 nec ratione queunt alia servata per aevom
 ex infinito iam tempore res reparare. 550

Por su parte, en la “La vida de los átomos” el donostiarra duda de la existencia de los átomos, tras leer “en una obra moderna de Química el desarrollo de la teoría atómica” (Baroja 1966: 142). Imagina entonces que ante él unos átomos forman simulacros caprichosos y parlantes, que intentan refutar sus argumentos²⁶. Los átomos –que, en realidad, son portavoces de la opinión de Baroja– arguyen que el ser humano tiene una constitución material, incluida la del alma. He aquí dos párrafos destacables (Baroja 1966, 145 y 146):

— ¿Conque no existimos, imbécil? –me replicó el átomo fosforescente, con desprecio—. ¡Vosotros los hombres sí que no existís! No sois más que nuestra casa, nos servís para nuestra alimentación, para nuestra vida; nada más (Baroja: 1966, 145).

— ¿Y el alma? –dije yo, recordando que en Psicología, Lógica y Ética había aprendido una porción de martingalas para demostrar su existencia.

— ¡El alma! Pchs! Esté yo en el cerebro de un hombre, y verás inteligencia; que falte este cura, y verás estupidez.

²⁶ Esta fantasía recuerda la teoría de la formación de los simulacros y de las ilusiones ópticas, desarrolladas por Lucrecio en el *De rerum natura* IV 54-215 y IV 353-461, respectivamente.

- Pues ¿quién eres, que te das tanto tono?
- Soy un átomo de fósforo. Mira. (Baroja 1966: 146)

El libro tercero del *De rerum natura* de Lucrecio, dedicado íntegramente a la psicología, desarrolla la tesis de la corporeidad del alma en varios lugares, como este (III 177-180):

Is tibi nunc animus quali sit corpore et unde
constiterit pergam rationem reddere dictis.
principio esse aio persuptilem atque minutis
perquam corporibus factum constare. 80

La doctrina epicúrea cantada por Lucrecio en su *De rerum natura* y explicada en parte por el propio Epicuro en unas pocas cartas pervividas de su vastísima obra, estaba ya diluida, asimilada y desarrollada en multitud de obras técnicas y filosóficas, como la *Historia del materialismo* de F. A. Lange o los tratados de K. Marx (1818-1883). Pero, en España, había sido publicada recientemente la primera traducción del poema lucreciano en 1892 (Madrid: Agustín Avrial), poco antes de *Vidas sombrías* (1900), a cargo del escritor Manuel Rodríguez-Navas (1848-1922)²⁷, y, poco después, en 1896, la segunda, atribuida al “abate” Marchena (1768-1821) por Menéndez Pelayo, su editor (Sevilla: Imp. de E. Rasco). Y Lucrecio fue siempre el referente clásico para los interesados en el materialismo, como parece confirmar este dato que Julio Caro Baroja incluye en su biografía *Los Baroja*, al comentar las ideas de su tío Ricardo Baroja (1871-1953), hermano de Pío:

Mi tío Ricardo tenía poca afición, por no decir ninguna, a la Psicología y a la literatura psicológica. Le gustaban, en cambio, la geometría, la mecánica y las ciencias-físico naturales: acaso más las naturales que las físicas. No poseía fe religiosa, ni le interesaba la religión como a su hermano, aunque fuese desde fuera. Era un discípulo de Lucrecio, con los datos de su época, de su siglo: un darwiniano . . . Era también bastante marxista de teoría, en su interpretación de la Historia . . . Mi tío tenía una concepción mecánica de la

²⁷ La publicación de la versión castellana, ciertamente tardía, se producía gracias al movimiento krausista, al que Rodríguez-Navas pertenecía, que propugnó en España una mayor implantación de la ciencia en la educación. La primera traducción impresa aparece en 1650 (Gordon 1985: 151), en francés, a cargo del abad Michel de Marolles (1600-1681); la primera portuguesa vio la luz en 1850 (Gordon 1985: 217, nº ref. 425), obra de J. D. Machado Ferraz (1774-1861). La española fue de las últimas en Europa occidental.

Naturaleza y era indiferente a los problemas del más allá. Anticlerical en esencia. (Baroja 1972: 82)

Pío Baroja conocía a Lucrecio, pero no sabemos si lo había leído entonces. Es probable que sí²⁸. En cualquier caso, con él se había topado en la abundante literatura intermediaria que había estudiado y manejado, de Medicina, de Química, de Psicología, de Fisiología, del irracionalismo de Schopenhauer y del nihilismo nietzscheano. No era necesario una lectura directa del *De rerum natura* para recrear sus planteamientos materialistas en los cuentos que hemos comentado. En todo caso, Baroja manifiesta un conocimiento notable de los principios físicos del epicureísmo, los cuales tuvieron una incidencia significativa en la cosmovisión y ética barojianas.

4. Conclusión

La sinceridad de la adhesión al epicureísmo de Pío Baroja queda confirmada por el incidente de Itzea, a raíz de la reseña negativa de Ladrón de Guevara a sus primeras novelas; las múltiples referencias bibliográficas, su actitud de retiro y apolítica, así como la filiación epicúrea de las corrientes materialistas de su época, el irracionalismo y el nihilismo, con las que Pío Baroja simpatizó, al punto de impregnar con ellas una parte importante de su novelística. Es muy posible que al leer la biografía del libro décimo de Diógenes Laercio apreciara en la vida de Epicuro cierto parecido con la suya, no solo por las injurias que recibía de la sociedad, sino también porque su filosofía, aunque antigua, era, en realidad, la misma con la que él simpatizaba.

Como novelista de intención social, cuya mirada crítica sobre los males de la sociedad era implacable, Baroja tal vez comprendió que sus novelas podían ser también útiles para solucionar los problemas sociales que veía a su alrededor, de la misma forma que el materialismo y la ciencia habían traído

²⁸ Iglesias (1963: 82, n. 11) afirma que tomó ideas del *De rerum natura* para su novela *El cura de Monleón*, escrita bastante después, en 1936. En la biblioteca familiar de Itzea se conservan doce ediciones de Lucrecio y en varios idiomas. Once son anteriores a la muerte de Pío Baroja en 1956: la edición renacentista comentada de Gifanio, en latín (Amberes, 1565); la edición latina de Th. Creech (Londres, 1695), otra edición con traducción inglesa de Th. Creech (Londres, 1754); la traducción francesa de Panckouke (París, 1768), la edición latina de C. H. Weise (Leipzig, 1833), la traducción francesa de Lagrange (París, 1865), la traducción italiana de A. Marchetti (Milán, 1875), dos traducciones españolas de J. Marchena (Madrid, 1927 y 1946), la edición latina con traducción española de E. Valentí (Barcelona, 1951) y la traducción francesa con texto latino de P. Burney (París, 1953). De Epicuro se conserva la segunda edición (1938) de *Doctrines et maximes* (París: Hermann et Cie) a cargo de Maurice Solovine (1875-1958), amigo íntimo de Albert Einstein (1879-1955).

progreso a la civilización. Pero una cosa es ilustrar la vida cotidiana mojjigata y atrasada con el pesimismo y tristeza que, a él al menos, le transmitía la realidad circundante, y otra distinta es la inclinación íntima del autor, surgida de la reflexión, por una filosofía vitalista y optimista como el epicureísmo²⁹.

No sabemos si don Pío murió sin saber que Horacio, como él, había usado la expresión como autoafirmación de su pertenencia a la grey de Epicuro. Seguramente le habría agradado tenerlo también como compañero.

²⁹ Comentaba Julio Caro Baroja (1976), al final de la entrevista al programa “A fondo”, que la verdad barojiana era la que nacía del individuo, de su reflexión interior, al margen de las distintas verdades, oficiales o religiosas.

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TRANS-MEDIATION OF GENDER IN ELIA KAZAN'S ADAPTATION OF A *STREETCAR* *NAMED DESIRE*

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Abstract

Elia Kazan is among the first directors who adapted Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) for the cinema. Kazan's film adaptation was almost faithful to the original manuscript by sticking to Williams's words and sentences. However, even if one ignores the cultural and historical contexts, the alterations that take place in the process of trans-mediation cannot be disregarded, since the telling mode in the text changes to the showing mode in the media. With this hypothetical basis, the present study aims to detect the possible alterations in the adaptation of the play to examine gender roles in both texts. Using the ideas of Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013), the authors have studied the verbal signs in the play together with the verbal and visual codes in the movie to assess how the film adaptation has incorporated the ideas of femininity, which are the main concerns of the play, too. The results of the study suggest that the alterations from the literary text to film have contributed to the development of female identity.

Keywords: Gender, Trans-mediation, Literary Adaptations, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Elia Kazan.

TRANSMEDIACIÓN DE GÉNERO EN LA ADAPTACIÓN DE ELIA KAZAN DE *UN TRANVÍA LLAMADO DESEO*

Resumen

Elia Kazan se encuentra entre los primeros directores que adaptaron el drama *Un Tranvía Llamado Deseo* (1951) de Tennessee Williams para el cine. La adaptación cinematográfica de Kazan es bastante fiel al libreto original, al seguir de cerca las palabras e ideas de Williams. Sin embargo, incluso si uno ignora los contextos culturales e históricos, no se pueden soslayar las alteraciones que suceden en el proceso de mediación, donde el modo de narración en el texto cambia al modo de visualización en el medio audiovisual. A partir de esta hipótesis, este estudio tiene como objetivo detectar las posibles alteraciones en la adaptación de la obra, para examinar los roles de género en ambos textos. Utilizando las ideas de Linda Hutcheon en *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013), los autores han estudiado los signos verbales en la obra frente a los códigos verbales y visuales en la película para examinar cómo la adaptación cinematográfica ha incorporado las ideas de feminidad, que constituyen, asimismo, las principales preocupaciones de la obra original. Los resultados del estudio sugieren que los cambios operados del drama a la película contribuyen a la construcción de la identidad femenina.

Palabras clave: Género, Transmediación, Adaptaciones literarias, *Un Tranvía Llamado Deseo*, Elia Kazan.

TRANS-MEDIATION OF GENDER IN ELIA KAZAN'S ADAPTATION OF *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

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1. Introduction

In 1951, Elia Kazan worked hand-in-hand with Tennessee Williams to adapt the latter's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), into a movie. Kazan was determined to be as faithful as possible to the play. Although Oliver Saul had intended to write the script for the movie, he "mostly followed the dramatist's version" (Tüttelmann 2006: 3). As a result, the movie appeared to be very similar to the play. Nonetheless, the play's "notoriety and the censorship problems" made Hollywood producers doubtful about adapting it (Davison 2009: 61), and a few changes had to be applied to the movie to satisfy "the Production Code Administration" (51). For instance, Kazan was asked to censor the scene of Blanche's rape as well as her explanation about Allan's homosexuality (Phillips as cited in Blaschke 1999: 9). Eventually, twelve changes were made to the movie, "amounting to about four minutes of screen time" (9). Thus, despite Kazan's fidelity to the source manuscript, there are moments in the film in which differences can be noticed from Williams's play (see Hurst 2009: 3). In this article, however, the similarities between the original text and screen script will not be the focus of the study because, as already noted, critics have verified the fidelity of Kazan's movie to Williams's play.¹ Instead, because the two works are products of almost the same historical periods in America, we will try to investigate the differences regarding the gender roles of women in both works by examining

¹ See Ellen Dowling's commentary in (Davison 2009: 74).

the verbal and visual signs. The aim is to assess how this particular adaptation has re-constructed the gender identity of women, even though both the play and the adaptation belong to the same place and time, that is to say mid-20th century America.

2. Literature Review

Many critics have examined Kazan's adaptation (1951) of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). Davison, for example, believes that the play was more successful than its movie adaptation (2009: 72). Hirsch also states that, due to Williams's "exotic" setting in the play, its film adaptations "are all visually interesting" (1979: 103). He argues that, although most of the scenes have been filmed in an apartment, "the film is not static" (103). Rather, "with its ominous shadows, prominent spotlights, tight close-ups and sharp camera angles, the film has a rich, brooding texture, [and] a compelling visual personality" (103-104). He, thus, suggests that Kazan has introduced "a new level of naturalistic performance" to the American cinema (106).

Cahir declares that the movie's efficacy results from the way the playwright and the director "made potentially destructive constraints work constructively in the movie" (Davison 2009: 74). Davison goes further to claim that both the play and its 1951 movie adaptation are open to interpretations (2009: 73). As she explains,

Where expressionism offered Williams a means to communicate multiple views or positions within a framework of apparent reality, and thus explore the inability of language to express 'truth,' Kazan sought to rationalize characters' behaviors in terms of social and psychological causes, though he also sought to objectify their behavior—and their conflicts—via motion, action, and other visual elements. (260)

She, then, comments on the role of Stella and Stanley. As she asserts, Stella has a central role and Kazan introduces her as "the apex of the play's triangle" (58). The director, then, considers "her living in a 'sensual stupor,' with Stanley as the sole focus of her life" (58).

Admittedly, some critics have specifically addressed the question of gender. Byars, for instance, describes Kazan's movie as a "male-oriented melodrama" (1991: 73). He argues that in this movie, women are identified in terms of men and according to the "moral polarities" (64). Earthman also believes that the play, along with Kazan's adaptation of it, portrays "an epic struggle between ultramasculine and ultrafeminine forces" (2003: 274). In a similar way, O'Neill suggests that, at the heart of both the play and Kazan's

adaptation of it, lays "the portrayal of woman as the lynch-pin of the relationship between the individual and society" (2004: 169). All the above studies are interesting and informative in their own ways. However, this article is going to give a new perspective by presenting a detailed comparative reading of women's representation in Williams's play and Kazan's adaptation within the framework of Adaptation Studies.

3. Women in Williams and Kazan's *Streetcar*

Kazan's film adaptation is quite faithful to the original manuscript, sticking to the play's words and sentences. However, as Linda Hutcheon notes, the way text and media narrate stories are quite different. Thus, even if we ignore the cultural and historical contexts of adaptations, the alterations from the "telling mode" in plays to the "showing mode" in media can result in significant changes (Hutcheon 2013: 23). Hutcheon argues that showing "involves a direct aural and usually visual performance experiences in real time" (13), which is missing in the narratology of written texts. In fact, through the showing mode, the audience can enter a new stage of "direct perception" of the material (23). As she further explains,

The performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations; music offers aural "equivalents" for characters' emotions and, in turn, provokes affective responses in the audience; sound, in general, can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal aspects. (23)

In addition, media uses "indexical and iconic signs", while texts possess "symbolic and conventional" ones (43). As a result, the two modes can convey different meanings. Accordingly, although Kazan has been apparently faithful to Williams's manuscript, he has inevitably engaged in the act of re-creation of the play by employing visual and aural signs. In other words, he has used a variety of techniques to "visualize" Williams's work (Tripković-Samardžić 2016: 101). For example, he has made use of "close-up[s] and deep shadows" to represent "the complexity of the characters" (102). Also, the application of walls and the design of the furniture help him portray Blanche's entrapment in the apartment (Blaschke 1999: 8).

3.1. Domestic Roles

Hutcheon argues that "[s]ometimes adapters purge an earlier text of elements that their particular cultures in time or place might find difficult or

controversial; at other times, the adaptation ‘de-represses’ an earlier adapted text’s politics” (2013: 147). The spirit of patriarchy that is highlighted in Williams’s play makes the study of the traditional gender roles of women significant. However, in the movie adaptation, one finds more emphasis on the traditional gender roles of Stella and Blanche, and specifically, on the cult of domesticity and fidelity. Both in the play and its adaptation, Stella tries to show her allegiance and obedience to her husband on different occasions. For instance, when Stanley begs her to come back home after the quarrel in the third scene of the play, her “return down those stairs” testifies to her fidelity to him (Bloom 2005: 71).² Also, when Stanley stands in protest and asks for the dinner, she assures him that she has already prepared supper for him, which is indicative of her submission (Williams 1947: 32; Kazan 1951: 00:15:52).

In the adaptation, this obedience and allegiance is more highlighted. For instance, Stella never appears half-naked in front of strangers and hides her body to every man except to her husband (Kazan 1951: 00:15:23 and 00:33:11). By this, in fact, she tries to show her allegiance to him. In the movie, Stella respects her husband and cares for him much more than she does in the play. She hugs and kisses him frequently (for instance, 1951: 00:16:19 and 00:51:03), talks to him using kind and gentle words (1951: 00:15:28) and obeys him. These indicate her adherence to her traditional gender roles as a wife. Moreover, we find Stella and Blanche cleaning the house (1951: 00:52:01) and “making ... some new slipcovers” (1951: 00:51:41), which are missing in the play. Consequently, in his adaptation of Williams’s *Streetcar*, Kazan has intensified the traditional roles of women as wives by portraying the domestic roles that are either not mentioned in the play, or not as highlighted as in the movie.

3.2. Family Obligations

Blanche and Stella’s first encounter happens at the bowling club. Unlike Stella’s anxious look after Blanche’s arrival in the play (Williams 1947: 16), Kazan’s Stella greets Blanche with great eagerness and joy, and it is she who runs towards Blanche, calling her “Blanche, honey” to finally hug her tightly (Kazan 1951: 00:04:14). This signals the difference between the sisters in the play and the movie. Unlike in the play, Stella is not anxious about Blanche’s arrival in the movie. Instead, she is worried about Blanche’s anxiety and health, which is represented in her distressed facial expression when she finds

² This also happens in the movie. See Kazan 1951: 00:32:45.

Blanche hysteric in the bar (1951: 00:05:50). Stella loves Blanche very much. She prepares the bathtub for her to take a shower (1951: 00:07:23), hugs and assures her that she and Stanley will “get along fine together” (1951: 00:08:35), and tries to calm her down in every way (see for instance 00:05:22; 00:06:53; 00:16:23; 00:05:13). By adding these features to Blanche and Stella's relationships, Kazan portrays a closer and more intimate relationship between the sisters, as a result of which they find it crucial to take care of each other.³

3.3. Mental and Sexual Inclinations

Tennessee Williams starts his play with the picture of Stanley throwing meat over Stella and disdaining her in front of Mitch (Williams 1947: 10), whereas Elia Kazan prioritizes Blanche's arrival. Blanche is represented as a young, beautiful girl, dressed in fine clothes, which unlike Blanche's dress in Williams's play, are not white. Everything seems fine and nice with Blanche. Even the scene in the play in which Blanche robs the whisky bottle out of the closet without permission and drinks it (1947: 15) is omitted in the film; this gives a good impression of her to the audience from the beginning of the movie. However, examining the later scenes, we realize that she is as hysteric as Blanche is in the play. Her hysteria is even more intense as she screams and runs into the street (Kazan 1951: 00:10:34). By this, as well as demonstrating her “sweating and drinking” and showing “multiple sounds to which Blanche reacts emotionally,” Kazan has tried to visualize her “anxiety and uneasiness” (Tripković-Samardžić 2016: 101).

The visual representations of Blanche's anxiety reduce the distance between her and the audience. Consequently, the audience will understand her more. Furthermore, as this introduction to her hysteria is a bit delayed, the prejudgments about her will also be delayed. Her anxiety is revealed to us when she starts to talk about her past in the bar while smoking a cigarette and shaking (Kazan 1951: 00:05:42), not when she is talking about ordinary issues. Thus, the director makes it clear to the audience that there is a strong reason behind her anxiety, which cannot be properly understood without knowing about her tragic past. Eventually, Kazan accentuates the picture of a woman who is psychologically ill.

When Blanche gets off the train, she immediately encounters a young boy (Kazan's replacement for Eunice), whom she asks for the address (00:02:03).

³ For an analysis of the relationship between the Stella and Blanche in Williams's play see Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht and Movahhed 2018: 559-560.

With her smile and flirting gestures, she tries to attract the boy even though she does not know him. The young boy then helps her, taking her hand and luggage, to get on the streetcar (00:02:30). The selection of a young gentle boy instead of an old woman and Blanche's immediate flirtations with him foreshadows her later coquetties with Mitch and Stanley, and suggests her strong inclinations toward men and sex.

Furthermore, by highlighting this characteristic from the very beginning of the movie, Kazan attempts to emphasize this aspect in her character. Although in the play her coquettish behavior is frequently implied, it is more visible in the movie because the audience can see her gestures and looks. Even though Blanche asserts that she finds Stanley "common" (Williams 1947: 80; 00:48:05), in many instances she talks to him seductively, attracting his attention to her beauty and physique, and eventually, contributing to the final rape. Stanley, too, "Despite his violent nature, ... is at times an appealing—even charming—character" (Koprince 2009: 53). He is also very "handsome, unaffected, and down-to-earth" (2009: 53), and the female characters in Williams's play "desire spectacular males." This is the reason why Blanche finds "the sight of Stanley's rippling muscles" attractive and, at the same time, alarming (Hirsch 1979: 11), and tries to attract and win him over Stella.

In the movie adaptation, to attract the attention of Stanley, Blanche frequently uses gestures that signal her flirtations. For example, when Stanley tells her that "a woman must lay her cards on the table" for him, she laughs (Kazan 1951: 00:23:40), signifying her consent to his demand. When she makes sure that Stella is out, she asks Stanley to button up her dress (00:21:40). While Stanley is busy buttoning up the dress, she looks playfully at him and appears willing to flirt with him (00:22:12). During the discussion over the loss of Belle Reve, Blanche pours perfume on herself coquettishly in front of him (00:24:34) and seductively takes the fur in front of herself and asks Stanley whether she is attractive or not (00:22:44). Moreover, she looks at Stanley's body when he tries to change his T-shirt (00:13:18). She also touches him in several instances. For example, when she hears the scream of a cat, she jumps in fear and touches Stanley's hands (00:13:48; see also 00:23:53). All the instances indicate her attempts to arouse Stanley sexually. Eventually, Blanche's gender identity is associated with desire and sexuality.

The sexual inclination of Blanche is not restricted to her treatment of Stanley. For example, in their first encounter, Blanche smiles and talks to Mitch very gently and coquettishly (00:31:39), or, when he wants to show her the inscription on the case of the cigarette, she does not ask him to take

the light closer so as to see the inscription better but moves Mitch's hands herself (00:35:11; see also 00:35:17), trying to provoke his desire. All the instances mentioned indicate that, in the movie, Blanche's identity is recognized as more inclined towards sexuality. Kazan also intensifies this picture by the use of close-ups that help reduce the distance between the audience and the characters, revealing the characters' emotions to the audience, who can now "witness a subtle way in which Blanche encourages Stanley's [and Mitch's] interest in her and contributes to the act of rape" (Tripković-Samardžić 2016: 103). By her "exaggerated femininity," therefore, she tries to put "Stanley into an exaggeratedly masculine position" (Earthman 2003: 275), and eventually, Stanley's rape of Blanche suggests the "the complete defeat of everything Blanche is" (275).

Moreover, both in the play and the movie, Blanche possesses unique feminine characteristics that all contribute to her gender identity. By her excessive attention to her appearance, she does not rise above her gender roles, but acts in favor of them. For example, "she wears frilly cocktail dresses and white gloves, soaks for hours in a hot bath, lies about her age, refuses to be seen in strong light, and attempts to enchant every man she meets" (Earthman 2003: 274). As Tripković-Samardžić argues,

special attention in the film is given to the choice of costumes (Blanche's selected, sophisticated, feminine garments made up of chiffon, rayon, silk and lace) and props (fans, creams, perfumes, pins, rollers, depilatories, suitcase with carefully selected items) ... are part of Blanche's identity. (2016: 101)

Kazan stresses this image by portraying Blanche as a person who does not agree to meet Stanley before she takes a shower and looks fresh (1951: 00:05:18). This indicates that she uses her appearance as a means to attract men. We always find her fresh and pretty in the play, much younger than her age. However, Kazan also refers to the reality of her life by showing the wrinkles on her forehead and the glasses that she has to wear when reading papers in the movie (00:26:39). Thus, in Kazan's version, a degree of reality behind Blanche's alluring appearance is also given to represent a more honest picture of her identity.

This concern with sexuality exists to some extent in Elia Kazan's *Stella*, too. She adores her husband's physique, but not moral and behavioral characteristics (00:05:06). She touches him frequently (00:16:20), is duped into coming back home by Stanley's kisses after all the quarrel that he has made (01:25:04), and forgives him for his violent attitude at the poker night

after the two make love (00:43:14). She, like Blanche, is in need of somebody to support her (Blaschke 1999: 10) although she is aware of Stanley's brutal attitude. She, like Blanche, is obsessed with sexuality. However, because she has a man in her life, she does not need to cling to strangers. The source of all these portrayals of sexuality in the movie might be Hollywood's emphasis on love scenes. To attract more groups of audience, Hollywood movies are replete with similar love scenes in which the audience's desire would be inevitably stimulated.

3.4. Gender Violence

Hurst argues that the most significant difference between Tennessee Williams's play and its 1951 adaptation is that "Stanley has a more powerful role" in the movie (2009: 4). This might be a result of the cult of masculinity and the dominant male stereotypes in the cinema in the 1950s because, as Gauntlett observes, at the time, most of the films "focused on [a] male hero", who "made the decisions which led the story, and were assertive, confident and dominant" (Gauntlett 2008: 50). Women, on the other hand, as in the case of Blanche DuBois, "had important roles," but they were usually "shown as frightened, in need of protection and direction" (2008: 50). In addition, the notions of "desire and sexuality" that are represented in the play are usually associated with domestic violence (Kolin 1993: 1), and that is the way Stanley, as the main male protagonist, violates Stella and Blanche, considering them the 'Other'. Hence, there is a relationship between men's violence and women's gender identity: as men become more aggressive against women, women's portrayal will be more associated with Otherness.⁴

The very manifestation of the bowling scene in which Stanley is "making all the rhubarb" (00:05:01) shows his inclination to violence. Stanley, who, in Williams's words, is "a richly feathered male bird among hens" (Williams 1947: 28), "loves all that is male-identified" like "bowling, poker, whiskey ..., crude jokes, and his 'baby doll,' Stella" (Earthman 2003: 274). He is the one whose loud masculine cries frighten the audience, too. His violence is so intense that he can beat all his friends at the poker party and push them out of the house (Kazan 1951: 00:39:54). However, attacks on women in the movie are much more intense than in the play, since "the main conflict" in the play "is between Old South gentility and a brutal new order" (Kolin 2000: 54). Stanley, in Kazan's version, is "more violent and vicious," and it shows the

⁴ Nazemi, Aliakbari Harehdasht and Movahhed (2016: 68-69) discuss the question of Otherness from a feminist perspective in Williams's play.

audience from the beginning “that he has already planned something in mind” (Hurst 2009: 4), which is to finally rape Blanche. In other words, the screenplay attributes “a direct criminal intent to Stanley” which is not implied in the play (5). By this, the movie gives more power and dominance to the men and less to women, contributing to women’s portrayal as the Other.

While Williams describes Stanley’s harsh attitude towards women and reports the way he considers them as sexual objects (Williams 1947: 28), Kazan visualizes this, portraying the way Stanley gazes at Blanche’s body when she talks to him (00:13:18). He also represents Stanley’s rape of Blanche in the final scene after beating her, pushing her forcefully on the bed (01:48:11) and breaking the mirror in which the picture of Blanche is reflected while she is struggling with him and finally, is defeated by his violence and desire (01:52:34). In many instances, Stanley beats and pushes Stella harshly although he is aware of her pregnancy.⁵ He not only has no respect for women to the point that he abuses his wife in front of the others frequently⁶, but also does not allow the other men to have respect for them, either (00:31:03). As a result, the movie highlights Stanley’s violence towards women more than the play does and intensifies women’s oppression under his domineering attitude using the visual representations of these brutalities. Eventually, as Kleb argues, Blanche becomes “the Unreason, the feminine ‘Other,’” (Kolin 1993: 7), while Stanley is “the brute,” “the absolute monarch” and the one “who interrogates and then punishes physically” (8). Therefore, women’s identity is associated with their being “the Other” under the ruling ferocity of men who are considered the “self”.

This patriarchal empowerment against women can also be detected in the image of Mitch. Although in both the play and the movie he is described as a kind and polite man who acts gently towards Blanche and Stella and who “seems superior to the others” (Kazan 1951: 00:32:10), he, like the others, follows the codes of patriarchy, and this is represented in the movie more than it is in the play. When Blanche asks him to bow in front of her and then present the flowers, he hesitates a little bit, looks around to make sure that nobody is looking at him and disdaining his respect for her, and then acts as Blanche has asked for (01:03:14). Another instance is when Blanche laughs loudly: he asks anxiously whether she laughs at him and checks the surrounding to make sure that nobody is looking at them so he wouldn’t be

⁵ See Kazan 1951: 00:18:36; 00:18:44; 00:19:22; 00:39:05; 01:28:25; 01:28:42; these cases are not mentioned or highlighted in the play.

⁶ Kazan 1951: 00:31:22. Also see the third scene in Williams’s *Streetcar*.

belittled by the others (01:05:14). He is afraid that others would notice his respect for Blanche –a woman– and deride him. This reveals that Blanche, and generally women, are the ‘inferior’ type in the society and Mitch, who belongs to patriarchy, nonetheless, submits to this binary opposition of man vs. woman. Furthermore, Mitch is the person who breaks the door to enter the house angrily when he understands about Blanche’s misdeeds (01:30:37), while in the play, it is she who “lets him in” (Williams 1947: 130). He also beats Blanche so harshly that she is pushed away on to the chair as a result of which she cries (Kazan 1951: 01:34:33); this is also missing in the play. The violence that is so explicitly emphasized in the movie adaptation contrasts with what the censors had asked for: that the director should be conservative about the “explicit” representations of “violence” and similar taboo issues (Davison 2009: 9). Thus, Kazan attempts to represent men as more violent and disdainful towards women in the movie than in the play, and portrays women as the oppressed, inferior, weak type against the powerful, violent, and domineering men.

Furthermore, unlike the play’s ending, in which Stella and Stanley find their reunion marked by love after Blanche’s departure (Williams 1947: 166), in Kazan’s adaptation Stella punishes Stanley by rejecting him and decides not to live with him anymore (1951: 02:03:27). Blanche argues that this is how society punishes Stanley for his brutal actions (Blaschke 1999: 10) so as to represent the negative consequences of his cruelty and to reconcile all the violence directed towards Blanche and Stella. Obviously, the cinema, which addresses a wider and more diverse audience than literature, should display less inhumanity and savagery. As such, Stella’s punishment is, in fact, a very difficult one for Stanley because “losing Stella and his child had always been his weak spot” (Blaschke 1999: 10; see also Kolin 1993: 10).

Finally, the way Stella beats Stanley’s friends and pushes them out of the house in the movie (Kazan 1951: 00:39:02) provides the audience with the picture of a woman who attempts to act against her repressed position, imposed by patriarchy. In the same manner, Blanche rises against Stanley, violating her privacy, by pushing him away when he tries to find the papers in Blanche’s luggage (00:25:29). Stella and Blanche shout at Stanley and Mitch in several instances (00:18:34; 00:23:56; 00:38:56; 01:35:04). In the play, Blanche admits that she has told Allan that she knows that he hates her (Williams 1947: 109), while, in the movie, she declares that it is she who has told Allan that she hates her (01:14:09). Therefore, although women are abused more harshly in the movie, women in Kazan’s version struggle more

to escape their prescribed gender identity and to fight the “brutal, unattractive, and villainous” men, using Davison’s words (2009: 74).

4. Conclusion

In this article, Tennessee Williams’s female characters were compared to those of Kazan’s movie adaptation. Although the scripts of the two works were similar and the two were products of almost the same historical periods in America, the transition from the written text to the cinema not only imposed changes on the overall structure of the adapted play, it also had an impact on the gender identity of women as well. After examining the roles of women as wives and sisters, their roles in terms of behavioral and moral traits and also their identity as associated with Otherness, it was concluded that, in Kazan’s movie adaptation, women’s traditional roles as wives doing housework, obeying and respecting husbands and sticking to the codes of fidelity are more highlighted than in the play. Moreover, a more intimate relationship between the sisters can be noticed in the play, compared with the movie. In the adaptation, women’s identity is highly associated with sexuality, probably as a result of the influence of Hollywood’s needs. Finally, while there is more violence directed against women in the movie, this violence and animosity is mediated by the punishment that the director has decided for Stanley at the end of the movie.

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LE MYTHE DE L'ENFANT DANS *DOUZE CONTES VAGABONDS* DE GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

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Résumé

Cet article se propose d'analyser, au moyen de la sociologie de la littérature, la perception que l'écrivain colombien Gabriel García Márquez a de l'enfant à travers les contes de l'anthologie *Douze contes vagabonds* (1992). La création esthétique de cet auteur se nourrit de fond en comble du réalisme magique et peint le personnage de l'enfant, à la fois, comme une merveille et une calamité. L'image que le narrateur présente des petits enfants varie d'un conte à l'autre et suscite la curiosité de la science littéraire. Ainsi, dans certains contes l'enfant est peint comme une bénédiction de Dieu, un symbole d'humilité, le lieu de la présence de l'innocence, de la sagesse et de la sainteté. Cependant dans d'autres contes, il est décrit comme objet de terreur épouvantable.

Mot-clés : mythe, enfant, vision, miracle, désastre.

THE MYTH OF THE CHILD IN *STRANGE PILGRIMS* BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Abstract

This article aims to analyze, through the sociology of literature, the viewpoint that the Columbian writer Marquez has on the child through the stories included in *Strange Pilgrims* (1992). The aesthetic creation of this author is fed from top to bottom with magical realism. These short stories portray the character of the child, on the one hand as wonder and on the other hand as a calamity. The image the narrator presents of the children changes from one story to the other and it arouses the interest of the literary science. In some stories, the child is portrayed as God's benediction, a symbol of humility, the place of innocence, wisdom, and holiness. However, in other stories, he or she is described as an awful object of terror.

Keywords: myth, child, vision, miracle, disaster.

LE MYTHE DE L'ENFANT DANS *DOUZE CONTES VAGABONDS* DE GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

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Aborder le sujet du mythe de l'enfant dans *Douze contes vagabonds* de G. García Márquez exige qu'on clarifie, d'entrée de jeu, les concepts clés qui le structurent. Ainsi, dans *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*, Pierre Brunel a jugé raisonnable de se référer à Mircea Eliade qui dit : « Le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée ; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial, le temps fabuleux des commencements » (1988 : 15). Dans *Le dictionnaire du Littéraire*, P. Aron, D. Saint-Jacques et A. Viala définissent ce terme à partir de son étymologie :

Le mot mythe vient du grec « mythos » qui signifie « récit », « fable » et, plus en amont « parole » : le mythe est donc « une histoire fabuleuse qui se raconte ». Ces histoires établies en tradition offrent en général, sous une forme allégorique, des explications de l'inexplicable. Au sens restreint, les spécialistes conçoivent le mythe comme un récit se rapportant à un état du monde antérieur à l'état présent et destiné à donner une cause à l'ordre des choses : le mythe est, en ce sens, récit des origines. Au sens plus courant, il désigne tout récit fondé sur des croyances fabuleuses, et qui éclaire un trait fondamental des conditions humaines. (Aron, Saint-Jacques et Viala 2002 : 387)

En ce qui concerne la notion d'enfant, le *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires* cité antérieurement la clarifie comme un être humain jeune dont l'âge est compris entre zéro et quinze ans. Pour ce qui est du mythe de l'enfant, il réside dans le fait qu'il est un alter ego, un être étranger non seulement à la personne adulte mais aussi au chercheur car l'enfant étant objet de recherche dans presque toutes les branches du savoir, il naît un rapport de différence ou d'étrangéité entre lui et le chercheur. Le thème de l'enfant est toujours en vogue. Victor Hugo dans *Les contemplations* (1856), Richard Wright dans *Black Boy* (1945), Camara Laye dans *L'enfant noir* (1953) ne manquent pas d'en parler avec ferveur et enthousiasme. De même, nombreux sont les organismes non gouvernementaux comme l'UNICEF (Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'Enfance), le BICE

(Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance), Planète Enfants & Développement etc. qui œuvrent pour la protection, le bien-être et l'épanouissement de l'enfant. Il fait également l'objet d'une attention particulière dans les sciences sociales. Ainsi, Josie Bernicot et Alain Bert – Erboul constatent :

Un tournant capital dans les études sur le développement de l'enfant (incluant le domaine du langage a été accompli par le psychologue Alfred Binet au début du XXe siècle avec L'étude expérimentale de l'intelligence en collaboration avec Theodore Simon (1905 et 1908). (Bernicot et Bert – Erboul 2014 : 25)

Le thème de l'enfant se retrouve aussi chez les auteurs latino-américains. En scrutant la littérature de l'Amérique non anglo-saxonne, l'on se rend à l'évidence que l'enfant constitue une source d'inspiration inépuisable. La thématique de l'enfant y occupe une place non moins prépondérante et bénéficie d'une représentation à multiples facettes. Tantôt l'enfant est représenté comme le symbole de la candeur, de l'innocence, de la vérité, de la confiance et même de l'espoir ; tantôt, il est aussi l'incarnation de perversité effroyable. C'est pour cela que le personnage de l'enfant qui transparaît dans *Douze contes vagabonds* de G. García Márquez ne laisse point le lecteur indifférent. En effet, comme l'intitulé de l'œuvre le dévoile déjà, il s'agit d'une anthologie composée de douze récits écrits par le prix Nobel de littérature (1982) dans un style où le surnaturel se mêle au réel. Les contes de la collection sont écrits sur une période de dix seize ans, depuis 1976 jusqu'à 1992. Elle amène le lecteur à s'interroger sur soi et sur le monde, pose les questions existentielles les plus angoissantes telles que l'éthique et la morale, la vie et la mort, le bien et le mal, etc. Partant des révélations de la collection des contes marquesiens sur l'enfance, il y a lieu de chercher à comprendre, d'où la problématique suivante : Pourquoi l'enfant constitue-t-il un mythe permanent dans la fiction narrative de *Douze contes vagabonds* de G. García Márquez ? Pour répondre à cette interrogation, nous nous proposons d'adopter la sociocritique de P. Zima (1985) comme approche méthodologique puisque de lui, P. Dirx retient ceci : « Son objectif est de décrire comment des problèmes sociaux ou des intérêts particuliers se trouvent inscrits dans les structures du texte (littéraire ou non) » (Dirx 2000 : 88).

Notre étude s'articule autour de trois axes principaux, à savoir :

- L'enfant comme réalité socioculturelle

- L'enfant comme objet de fascination
- Les relations parents - enfants.

1. L'enfant : une réalité socioculturelle

Partant du constat selon lequel l'enfant peut être défini comme un jeune être humain, garçon ou fille, en cours de développement et dépendant de ses parents ou autres adultes dans l'ensemble des contes marquesiens, il est évident qu'il symbolise le noyau de la famille. En conséquence, il se révèle tantôt comme objet d'espoir, tantôt comme une infamie pour la société.

1.1. L'enfant : noyau de l'existence humaine et objet de félicité

L'enfant assure la pérennité de la vie humaine et l'héritage de la culture car pour se perpétuer la nature humaine a besoin d'hérédité biologique et sociale. Ainsi, dans les sociétés traditionnelles, ne pas avoir d'enfant est interprété comme une malédiction. Cette réalité ne passe pas inaperçue dans la fiction narrative de *Douze contes vagabonds*. Dans le conte intitulé « María dos Prazeres », l'on se rend compte que la vieille María dos Prazeres, songeant à sa mort prochaine décide de confier le soin de sa tombe à son chien Noi. Le narrateur en témoigne :

Peu après cinq heures, avec douze minutes d'avance, Noi apparut sur la colline, bavant de fatigue et de chaleur, mais arborant une fierté de gamin victorieux. Dès cet instant, María dos Prazeres surmonta sa terreur de n'avoir personne pour pleurer sur sa tombe. (García Márquez 1995 : 93)

Selon un adage populaire, à défaut de ce qu'on aime, on se contente de ce qu'on a. C'est bien le cas de la vieille María dos Prazeres qui, à défaut d'un enfant pour pleurer sur sa tombe, se contente des aboiements d'un chien. Or, le jour des morts n'est guère célébré par des animaux mais par des humains, notamment les femmes et les enfants tel que l'avoue Roy dans le passage suivant :

Vers minuit, le 1^{er} novembre, femmes et enfants, à la lumière des chandelles, défilent vers les lieux de repos de leurs proches, ornant leurs pierres tombales de serviettes brodées et de victuailles, tandis que retentit l'écho des chants traditionnels des Indiens purépechas implorant le repos des âmes. (Roy 2015 : 79)

Si le personnage principal de ce conte n'a personne d'autre que son chien pour le pleurer et visiter sa tombe, il est clair que María dos Prazeres

n'a pas de descendance ou de progéniture. Cela explique, selon le narrateur, la longue solitude dans laquelle elle se recroqueville avec comme unique compagnon son chien Noi, malgré une fortune colossale :

La porte à peine fermée, elle prit le petit chien dans son bras, le cajola, . . . Elle avait pris sa retraite de sa propre volonté après avoir amassé sou à sou, une fortune sans trop de sacrifices amers, et choisi comme ultime refuge le très ancien et très noble bourg de Gracia, qu'absorbait déjà l'extension de la ville. (García Márquez 1995 : 90)

L'absence d'enfant dans la vie de María dos Prazeres ne la rend pas aussi heureuse qu'elle l'aurait souhaité. Elle aurait aimé en avoir un, le cajoler, lui léguer son trésor et lui confier sa sépulture plutôt que ce soit un chien qui aille aboyer sur sa tombe. Pour preuve, elle finit par confier la garde même de son chien à une fille du voisinage. Le conteur dans cette partie de l'œuvre de García Márquez en donne la confirmation :

Un dimanche, en rentrant du cimetière, elle trouva sur le palier la petite fille qui vivait dans l'appartement d'en face . . .

Alors María dos Prazeres lui fit la proposition qu'elle méditait depuis longtemps. Si un jour, il m'arrive quelque chose, occupe-toi de Noi, lui dit-elle. Tout ce que je te demande c'est de le laisser libre le dimanche et de ne t'inquiéter de rien. (García Márquez 1995 : 96)

Ce fragment est révélateur du grand vide que l'inexistence de l'enfant creuse dans la vie de la vieille María dos Prazeres. Ce conte de l'écrivain colombien pose un problème métaphysique profond auquel le personnage principal est confronté. L'enfant est un don de Dieu, une bénédiction divine. Le manque d'enfant s'interprète comme un malheur, un désastre, une malédiction qui provoque un creux profond qu'aucun chien ni qu'aucune fortune ne peut combler.

Cette valeur indiscutable de l'enfant est prise en compte dans la réalisation des objectifs du millénaire qu'Olivier Dabène (2007 : 246) évoque dans *L'Amérique latine à l'époque contemporaine*. Il s'agit de protéger les enfants, non seulement en réduisant leur taux de mortalité mais encore en les scolarisant tous, filles et garçons, sans distinction de sexe.

Si l'enfant mérite soin et protection cela signifie qu'il est d'une importance capitale et ne pas en avoir peut être source de mélancolie comme c'est le cas du personnage Maria dos Prazeres.

C'est pour cela que la naissance d'un enfant est souvent un événement heureux. Ses géniteurs reçoivent de part et d'autre des félicitations et des présents qui les rendent joyeux. Il est la relève de la société lorsqu'en grandissant, son attitude est bonne et suscite l'approbation sociale. En cela il constitue une source d'espoir.

En scrutant le conte « La lumière est comme l'eau », on découvre deux personnages principaux qui ne sont que des enfants de neuf et sept ans. Ce sont eux qui remportent miraculeusement le prix de l'excellence à l'école. Parlant d'eux, le raconteur déclare ce qui suit :

Totó et Joel, qui les deux années précédentes avaient été les derniers de la classe, remportèrent au mois de juillet le prix d'excellence et reçurent les félicitations du directeur. (García Márquez 1995 : 135)

Ce succès brillant ne peut que susciter la joie, l'admiration et l'espoir non seulement de la famille de ces enfants lauréats mais aussi de toute la société. C'est pourquoi, en plus du prix, les deux enfants excellents ont également reçu des cadeaux de leurs parents. Le narrateur dans ce passage de l'œuvre de Márquez révèle ce qui suit :

L'après-midi, sans qu'ils aient eu à les redemander, ils trouvèrent dans leur chambre les équipements de plongée dans leur emballage d'origine. (García Márquez 1995 : 135)

Mais la liste des récompenses est longue car les parents, très fiers de leurs enfants primés sont allés jusqu'à organiser une fête, selon le constat du conteur :

Le jour des prix, les deux frères furent acclamés comme un exemple pour l'école et on leur remit leurs diplômes. Cette fois, ils n'exigèrent rien parce que les parents ne leur avaient pas demandé ce qu'ils désiraient. Ils furent si raisonnables qu'ils se contentèrent d'une fête à la maison pour faire plaisir à leurs camarades d'école. (García Márquez 1995 : 135)

Ces cadeaux, ces prix et cette fête dont jouissent ces enfants ne sont pas un tintamarre mais une récompense méritée dont l'objectif est de les encourager à viser toujours l'excellence et à attirer d'autres enfants à en faire autant afin que leur avenir soit radieux et que la république qu'ils vont hériter des adultes soit prospère et rayonnante car seul le travail bien fait peut garantir la réussite de toute communauté humaine. Ainsi, pour

construire efficacement la société de demain, les adultes n'ont d'autre alternative que de fonder leur espoir sur leur progéniture dont ils ont le devoir et l'obligation d'éduquer et de conduire à la réussite.

La joie et le bonheur que procure toute progéniture laissent découvrir la valeur de l'enfant qui mérite d'être protégé par les lois de la société. Broca le reconnaît en ces termes :

Tout aussi réprimé était l'avortement qui venait compléter les procédés de régulation naturelle et touchait tous les milieux sociaux, même s'il concernait plutôt les milieux défavorisés. (...) Il a fallu attendre 1874 pour que les lois sur la réglementation du travail des enfants commencent à être respectées. (Broca 2017 : 12)

Certes, l'enfant fait la fierté de sa famille. Cependant, il faut tout de même noter qu'il n'est pas toujours une source de bénédiction.

1.2. L'enfant : objet de scandale

La fiction marquisienne ne fait pas que l'apologie des enfants. La progéniture peut être aussi une terreur pour ses parents et la société. En parler ne consiste pas à aborder les fléaux tels que la pédophilie, le phénomène des enfants jetables aux Etats-Unis, la maltraitance etc. dont sont victimes des milliers d'enfants mais à analyser des indices de délinquance criminelle provenant des enfants dans l'œuvre de l'écrivain colombien. Le narrateur ne s'interdit point de relever et de vitupérer les actes macabres posés par des mineurs. C'est bien le cas de deux petits garçons anonymes qui font mourir leur institutrice par empoisonnement. Effectivement, dans le conte intitulé « L'été heureux de madame Forbes », apparaît une jeune dame, madame Forbes, comme l'indique bien le titre du conte. Il s'agit d'une enseignante dont la sévérité et la rigueur sont interprétées comme de la méchanceté. En réplique à ce dur caractère, les deux bambins préméditent et posent un acte abominable, selon le constat du narrateur dans ce fragment :

Deux jours après la substitution du vin, tandis que nous prenions notre repas matinal, mon frère me fait comprendre d'un regard déçu que la bouteille empoisonnée était encore intacte dans le buffet. C'était un vendredi, et la bouteille demeura pleine pendant tout le week-end. Mais dans la nuit du mardi, Mme Forbes en but la moitié en regardant les films érotiques à la télévision. (García Márquez 1995 : 128)

Dans cette partie de la fiction marquesienne, le génie de l'enfant n'a pas servi à émerveiller mais à produire un acte tragique. Cette intoxication, comme nous l'avons déjà dit antérieurement, conduit à coup sûr la dame vers une fin tragique, tel que le dévoile le conteur :

Au petit jour, elle parla seule pendant un long moment, déclama Schiler à pleine voix, comme sous l'emprise d'une folie frénétique, et acheva sa tirade par un long cri final qui résonna dans toute la maison. Puis elle poussa du tréfonds de son âme plusieurs soupirs et succomba dans un sifflement triste et continu pareil à celui d'un bateau à la dérive. (García Márquez 1995 : 129)

Cet acte relève de la barbarie. Certes, il est commis par des mineurs et cela peut relever d'un manquement de la part de la responsabilité parentale car, du point de vue de Viaux, « nul ne doute que le petit humain, pour se développer dans les meilleures conditions possibles, doit disposer d'un milieu familial protecteur et stimulant, capable aussi de gérer les conflits interpersonnels. » (2000 : 115). Cette conviction de Jean-Luc Viaux aurait été prise au sérieux par les géniteurs de ces gamins que cet assassinat aurait pu être évité. Néanmoins, aucune raison ne justifie un crime. L'institutrice Forbes a beau être autoritaire, rien ne justifie ce sort triste et pathétique qui lui a été affligé. Une telle atrocité commise par des mineurs n'est point différente de celles que commettent les enfants soldats. Si de petits garçons ont eu l'audace de tuer leur enseignante, il y a lieu de se demander si quelque chose peut les empêcher de s'enrôler dans des conflits armés. Cette déviance des adolescents que le lecteur constate dans ce passage de la production narrative marquesienne préoccupe au plus haut la société. D'après Jean-Marie Peticlerc: « Tous, nous sommes aujourd'hui surpris, inquiets, voire abasourdis par la montée de la délinquance et de la violence chez les enfants et adolescents. » (2004 : 9)

Au moyen d'une approche théorique qui ne s'entend pas en dehors de la sociologie de la littérature nous découvrons que *Douze contes vagabonds* de G. García Márquez révèle une figure ambiguë du personnage de l'enfant car il est à la fois un bijou et une folie. C'est pour cela que cette œuvre narrative est fascinante à la lecture. Même si le personnage de l'enfant est ancré dans le réel et pose un problème sociétal, le narrateur ne manque pas de lui donner une dimension fantastique qui n'est pas remise en cause par l'imagination.

2. L'enfant : objet de fascination

Evidemment, l'ignominie commise par des adolescents sur l'institutrice Forbes écœure, et bouleverse le lecteur. Néanmoins, le narrateur ne s'est pas interdit de faire de l'enfant, un personnage qui incarne le mystère. L'auteur G. García Márquez étant toujours attaché au réalisme magique, il n'y a pas de raison que la fascination soit en reste dans cette partie de sa production littéraire. Dans l'extrait suivant O. Dabène confirme que l'écrivain colombien figure en bonne posture parmi ceux qui ont fait briller le réalisme magique :

Le réalisme magique est apparu dans les années 1960-1970 et a provoqué l'explosion de la littérature latino-américaine et sa renommée mondiale. Les auteurs transforment des événements du quotidien en incluant des éléments de croyances populaires et religieuses de la mythologie propres aux Latino-Américains, déformant ainsi la réalité à travers une atmosphère surnaturelle . . . Des auteurs comme Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Jorge Luis Borges et Isabel Allende participent à la création d'un mouvement littéraire qui décrit l'histoire et la vie des peuples latino-américains. (Dabène 2006 : 46)

2.1. L'enfant génie

Le merveilleux est très impressionnant dans cette œuvre narrative de Márquez, notamment lorsqu'on s'appesantit sur le crack et la candeur du personnage de l'enfant qui relèvent du surnaturel.

Le brio des personnages enfants tels que Totó, un garçon de neuf ans et son frère Joel de sept ans, n'est souvent pas donné aux communs des mortels. Ils avaient été derniers de leur classe mais pour avoir redoublé miraculeusement d'efforts, ils sont devenus les meilleurs à telle enseigne qu'ils ont remporté le prix d'excellence. Passer du pire au meilleur est symbole d'un effort qui sort de l'ordinaire. Partant de ce constat, l'on peut affirmer sans ambages qu'en tout enfant dort un talent qui peut se réveiller à tout moment.

Hormis ces écoliers qui fascinent leur entourage par un travail efficace, le lecteur découvre un type de personnage enfant qui brille par le don de la clairvoyance dans le conte « Un métier de rêve ». Il s'agit effectivement d'une fille nommée Frau Frida. Elle est née avec un pouvoir surnaturel qui lui permet d'interpréter les rêves, de prévoir voire d'anticiper l'avenir. Le narrateur la présente ainsi :

Troisième des onze enfants d'un commerçant prospère du vieux Caldas, dès qu'elle avait su parler elle avait instauré dans la maison la bonne habitude de raconter ses rêves à jeun, dès son réveil, moment où leurs vertus prémonitoires sont encore à l'état pur . . . Mais Frau Frida avait un système de prédictions bien à elle. (García Márquez 1995 : 61)

Selon le conteur, ce talent de rêveuse n'a pas été vain puisque la petite Frau Frida en a finalement fait un métier noble :

Alors, elle frappa pour demander un emploi à la porte de la première maison où elle pensa qu'il ferait bon vivre, on lui demanda ce qu'elle savait faire et elle répondit la vérité : « Rêver ». (...) Elle fit bien et longtemps, surtout pendant les années de guerre, lorsque la réalité était plus sinistre encore que les cauchemars. Elle seule avait le pouvoir de décider, à l'heure du petit déjeuner, ce que chacun devait faire ce jour-là et comment il devait le faire, jusqu'au jour où ses prédictions devinrent l'autorité de la maison. (García Márquez 1995 : 161-162)

En se servant de son don d'oracle pour faire fortune, le personnage Frau Frida se révèle comme un être surnaturel à qui la chance n'a jamais cessé de sourire.

2.2. L'enfant : un être candide et saint

L'enfance, c'est aussi la qualité d'une personne pure et sainte. L'enfant symbolise l'innocence et la naïveté. C'est pour cela qu'il apparait comme un ange et, par conséquent, irréprochable. En parcourant le conte "La sainte" le narrateur nous amène à la découverte d'un personnage dont l'image fantasmagorique révèle à la fois le dramatique, le magique et le merveilleux. Ce personnage nommé la sainte l'est effectivement. Morte et inhumée, son cadavre est resté inaltéré. Pour avoir un éclairage sur cet événement, à la fois bouleversant et merveilleux, son père Margarito Duarte se rend à Rome pour rencontrer le Souverain Pontife avec le cadavre de sa fille. Le passage suivant en dit long :

Celle-ci, plus belle encore que sa mère, mourut à l'âge de sept ans . . . Mais le plus surprenant, toutefois, était l'absence de pesanteur du corps.

Des centaines de curieux, attirés par la rumeur du miracle envahirent le village. Aucun doute n'était possible. L'incorruptibilité du corps était un signe incontestable de sainteté et l'évêque du diocèse alla jusqu'à corroborer

l'opinion selon laquelle un tel prodige devait être soumis au verdict du Vatican. (García Márquez 1995 : 39)

Certes il y a des évènements qui choquent, mais il n'y en pas de plus pathétique que la mort d'une gamine. Cependant le mystère qui entoure le cadavre de la fillette et qui fait penser à une intervention divine suscite l'étonnement et le fantasme qui amènent les personnages éplorés à surpasser les traumatismes du deuil. Cela évite des pleurs et des cris de détresse et incite chacun à cogiter sur sa vie et sa mort prochaine. Cette histoire fantastique de la sainte relève encore du réalisme magique car l'auteur donne une charge mythique à ce qui est horrible. Parlant du fameux réalisme magique, Scheel renchérit que la place de Márquez y est incontestée :

Le phénomène ne manque pas de salsa, puisque Newsweek, magazine d'anticipation pour être régulièrement antidaté d'une semaine au moins, vient pour sa part d'annoncer la mort du réalisme magique (l'authentique, le latino-américain, celui « créé », selon eux, vers 1968 par le prophète Gabriel García Márquez). (Scheel 2014 : 11-12)

De même, dans le conte « Épouvantes d'un mois d'août », la vieille fortunée María dos Prazeres décide de remettre son chien aux soins d'une fillette qui vit en face d'elle, avant la fin de ses jours ici-bas, parce qu'elle voit en cette enfant, quelque'un de sûr, un être innocent, pur et incorruptible. Cette candeur se vérifie également au niveau de la dépouille des enfants comme celle de la sainte que nous avons déjà évoquée dans les lignes antérieures. La décision et le choix de la vieille ne sont nullement hasardeux mais fondés sur le fait que l'enfant est une créature merveilleuse.

La sociologie de la littérature que nous utilisons comme théorie prend en compte les valeurs morales de l'enfant et sa folie criminelle. De ce fait, il est également judicieux d'aborder son environnement immédiat.

3. Rapports parents-enfants

Même si l'enfant est un don de Dieu, il est tout de même clair qu'aucun enfant n'est tombé du ciel. Tout enfant naît d'un père et d'une mère à qui incombent le devoir et l'obligation d'en prendre soin. Ainsi, les relations entre géniteurs et progéniture constituent une donnée intéressante dans une approche qui est celle de la sociologie de la littérature.

3.1. Le drame de l'enfant abandonné

L'influence des géniteurs est déterminante dans la formation de la personnalité de base de l'enfant :

Les relations revêtent une importance fondamentale dans notre expérience de pédopsychiatres. En paraphrasant Winnicott, nous dirions volontiers que tous les enfants que nous rencontrons sont déjà en relations, en liens avec d'autres personnes, au premier rang desquels les parents. (Bourrat et Garoux 2003 : 1)

Pour Prado (2014, p.12), ces parents doivent être des modèles afin que leur progéniture acquière une bonne éducation et jouisse plus tard d'un avenir radieux :

Un arbre, avant d'avoir des branches et des fruits, enfonce ses racines profondément dans la terre. Il en va de même pour l'enfant. Les racines de l'enfant, c'est son attachement à ses personnes de référence primaires. (Prado 2014 : 12)

Aucun enfant ne demande à venir au monde si ce n'est la volonté des parents. Cependant, il n'en demeure pas moins vrai de constater que beaucoup de parents consacrent très peu de temps à leurs enfants. Dans ce passage nous ne focalisons pas notre analyse sur les enfants rejetés par leurs géniteurs et qui se retrouvent à la rue mais nous voulons démontrer l'importance capitale de la proximité des parents avec leurs enfants. À ce propos Olivier Galland fait remarquer :

La famille reste plébiscitée par toutes les générations et par les jeunes en particulier (82% des jeunes Européens considèrent en 1999 qu'elle est « très importante » dans leur vie et ce taux s'est accru par rapport à 1990) . . . Cependant, si la famille est loin d'être rejetée, les relations que les jeunes entretiennent avec elle se transforment assez profondément et le contrôle qu'exercent les parents sur la vie des jeunes et même des adolescents ou des pré-adolescents semble se relâcher. (Galland 2007 : 212)

Le déficit de cette proximité peut se révéler catastrophique non seulement pour la famille mais aussi pour les proches et toute la société. L'absentéisme chronique des parents auprès des mineurs ou des adolescents peut les conduire à poser des actes diaboliques. Dans le conte « L'été heureux de madame Forbes », la responsabilité de l'assassinat de l'institutrice incombe plus aux parents qu'aux enfants car le discours du

narrateur révèle que les parents ne consacrent pas suffisamment du temps aux enfants : « Parfois, nous rentrions alors que nos parents étaient déjà couchés, . . . La décision d'engager une institutrice allemande ne pouvait venir que de mon père, un écrivain des Caraïbes, avec plus de prétentions que de talents. » (García Márquez 1995 : 145).

Si ces gosses avaient des parents bienveillants, le crime commis sur leur maîtresse n'aurait pas eu lieu. Le facteur temps est très déterminant dans toute éducation, notamment celle des mineurs. Les personnages enfants qui transparaissent dans cette partie de l'œuvre narrative marquesienne ne sont ni marginaux, ni rejets de la rue. Cependant, ils ont commis une abomination qui relève d'une délinquance indescriptible à cause du fait d'avoir des parents hyper occupés par autres choses que l'éducation de leurs garçons. L'autre personnage adulte qui mérite d'être blâmé dans cet assassinat, même si le crime est indiscutablement condamnable, est madame Forbes elle-même car elle a prêté le flanc en s'enfermant dans sa chambre pour suivre des émissions obscènes sur son écran alors que les petits enfants le savaient. Le conteur le dévoile en ces termes : « C'était un vendredi, et la bouteille demeura pleine pendant tout le week-end. Mais dans la nuit du mardi, Mme Forbes en but la moitié en regardant les films érotiques à la télévision. » (García Márquez 1995 : 128)

En sa qualité d'institutrice, elle contrarie le bon exemple qu'elle est censée donner aux enfants dont l'éducation lui a été confiée. Suivre des films pornographiques relève d'un manquement grave à l'éthique parce qu'ils influent dangereusement sur le mental des enfants mineurs selon le constat de Serge Tisseron :

Les enfants grandiraient -ils aujourd'hui en quelque sorte « sous influence », soumis aux caprices d'un nouveau pouvoir qui serait celui de la télévision et du cinéma ? . . . L'accusation portait alors sur sa légèreté, voire sa pornographie qui risquaient de provoquer chez les jeunes des comportements amoraux et de les détourner. (Tisseron 2000 : 85)

Ces enfants moins soignés et négligés coexistent avec d'autres qui bénéficient d'une attention particulière de leurs parents.

3.2. Le mythe de l'enfant gâté

Nombreux adultes pensent que choyer les enfants peut les conduire à la déviance voire à la dérive. En fait l'éducation des enfants nécessite des

méthodes dures. Pour eux, il n'est point indispensable d'amadouer un enfant au point de l'amener à croire que la vie est facile tel que l'affirme :

Dans bien des cultures, surtout celles qu'on dit « traditionnelles », éducation et rigueur sont inséparables. Par exemple ce verset de la Bible : « Qui ménage sa baguette hait son fils. Qui aime corrige avec rigueur » (Proverbes XIII, 24). Nous n'allons pas ressortir ici le cliché du pessimisme judéo-chrétien ; on retrouve le même genre de conseil dans d'autres cultures. (Reboul 1989 : 85)

Par contre, la philosophie véhiculée dans cette partie de la littérature narrative marquésienne est celle qui exclut toute méthode forte dans le processus de formation des enfants mineurs. Le caractère dur de madame Forbes a amené les enfants à la haïr viscéralement. Les relations entre elle et les petits enfants ont toujours été exécrables, comme le témoigne un des personnages narrateurs de cette œuvre de Márquez : « Nous nous exécutâmes aussitôt en nous efforçant de ne commettre aucune erreur car après deux semaines passées sous la fêrule de Mme Forbes nous avons appris que vivre est la chose la plus difficile au monde. » (Márquez 92 : 121)

Un coup d'œil lucide sur ce passage montre que le manque de minimum d'affection rend l'existence infernale aux gamins. Un peu de tendresse ferait de ces enfants de petits anges. Cela éviterait la mort atroce de l'institutrice allemande. Ces petits garçons criminels et leur maitresse pouvaient être les meilleurs amis au monde si la dame avait mis un peu d'eau dans son vin. Cela est d'autant plus vrai lorsqu'on s'appesantit à nouveau sur « La lumière est comme l'eau », conte dans lequel les enfants n'apparaissent pas comme des saints puisqu'ils sont très capricieux, mais étant donné qu'ils ne sont guère soumis à un caractère répressif, ils sont passés de la médiocrité à l'excellence et puisqu'ils sont choyés et encouragés avec des cadeaux, ils s'efforceront de faire davantage mieux. Ces enfants sont entourés de soins attentifs et tendresse à telle enseigne qu'ils sont devenus faiseurs de lois. Ils n'hésitent pas à imposer leur volonté à leurs parents, selon les révélations du narrateur :

Pour Noel, les enfants redemandèrent un bateau à rames. « D'accord, dit le père, on l'achète en rentrant à Cartagena. »

Totó qui avait neuf ans, et Joel, sept ans, étaient plus têtus que ne le croyaient leurs parents.

« Non s'écrièrent-ils en chœur. On le veut ici et tout de suite. » . . . C'était un magnifique bateau en aluminium avec un filet doré qui marquait la ligne de flottaison. (García Márquez 1995 : 133)

Certes, Totó et Joel sont des enfants gâtés et débordant de caprices. Néanmoins, aucun trouble d'adolescence n'est constaté dans leur vie, encore moins des indices de crime.

Conclusion

Par le truchement de la sociologie de la littérature prônée par Pierre Zima (1985) et reprise par Paul Dirkx (2000), l'analyse du personnage de l'enfant dans *Douze contes vagabonds* de G. García Márquez nous amène à affirmer que l'enfant reste et demeure un mythe. Il est un être sur lequel la littérature et d'autres arts ne cessent de jeter un nouveau regard. L'œuvre de Márquez, à l'instar de beaucoup de contes, mythes et légendes depuis l'Antiquité gréco-romaine jusqu'à nos jours retrace le fonctionnement socioculturel de l'enfant. Les contes marquesiens symbolisent l'enfant comme une source d'inspiration et une figure incontournable de l'art littéraire car il y est représenté comme une problématique majeure et perpétuelle. La fiction narrative de l'auteur colombien, par l'entremise du réalisme magique révèle que l'enfant est un alter ego qui peut jouir du bien-être ou être confronté au malaise social lié à la condition humaine suscitant ainsi des questionnements existentiels et métaphysiques profonds.

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ENTREVISTA A LORENZO SILVA: “TODOS MIS LIBROS AÚNAN INVENCIÓN E INVESTIGACIÓN”

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Resumen

Entrevista con el escritor español Lorenzo Silva, sobre variados aspectos: entre otros, formación, vocación, ficción frente a no ficción, la novela policiaca, la COVID y los premios literarios.

Palabras clave: Lorenzo Silva, literatura, novela, entrevista, educación.

“ALL MY BOOKS COMBINE INVENTION AND RESEARCH”: AN INTERVIEW WITH LORENZO SILVA

Abstract

Interview with Spanish writer Lorenzo Silva, about various subject-matters: among them, education, literary vocation, fiction vs. non-fiction, hardboiled novel, COVID, and literary prizes.

Keywords: Lorenzo Silva, literature, novel, interview, education.

ENTREVISTA A LORENZO SILVA: “TODOS MIS LIBROS AÚNAN INVENCIÓN E INVESTIGACIÓN”

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Lorenzo Silva (Madrid, 1966) es un prolífico escritor español, que ha cultivado tanto la ficción como la no ficción. Estudió Derecho y trabajó como abogado en una empresa dedicada a la energía. Aunque su dedicación a la literatura se remonta a su adolescencia, allá por la década de 1980, no empezó a publicar hasta relativamente tarde. Su entrada exitosa en el mundo de las letras tuvo lugar en 1997, cuando quedó finalista del Premio Nadal con su novela *La flaqueza del bolchevique* (que luego sería adaptada al cine en 2003). Posteriormente, ganaría el mismo Premio Nadal en el 2000 (*El alquimista impaciente*) y el Premio Planeta en 2012 (*La marca del meridiano*). Es conocido entre un público amplio por su serie de novelas policíacas, protagonizadas por la “pareja” de la Guardia Civil Rubén Bevilacqua y Virginia Chamorro. A fecha de 2021 suman doce, desde la primera, *El lejano país de los estanques* (1998), hasta *El mal de Corcira* (de 2020). El novelista reconoce en esta entrevista que el género policíaco que cultiva se mueve en las coordenadas genéricas de la novela “hardboiled” de Raymond Chandler (1888-1959), más que en la tradición puramente hispánica (Vázquez Montalbán). Ha cultivado también la literatura juvenil. En el campo de la no ficción, ha escrito libros de viajes y de historia, así como crónicas de guerra. En esta entrevista dialogamos sobre una amplia variedad de temas, desde la formación proporcionada por el Bachillerato, hasta la vocación literaria, pasando por la inserción de la filosofía en la novela del autor, la repercusión de la COVID en la literatura y la autenticidad de los premios literarios privados.

GABRIEL LAGUNA.— ¿Cuándo tuvo conciencia de su vocación literaria, es decir, de que quería dedicarse a la literatura y vivir de ella? ¿Nos explica cuál fue el contexto en que tuvo lugar este descubrimiento?

LORENZO SILVA.— Los libros y el ejercicio de inventar historias me interesaron desde que recuerdo. Escribí mi primer cuento antes de cumplir los catorce años y con dieciséis ya quería hacer novelas y pensé que escribir

iba a ser mi misión principal en la vida. Nada me atraía, divertía ni satisfacía tanto, y creía y creo que uno debe tratar de buscar su lugar en el mundo con arreglo a lo que siente que es. Que pudiera vivir de ello, casi lo descarté en ese mismo momento y por eso, sin dejar de escribir, hice Derecho y tuve otros oficios. Estaba mentalmente preparado para no vivir nunca de la literatura, pero la vida veces te da sorpresas. En mi caso, fue quedar finalista del Nadal en 1997 (Silva 1997) y, a partir de ahí, empezar a tener editor y lectores para mis libros.

G. L.— Según la biografía publicada en su página oficial en internet (<https://www.lorenzo-silva.com/biografia/>), su vocación literaria se inició sobre 1980, es decir, cuando solo tenía 14 años. Ahora bien, su primer libro publicado es de 1995 (*Noviembre sin violetas*). Tiene una formación en Derecho y ha trabajado como asesor fiscal, auditor de cuentas y abogado. ¿Qué cree que es preferible para la calidad de una producción literaria, la dedicación exclusiva del escritor o compartida con otras dedicaciones profesionales?

L. S.— Creo que es bueno que un escritor haya hecho en la vida algo más que escribir, y que haga otras cosas si lo necesita para ser libre en la escritura. Pero si en algún momento la vida le hace el regalo de poder dedicar todo su tiempo a su pasión, sin perder por ello la libertad de escribir lo que siente que debe y necesita —para eso hace falta tener los lectores que le proporcionan la independencia suficiente— no veo que haya de negarse.

G. L.— ¿Qué recuerdos guarda del bachillerato?

L. S.— Excelentes. Esos años fueron los de mi verdadera formación. Tuve muy buenos profesores: de Lengua, de Historia, de Ciencias, de Matemáticas, de Filosofía. Sentaron las bases de mi visión del mundo con amplitud de miras, y sin subordinar las letras a las ciencias ni viceversa. En la facultad sólo completé esa formación desde el conocimiento especializado del derecho.

G. L.— ¿Qué importancia les da a asignaturas humanísticas, como la filosofía, la lengua y literatura, la historia, las lenguas clásicas (griego y latín), para la formación de un joven?

L. S.— Fundamental. Como a las matemáticas y la física, por cierto. Entiendo poco y mal —quizá porque desde siempre me gustó leer y a la vez hice bachillerato de ciencias— esa manía de establecer compartimentos estancos y jerarquías entre los saberes. El mundo se entiende desde multitud

de perspectivas o no se entiende apenas. Mi espina clavada es que por elegir ciencias dejé de estudiar griego (aunque no a los griegos), una laguna que me propongo completar en cuanto la vida me lo permita. No quiero morirme sin poder leer a Tucídides en el original y entender al menos algo. Y mi experiencia como jurista me descubrió que tal vez la asignatura más importante que estudié en toda la carrera fue el Derecho romano, cuyos textos están en latín, lengua que afortunadamente sí que estudié en el bachillerato.

G. L.— Si tenía clara una incipiente vocación literaria desde la adolescencia, ¿por qué estudió Derecho, en lugar de alguna rama de Filosofía y Letras?

L. S.— Porque para escribir literatura sólo hace falta observar, escuchar y leer, no es tan importante adquirir herramientas de análisis especializado de textos literarios o de otra índole. Preferí adquirir un conocimiento que me diera otras salidas profesionales y otro ángulo desde el que observar el mundo. Y el derecho es una buena herramienta en ambos sentidos. Dice mucho de lo que somos, y ayuda a entender las sociedades en las que nos organizamos, las relaciones de convivencia y poder, en fin, el derecho está en todas partes, como los virus, aunque no se vea.

G. L.— ¿Qué consejo le daría a un joven adolescente que quiere dedicar su vida personal y profesional a la literatura?

L. S.— Que se pregunte si acepta esa dedicación, sin límite, incluso si nadie le hace jamás ningún caso. Si no, es mejor que se busque otra actividad que le inflija menos frustraciones —y menos amargas—. Si está dispuesto a entregarse a la literatura incluso en medio del mayor de los fracasos, es escritor y será feliz en la medida suficiente, pase lo que pase con su obra.

G. L.— Es un prolífico escritor, cultivador de varios géneros de ficción y de no ficción. ¿Disfruta más escribiendo ficción o no ficción?

L. S.— Siempre me ha gustado mucho inventar, pero también me gusta investigar, y creo que puede ser igual de creativo, como creo que inventar es también una actividad muy instructiva. A medida que pasa el tiempo me cuesta más decidirme. Sigo inventando e investigando, y en todos mis libros, sean de ficción o no, hay, al final, una mezcla de invención e investigación.

G. L.— Dentro de la no ficción, ha cultivado el género de viajes, ensayo histórico, crónica de guerra, ensayo periodístico... Para la documentación, ¿confía más en la autopsia (visita personal) o en la consulta de bibliografía?

L. S.— Como a Heródoto, la autopsia me tira y la practico cuanto puedo, pero también de él aprendí que a veces uno debe poner en cuarentena lo que le cuentan y aun lo que ve, y no dejar de respaldarlo y contrastarlo con lo que vieron y anotaron otros. Las narraciones se enriquecen con la diversidad de materiales, y con el diálogo, incluso problemático, entre unos y otros.

G. L.— En ficción, es un especialista del género policíaco. La serie de novelas protagonizadas por la “pareja” de la Guardia Civil, el sargento (después brigada) Rubén Bevilacqua y su adjunta, la guardia (luego cabo) Virginia Chamorro, lo ha hecho famoso entre los lectores del género (“un guardia civil de apellido impronunciable que al cabo de los años me daría la mayor alegría que puede tener un escritor: un buen puñado de gente con ganas de leerle”) y, además, le ha hecho merecedor de ser nombrado Guardia civil Honorario por su contribución a la imagen del Cuerpo de la Guardia Civil (en 2010). El sargento “Vila” es un investigador desengañado que, sin embargo, siente que debe cumplir una misión. Para su caracterización, ¿le ha influido más el Marlowe de Chandler o el Pepe Carvalho de Vázquez Montalbán?

L. S.— Con todo el aprecio a Vázquez Montalbán, que es máximo —en lo literario y en lo personal, él me presentó *El alquimista impaciente* (Silva 2000) en Madrid—, el culpable de que yo haga novela negra es Raymond Chandler, y el gran referente entre los detectives para mí no puede ser otro que Marlowe. Ahora bien, es un personaje tan poderoso y carismático que hay que defenderse un poco de él y tomar cierta distancia irónica, y quizá en ese sentido sí que me ha ayudado algo la lectura de las novelas de Carvalho, un tipo que no termina de tomarse en serio a sí mismo. Y una parte de Bevilacqua viene de su condición de guardia civil: accidental en su caso, pero que imprime tal carácter que ni un verso suelto como él se libra de que le salpique.

G. L.— ¿Cree que la pandemia del COVID-19 va a incidir en la creación literaria? ¿El trauma causado globalmente va a tener una incidencia cultural? ¿Estamos ante una literatura post-COVID?

L. S.— Va a incidir en todo, va a derribar unas cuantas categorías y a instaurar otras, ya lo está haciendo de hecho, pero tras ella, como tras las pestes de Atenas y Bizancio —léase a Tucídides y a Procopio,

respectivamente—, lo que habrá en las calles seguirán siendo seres humanos, con sus eternas miserias y grandezas. Habrá que estar muy atento a los detalles que hayan cambiado —en ellos está la verdad, según Stendhal—, para no desfigurarse ni ser anacrónico, pero sin olvidar que la esencia de lo humano permanece, y está allí donde ya la vieron, hace muchos años, los que nos precedieron y dejaron de ello testimonio.

G. L.— Parece que la filosofía (clásica y moderna) tiene una presencia importante en su obra de ficción (Laguna Mariscal 2022). El protagonista de *La flaqueza del bolchevique* (Silva 1997) hizo su tesis doctoral sobre Spinoza. La víctima de *La estrategia del agua* (Silva 2010) lee a Epicteto para sobrellevar sus problemas vitales. El sargento Bevilacqua se nos presenta como un héroe cínico-estoico, a la vez crítico con la sociedad y consciente de su deber de paliar el mal. ¿De dónde procede este interés por la filosofía? ¿Cree que la filosofía puede ofrecer respuestas y pautas para el atribulado hombre moderno?

L. S.— La primera culpa la tiene mi profesora del bachillerato, Elisa Chozas, que me enseñó a disfrutar de ella. Luego he hecho mi camino, un poco anárquico, pero con la conciencia constante de que pensar en todo eso que no asoma a la superficie ni es inmediato es una buena manera de acabar soportando con menos infelicidad y más paz la existencia y sus complicaciones. La filosofía no resuelve ni resolverá ninguno de los grandes problemas, que son insolubles, pero ayuda a no hacerse un daño tonto golpeándose todo el rato con ellos. Y eso ya es bastante.

G. L.— Ha obtenido los más importantes premios literarios del panorama español: finalista del Premio Nadal en 1997 por *La flaqueza del bolchevique*, ganador del mismo Premio Nadal por *El alquimista impaciente* (2000), Premio Primavera de Novela 2004 por *Carta blanca*, Premio Planeta por *La marca del meridiano* en 2012. ¿Cómo valora los premios literarios, en términos generales (más allá de que le hayan sonreído personalmente)? ¿Cree que los premios literarios comerciales (concedidos por editoriales privadas) estimulan la creación literaria y el descubrimiento de nuevos valores o son más bien operaciones de márketing?

L. S.— De todo hay. Además de haber ganado alguno, he sido jurado de unos cuantos, y de todo he visto en esa doble condición. Procuro hablar de lo que sé y me consta, y no de lo que se dice o se comenta, y menos generalizar. A mí me han elegido finalista del Nadal cuando estaba extramuros del sistema editorial, escogiendo entre seiscientos la novela de

un tipo que no conocía a nadie y la envió al premio creyendo que estaba echando las copias al contenedor del papel. Me han dado un premio comercial patrocinado por El Corte Inglés con la novela menos comercial de todas las mías, un viaje al horror de la guerra de África que es lo más violento y desasosegante que he escrito nunca (*Carta blanca*). Y como jurado he visto cómo iba a parar, con mi voto, un premio de decenas de miles de euros a un desconocido en detrimento de un autor consagrado al que, por cierto, aprecio y respeto —y por eso omitiré su nombre—. Todo eso no me lo han dicho, lo he visto y lo he tocado. También le puedo decir que la única vez que alguien me invitó a presentarme a un premio dándome garantías de ganarlo —y no era un premio pequeño—, me pareció una excelente razón para no presentarme y no lo hice. Y que en más de un jurado de premios de este tipo se ha fallado con mi voto en contra, que he emitido siempre libremente. Dicho todo lo anterior, de los premios hay que mirar el palmarés, libros y autores. Ninguno es perfecto, pero hay premios comerciales denostados que han premiado grandes obras, descubierto o consolidado autores y creado no pocos lectores.

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