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## Perspectives on Contemporary Literature: Literature and the Historical Process

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# Literature & the Historical Process

## PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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PERSPECTIVES ON  
**CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE**

Volume 14 / 1988

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## To Purge Auschwitz: The Poets' View

*Kathy Rugoff*

The Nazi death universe, composed of twenty-two concentration camps tucked away in the rural countryside of Europe, marks a terrible chapter in the history of the twentieth century. While we live under the threat of thermonuclear annihilation and block it out, we still confront the historical trauma of the murder of six million Jews and several million non-Jewish civilians. The ghettos, the railroad transports, the medical experiments, and the ovens are images stored in the collective consciousness of our age.

Thus, Hitler's "Final Solution" to the so-called Jewish problem has been treated again and again by historians, theologians, poets, novelists, and playwrights. Beginning in the mid 1970's, reviews of novels, memoirs, and historical interpretations on the Holocaust began to appear regularly in the the weekly *New York Times Book Review*. It has permeated television. Documentaries, docudramas, and prime-time serials have treated almost every aspect of the experience of Europe's Jews.

Many scholars of what is now termed Holocaust literature argue that the suffering of the victims has been exploited. The autobiographies and poems written by camp inmates themselves are what these critics find most valuable. In their view, the Nazi attempt to destroy every Jew is a matter so grave that any imaginative treatment of this subject can hardly do it justice. For example Alvin Rosenfeld claims in *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* that "imaginative literature on this subject does not carry a sufficient authority in its own right and needs support from without" (79). Sidra Ezrahi expresses a similar view in *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (2-3, 219). From their perspective, generally, poems written by the men and women who witnessed Auschwitz are valid whereas few poems by American and English writers who did not experience the event are.

I disagree with these views for several reasons. First, I believe that the Holocaust is an appropriate theme for poetry. Second, the treatment of the Holocaust already constitutes a significant component of post-modern American and British poetry. Finally, we should note that the poets were drawn to it independently without being aware of the role it would assume in poetry or in the popular consciousness. Early, before the flood of schol-

arly and popular books on the Holocaust, they sensed that this terrible chapter in twentieth-century history was tremendously significant.

In the early 1960's, British writers such as George MacBeth and Peter Porter, associated with the Group poets, published poems on the Nazi destruction of the Jews. The Group poets had no unified philosophy but their work represented a strong reaction to the dry wit of Kingsley Amis, John Wain, and others. Their work was frank, autobiographical, and grotesque. As Edward Lucie-Smith pointed out in his introduction to *A Group Anthology* (1963), they had in common "a willingness to see that art is intimately, though sometimes uncomfortably painfully, linked to the business of living (ix)." As in the poetry of their closest American counterparts, the confessional poets, the Holocaust figures in their work. Porter, an Australian Jew, and George MacBeth, a Scot, find genocide so heinous that its horror was not purged when the last camp was liberated; its shadow is cast into contemporary life. Both poets are immersed in the existential crisis of post-holocaust humanity that lives under the threat of the bomb; both rail against power and oppression.

In the early 1960's MacBeth, considered the *enfant terrible* of British poetry, treated genocide in short imagist narratives and in dramatic monologues. Later in songs with galloping rhythms, he castigates the Nazis for their creation of the death camps. Often the speaker is a Nazi tormentor whom MacBeth portrays as an example of the human capacity to follow orders no matter how cruel they are. In "The Disciple," published in the late 1950's, MacBeth debunks Christianity and suggests that a man is capable of killing through the subordination of his will to a stronger will. The speaker is a Nazi executioner who worships Hitler as though he were Christ. His faith and devotion represent a complete perversion of Christianity: to the disciple, Christian evil is virtue, and Christian virtue is vice. Adoring Hitler, he thinks:

. . . I remember His  
 Burned face sharp in a nimbus  
 of blurred light against the taut flags when He spoke  
 To our massed lifted hands at  
 The Rally. . . (26)

The ironic analogy is maintained when the disciple calls Hitler's followers "martyrs." He is even filled with self-contempt because he was weak and had succumbed to pity for the camp victims. With shame he admits: ". . . When I / Raked the ovens or even touched a / Spade I felt sick . . ." (26).

Peter Porter's poems are equally grotesque. Many deal with the relationship of death to art and culture. He often uses satire to convey the

human condition as one of pain and suffering. In several poems he explores the irony in the fusion of high German culture with the death instinct, a fusion which culminated in the Third Reich. A surreal series of highly graphic images, "Annotations of Auschwitz," one of Porter's most frequently anthologized poems, explores the meaning of mass death in contemporary English society. It is ambiguous: the speaker in contemporary London identifies with the Jewish victims, yet resents the psychological intrusion of Auschwitz into his daily life. Although the speaker associates himself with the victims, Porter's diction and imagery suggest neither the speaker's sympathy for them nor the poet's sympathy for the speaker:

My suit is hairy, my carpet smells of death,  
My toothbrush handle grows a cuticle.  
I have six million foulnesses of breath.  
Am I mad. . . . (p.85)

This aversion for the victims constitutes an original approach to their suffering. The images also refer to the pathological Nazi use of the physical remains of their victims for raw material. The other images are equally revolting so that the reader must discover the meaning of Auschwitz by negation, or conclude that it was outrageous—beyond discourse.

Other British poets such as Michael Hamburger and Karen Gershon, both Jewish exiles who lost family members in the Holocaust, treat this theme autobiographically. Geoffrey Hill and Jon Silkin also grapple with the meaning of Auschwitz. Hill began dealing with it in the late 1950's. Like Porter he confronts the unlikely marriage of civilization and brutality. But unlike Porter and MacBeth, he is extremely subtle. In structured stanzas piling image upon image, and in a highly ironic voice, Hill depicts the grim tendency inherent in human fate which drives one man to the hangman's hood and the other to his noose.

Harold Bloom, who wrote the introduction to Hill's collected poems, *Somewhere is Such a Kingdom: Poems 1952-1971*, points out that his subject is "the daemonic relationship between cultural tradition and human pain" (xiii-xiv). Hill's poems, Bloom suggests, embody an anti-poetic as Hill "begins to break through his own dialects of tradition" (xxv). By wrenching words into ironic contexts in alliterative sequences, he questions the morality of a historical event and at the same time renders his own articulation of it suspect. He treats a vast array of historical subjects such as the despotic reign of an eighth-century English king, the soldier poets from the War of the Roses, and the victims of the concentration camps.

In the first sonnet of "Two Formal Elegies: *For the Jews in Europe* (1956)," nature is not portrayed in harmony with death as it is in the conventional elegy; instead, ". . . The wilderness revives, / Deceives with sweetness harshness" (19). The person whom the speaker addresses is not clear, but

he appears to be a spokesman for tainted man: “. . . we grasp, roughly, the song. / Arrogant acceptance from which song derives / Is bedded with their blood” (19). What the song is or where it comes from are not clear, and the speaker’s sorrow is overshadowed by images of barbarism.

The last four lines of the sestet are laden with irony:

Fierce heart that is the iced brain’s to command  
 To Judgment—(studied reflex, contained breath)—  
 Their best of worlds since, on the ordained day,  
 This world went spinning from Jehovah’s hand (19)

Hill wildly displaces “judgment” from any religious context. The Jews are judged and condemned to have contained breath in the gas chambers, and best here means worst. Through the setting of Jehovah in this context, creation and destruction are balanced; thus, the majesty of the former is greatly undermined.

In the second sonnet, Hill faces the problem of how the death of the Jews can be appropriately treated. It opens with a contradictory statement:

For all that must be gone through, their long death  
 documented and safe, we have enough  
 Witnesses (our world being witness-proof). (20)

In addition to the clash between witnesses and witness-proof death, the idea of death as safe also rings with irony; the end of the sonnet goes on to question the meaning of monuments for the dead:

To put up stones ensures some sacrifice.  
 Sufficient men confer, carry their weight.  
 (At whose door does the sacrifice stand or start?) (20)

Otherwise meaningless, Hill implies, the monuments simply satisfy the living. He does not suggest an alternative or that this gesture is completely meaningless. However, by placing *sacrifice* in the context of death, he further renders futile the idea of a memorial. The sacrifice of the living in putting up a stone is absurd in relationship to the staggering millions of dead. The sacrifice has no purpose except possibly to force a witness-proof world to confront mass death, and this is contradictory. As Bloom concludes: “Hill does not comfort or console, and offers no dialectic of gain through loss. His subject, like his style is difficulty: the difficulty of apprehending and accepting moral guilt, and the difficulty of being a poet when the burden of history, including poetic history, makes any prophetic stance inauthentic” (xiv). In five or six other poems on the Holocaust theme, Hill pursues the issue of atrocity and its relationship to civilization



or art. He implies that human history cannot be ameliorated by art, and this theme itself is presented paradoxically in his poetry.

Jon Silkin, who has lived in the United States from time to time, is much less paradoxical and much more confessional than Hill. He is confessional in the sense that personal and historical facts are metaphorically associated. The tragedy, for example, of his infant son's death is associated with his sorrow over the historical persecution of the Jews and the twentieth-century mass extermination in Europe.

As early as 1954, in his *The Peaceable Kingdom*, indirect references to the camp survivors surface. Four years later, in *Two Freedoms*, he treats the Holocaust in several poems. In one he addresses the victims, saying simply: "I pray your compassion for you know that I / Did not, and could not have endured your pain" (47). In 1974 Silkin published *The Principle of Water*, which included a forty-page poem, "The People," written in the voices of a couple, Finn and Kaye, and a camp survivor named Stein. It links Silkin's personal experience with historical reality. The couple have lost an infant and Stein comforts them, associating his camp experience with their loss. "The People" represents the poet's assimilation of the Holocaust, of evil, and of suffering into his world view. Love and death are not irreconcilable opposites: they compose an integrated whole, and love strengthens the individual's endurance in a world of good and evil. This is suggested both by the plot and metaphors of the poem. Love and death are symbolized in the character of Stein, whose name is the German word for stone. After his immersion in the death landscape, Stein, the victim of the Holocaust, offers the childless couple love, which they accept. In this way Silkin seeks to cope with Auschwitz. But two years later, the reconciliation of these opposites disintegrates: Silkin's poems on the Holocaust in *The Little Time Keeper* are both brooding and angry. "In Two Images of Continuing Trouble," he writes:

. . . I who write  
 a factious poem want the means  
 to bless a christian. Breath  
 from the two locomotives *Work*  
 and *Freedom* steams over  
 the numbered faces. (40)

As he alludes to the deceptive inscription on the gate of Auschwitz "Work is Freedom," he mourns the loss of the Jews, and belittles his role as a poet. After dealing with the Holocaust for twenty-two years, Silkin reaches no simple conclusion; for him it is a historical fact that has private and complex implications.

Holocaust imagery appears in the poetry of American confessional poets

such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. In the early 1960's, shortly before her suicide, Plath wrote "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus," two of her most widely anthologized works, both of which have been highly praised and harshly criticized. They employ graphic Holocaust images to convey her feelings toward her father and her impulse toward suicide. The controversy over this mode is between critics who make vastly different assumptions. Rosenfeld and Ezrahi, scholars of Holocaust literature, argue that she is using images of suffering to convey her private preoccupations and that this is both morally suspect and artistically unsound; the images trivialize the reality of Auschwitz, and they burden the poems. According to Rosenfeld, Plath's allusions to the Holocaust in "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" exemplify what he terms the "misappropriation of atrocity" (181). On the other hand, the same poems are generally regarded by critics of contemporary poetry to be among her best. They are praised for their powerful images, driving rhythms and psychological complexity.

The fact that the poems evoke so strong a response on both sides suggests that Plath's imagery is powerful. She was tormented by the extremes of a love-hate relationship with her father and by the conflicting desire to live and to die. Plath intuited parallels between her consciousness and the death camp universe where the business of life was surviving and dying. Perhaps what is so troubling about her work is she has touched upon the conflicting drive towards love on the one hand and death on the other. Thus, her work, it seems to me, is not an exploitation of the Holocaust; instead it reveals her insight in spite of her emotional instability.

Another early American response to Auschwitz but one that has little in common with the confessional poets and much more with T. S. Eliot is that of Anthony Hecht. Like Eliot, Hecht often employs irony but he writes from a Jewish perspective. In 1967 he published *The Hard Hours*, which includes "Rites and Ceremonies," a ten-page meditation on a concentration camp, Buchenwald, and on religious persecution through the ages. Although structurally similar to *The Waste Land*, "Rites and Ceremonies" presents not the spiritual vacuity of modern life, but the historical persecution of Jews and of Christian martyrs and God's apparent absence. In "More Light! More Light," in the same volume, Hecht juxtaposes a medieval heretic's death to the murder of a Pole and several Jews by a Nazi. The Jews and the Pole die anonymously whereas the heretic dies with a kind of dignity; however, God intercedes for neither. Thus, over the body of the dead Pole, ". . . every day came mute / Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through the crisp air, / And settled upon his eyes in a black soot" (65). Hecht stresses human vulnerability and our responsibility to those other people with whom we share the earth. Hannah Arendt expressed a similar view in her condemnation of Adolf Eichmann as well as his trial in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). Denise

Levertov, who parallels Arendt's view, stresses Eichmann's humanity and criminality in her thought-provoking poem, "During the Eichmann Trial," which was published in *The Jacob's Ladder* in 1961.

A dozen other American poets have dealt with the Holocaust. In the vanguard of the response to the plight of the Jews was Randall Jarrell who published "A Camp in the Prussian Forest," "In the Camp There Was One Alive," and "Jews at Haifa" in the late 1940's. Almost thirty years later three poets devoted short books to the subject. Although they differ in style, tone, and diction, their basic strategy is similar. W. D. Snodgrass through the dramatic monologue, William Heyen through the imagistic lyric, and Charles Reznikoff through the reportorial narrative lead their readers into a recognition of their own relationship to the psychology that enabled civilized nations to follow a frightful program of bloodshed. In each book, the poet himself recedes and we must confront our own reaction without the poet-spokesman to guide us.

Snodgrass's *Führer Bunker: A Cycle of Poems in Progress* (1977) is a series of grotesque monologues in the voices of Hitler, Speer, Goebbels and other leading Nazis shortly before they committed suicide in a bunker in 1945. To convey the personalities of the Nazi figures, Snodgrass creates a psychological portrait through the particular rhythm, rhyme, and imagery of each monologue. He explores the psychological underpinnings of the fascist quest for power. Although the monologues are based on transcripts and letters, guided by his intuition, Snodgrass takes liberties in interpreting what these figures could have said and thought. In an afterword, he admits that he created these monstrous figures based partly on what he knows of himself. Because he draws on this common source, these monologues explore humanity's dark, hidden drives. Without the mediation of the poet's persona, the reader is confronted by Hitler's vulgarity, lies, and obsessions. Snodgrass suggests that his drive to kill was a perversion of his instinct to live; for example, after talking about food, Hitler suddenly says, ". . . Half a million / Squirm out of our glory. Our best troops / Sacked up on the Ruhr. Too gutless / Even to get killed" (11).

The reader of William Heyen's poetry encounters image upon image of the concentration camps. The author of three sequences of Holocaust poems and a collection of them immerses his reader in a landscape more horrific than that of nightmares. The poems are plaintive and ambiguous yet rhythmically mesmerizing. Rather than present the intellectual assertion inherent in simile, Heyen uses image catalogues to convey Nazi atrocity. To Heyen, the Holocaust is the essence of nightmare, which he transposes into language so that readers must face their own interpretations and psychological insights. For example, "Blue" which considers the relationship between God and the Holocaust, creates a dream landscape

that resists the distancing offered by logical discourse. The poem, which visually resembles smoke, begins,

To witness, to  
 enter this  
 essence, this  
 silence, this  
 blue, color  
 of sky, wreaths  
 of smoke, bodies  
 of children blue  
 in their nets  
 of veins . . . (52)

and goes on to convey in a vortex of literal and figurative images the unspeakable murder of children.

Perhaps the most unembellished of Nazi atrocity poems is *Holocaust* (1973) by Charles Reznikoff. The book is based upon the accounts of inmates and guards as recorded in the legal transcriptions of the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials. Drawing from the most devastating passages, Reznikoff's *Holocaust* presents the harsh facts of Nazi brutality and Jewish suffering. An unidentified objective narrator recounts the statements of the witnesses. The material is not insulated by the poet's assimilated presentation; the reader must bear the burden of the accounts alone. One witness says, for example,

A number of Jews had to drink sea water only  
 to find out how long they could stand it.  
 In their torment  
 They threw themselves on the mops and rags  
 used by hospital attendants  
 and sucked the dirty water out of them (153)

The flat, matter-of-fact tone underscores the grim facts of the harrowing historical event known as the Holocaust.

Auschwitz, thus, constitutes a major theme in contemporary poetry. None of the poets discussed presumes to be a spokesman; the English poets in particular play down the voice of the poet. Many American poets make painful explorations into the psychology that created the concentration camp universe of murderers and victims. Reznikoff simply lets the facts speak for themselves. The response in poetry is thoughtful and thought-provoking. As opposed to a scriptwriter's use of images of the Holocaust as the backdrop for a melodramatic scene, or for a hero's ad-

ventures, the poets present Auschwitz as part of the the psychological and spiritual landscape of our age.

Over twenty years ago poets anticipated the current preoccupation with the monstrous acts that took place in Europe in the 1930's and 1940's. The poets, like their literary ancestors in fifth century Thebes, recognize the value of purgation and feel the need for a catharsis here. But a wound as deep as Dachau will take a long time to close.

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## Ghelderode's Use of History in *Christophe Colomb*

Douglas Radcliff-Umstead

Michel de Ghelderode's drama *Christophe Colomb* (1927) shares the concern of several twentieth-century European philosophers, anthropologists, and authors of fiction to comprehend the historical process and its lasting consequences. Benedetto Croce in his text *History: Its Theory and Practice* (*Teoria e Storia della Storiografia*, 1917) identified history with philosophy in motion across time. For Croce the past is always with us in the present and future, and consequently history becomes our present reality. Croce's fundamental distinction is between *chronicle* and *history* where documents, records, letters like those of Columbus form the corpse of history that a historian resuscitates through a dynamic vision of an ever-living reality from the past to the present. All history for Croce is contemporary history where the past affects us now in its enduring significance. According to Croce names and dates appear as just so many meaningless details until the historian places them in the context of living experience. Croce's theoretical opponent Luigi Pirandello had already declared in his treatise *Humorism* (*Umorismo*, 1908) that the human actors in history did not contribute toward its progress but were merely participants in a grand marionette show where the master puppeteer remained absent. While historical writing tended toward synthesis, Pirandellian humor worked through analysis to uncover the contrary of any positive accomplishment: Pirandello would focus on the imprisonment and disgrace of Christopher Columbus to demonstrate the vanity of his great discovery. In *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962) Claude Lévi-Strauss recognizes that historical consciousness functions to reconstruct a concrete image of past events which create a myth expressed as a synchronic totality. The anthropologist asserts that history is always history-for-someone who uses the myths of an earlier period, like the discovery of America, as a model to inspire practical action. History's code for Lévi-Strauss is chronology where dates are members of a class meaningful to a particular culture but irrelevant to others: thus the year 1492 is a pivotal date in western historiography but without significance for East Asia.

As a dramatist Michel de Ghelderode sought to reveal every "halluci-

*nation historique*” motivating the forces controlling society. The Belgian playwright wished to explore the process of historical change that involved his characters in destructive delusions. Seeing time as a dynamic continuum, Ghelderode circumvents chronology in *Christophe Colomb*, where the discoverer of America is placed on the same temporal and spatial plane with the aviator Charles Lindbergh. The French-language play moves away from documentary reconstruction and naturalism to seek an inner truth; consequently Columbus’s great accomplishment is almost accepted as an established fact since the dramatist concentrates upon eternal human emotions of greed, power-seeking, and the thirst to conquer the unknown rather than reproduce slavishly the sequence of events. Like the title character in Pirandello’s play *Henry IV* (*Enrico IV*, 1922), Christopher Columbus can enjoy “the pleasure of history” where he lives secure without suspense in the predictability of events that have already taken place. Ghelderode attempts in his dramas of history to penetrate what he calls the “impenetrable night of the Past” as he fathoms the mysteries of vision quests and political opportunism (*Sortilèges*, 140).

During the late 1920s and the early 1930s a variety of European playwrights turned to the story of Columbus to point out a parallel between the atmosphere of fiscal corruption and moral hypocrisy in their own times and similar social conditions at the court of Spain in 1492. Working independently of Ghelderode, the Catholic dramatist Paul Claudel composed in 1927 an epic play *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* employing the multimedia technique of filmic backdrops to represent a spiritual mission flawed by ambition and avarice but still capable of expressing the glory of God. The German stage authors Kurt Tucholsky and Walter Hasenclever collaborated in 1932 on the drama *Christopher Columbus* in six scenes moving backward in time from a *Gymnasium* history class during the Weimar Republic down to the major moments in Columbus’s career between 1491 and 1505. Tucholsky and Hasenclever satirize the ruthlessness of Spanish courtiers and high-ranking clergymen (not unlike the “democratic” leaders of Germany just before the triumph of National Socialism) blind to Columbus’s dream of cosmic exploration except for their own enrichment and the realm’s colonial expansion. In that venal milieu even Columbus has to disguise his idealism under the mask of a grasping imperialist adventurer, whose success and later decline ironically derive from Queen Isabella’s passionate attraction to him. Unlike the rapacious Spaniards in the German drama, the Indians of Hispaniola display an idyllic sagacity for having long ago abandoned commerce and warfare: customs that their Christian “liberators” will reintroduce to the total liquidation of the natives. Another German playwright, Jura Soyfer, reached the same conclusion as Tucholsky and Hasenclever in his own parable drama *Christopher Columbus* that history must require mythic heroes in order to justify the present.<sup>1</sup>

In all these plays about the Italian navigator there runs a common theme about a crass society that rewards profiteers while condemning Columbus as a dreamer.

To write his drama of a courageous dream and political betrayal, Ghelderode looked to the model of the German Expressionistic theater: to plays like Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (1891) and Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* (1912). Like the German works Ghelderode's *Christophe Colomb* tends to abstraction in employing characters who represent an entire group of persons or a professional class: the *Homme-Foule* for the general public, *Le Reporter* for the sensationalistic press, and *Le Ministre* for the sanctimonious government official. As in many Expressionistic works the French-language play revolves around a central protagonist who delivers lengthy monologues. The three tableaux of *Christophe Colomb* possess the episodic quality of a *Stationendrama* across the stages of the hero's career: struggle for recognition, successful quest, disgrace, death, and glory. Above all the play appears as if enacted in the enchantment of a dream. In the author's remarks to future directors of the drama, he calls his work a "spectacle et féerie" that should be performed quickly with the "optique du songe", (*Theatre*, I, 154). Generally aiming in his plays to achieve grotesquely mixed genres, Ghelderode uses dance, song, and acrobatic gesture to combine the ridiculous, pathetic, and tragic in a work that results as a cross between a vaudeville review and a morality play with allegorical characters. At certain moments the protagonist resembles a burlesque comedian surrounded by grimacing clowns. Like the Expressionists Ghelderode wished to show life in society as a tragicomic circus where laughter and tears are the only remedy left in the failure of institutions and values. Ambivalently Ghelderode selects the period of 1492 to deride the falseness of social forces, the very moment that official Spanish historians hail as a time of greatness for the conquest of Granada to rid the Iberian peninsula of Moorish rule, the discovery of America to establish a colonial empire, and the expulsion of Jews to secure spiritual unity under the Catholic Monarchs. The Belgian dramatist never glorifies the historical moment as he indicts the state in the figures of "Le Ministre" and especially the King for society's failure at vital renewal. Ghelderode intends to move the drama beyond a particular time and place to stage the glory and the ridiculousness of a beautiful dream of perfection. With his Expressionistic manner of treating characters as symbols of human motivations, the author employs a magic realism in this modern morality play and dramatic fairy-tale.<sup>2</sup>

Columbus emerges in Ghelderode's drama as the agent of historical change that the general populace does not comprehend and the Spanish government resents. He remains, however, the innocent wanderer searching for an Eden not in the outside world but within his own being. In the *Entretiens d'Ostende* the playwright speaks of the spiritual adventurer de-



parting on a journey to discover himself in an eternal, poetic quest. This explorer demands an inner freedom not to be granted by a destructive society that long before surrendered individual integrity to the convenience of the state. Being a dreamer renders Columbus a nonconformist in a profoundly commercial and bureaucratic environment. He must continually struggle to preserve the spark of poetic purity that persecuting society attempts to extinguish in him. Ghelderode's theatrical art consists in illuminating a spiritual personality otherwise darkened by social pressures. According to the *Entretiens d'Ostende* it is the buffoon who works to counter the evil prevailing in human affairs. As the agent of folly the buffoon sees beyond the masks and pretenses of everyday existence while providing his ironic commentary about the senseless tragicomedy developing before his eyes. The explorer-buffoon possesses what one critic calls an "esprit de voyance" to see past conventional realities to an underlying truth.<sup>3</sup> That spirit of inquiry will leave the discoverer forever vulnerable to the attacks of the multitude lacking his vision, so that he will be compelled to follow the ultimate journey to death. As the figure of the poetic discoverer Christopher Columbus brings to mind two images of exploration in Baudelaire's "Le Voyage" and Rimbaud's "Bateau Ivre" in the search for knowledge of the unknown. Ghelderode's explorer displays a singleness of mind to travel for its own sake:

Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent  
 Pour partir; cœurs légers, semblables aux ballons,  
 De leur fatalité jamais ils ne s'écartent,  
 Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours: Allons!  
 ("Le Voyage")

Columbus has the buoyancy of spirit to defy death in his mission beyond physical obstacles. After his discovery the explorer could pronounce these words from the "Bateau Ivre": "Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!" Gaining a vision of a new universe sets Columbus apart from other Europeans, destining him to the ephemeral status of a celebrity interviewed by a crass journalist but eventually to become the scapegoat for the failure of the Spanish regime to adjust to its role as a colonial power. Although an aura of negativity surrounds Ghelderode's hero, the great discoverer always retains his child-like sense of adventurousness—even before imprisonment and death.

This "féerie dramatique en trois tableaux" unfolds in a simple triadic structure: Columbus's farewell from Spain; his journey and discovery of the West Indies; his return to Spain and subsequent incarceration. To create a poetry of decor the dramatist suggests the most rudimentary stage sets: vaudeville-type flats and posters ("affiches ineptes") to announce forthcoming actions:

"La terre est-elle ronde?"  
 "Débat contradictoire." (p. 155)

In his essay collection *La Flandre est un songe* (1953) Ghelderode notes that physical objects possess a second, autonomous life of their own, and in his plays decor serves as a parallel to the forces in contention with each other. Here setting expresses the pathetic farce of brave exploration, popular incomprehension, and political cynicism: the insubstantial flats represent a world viewed as in a dream where all is unreal and vaguely menacing. After the first tableau's deliberately primitive decor, in the second scene spectators behold a cross section of the admiral's flag ship with contrasting colored lights to indicate the shifting moods of the voyage: the purity of white aloft where the lookout is trying to sight land across seemingly endless dark expanses of ocean; contending complementary reds and greens across the bridge where the sailors are close to mutiny in fear of sailing into death; the bluish light of longed-for solitude in the hold where Columbus sits at a writing table; and later in the scene when the explorer meets his guardian angel Azuret an optimistic rose-colored light to caress the bridge. As an auditory structuring device to tie one tableau to another, the reporter closes the opening scene by beginning to sing the sea song "Il était un petit navire", which Columbus will take up again in the second scene to reassure his restless sailors of eventual success as he lulls them to sleep. For the decor of the third tableau there are three doors to signify Columbus's destiny after returning from America: to the left the red door inscribed "HONTE" leading into jail; to the right a black door inscribed "SILENCE" before a tomb; and in the center a gilt door inscribed "GLOIRE" to represent an arch of triumph into posterity. At the peak of the large construction in the third tableau is a pedestal upon which a Columbus made legendary after death will be petrified as a statue. Decor, lighting, and song all contribute to building a highly imagistic play about ambition, betrayal, and historical myth (Ehlke, 4-5).

At its opening this drama recaptures a child-like enchantment, for Columbus appears on scene seated on a suitcase (emblematic of his status as the universal traveler) blowing soap bubbles. Those bubbles symbolize nearly impossible dreams; in their perfect formation the tiny spheres stand for new worlds to be discovered by the Italian exile fleeing the decadence of Spain and the rest of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Circles and spheres according to Carl Jung express an aspiration toward completeness across the cosmos: "the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the ground plans of cities, or in spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life—its ultimate wholeness (*Symbols*, 240)." By envisioning the world as a spherical globe Columbus

opposes academic, ecclesiastical, and political authorities with their insistence on the earth's flatness. But most of all his is a psychic voyage to a perfection not to be found in Europe or America.

For a lover of solitude like Columbus the first tableau continues as a series of tormenting interrogations from various representatives of society who treat the navigator like a buffoon. The reporter combines the skills of photographer and public relations expert in a vain promise to promote Columbus' dream of exploration. A figure from the past comes on scene in Amicus, a former classmate of the Genoese traveler, someone who early learned the profitability of compromising with prevailing theories of reality. But on considering the remote possibility of Columbus's being able to prove his version of the world's form and open new trade routes, Amicus invests a pittance in the expedition. Childhood friendships have less substance than soap bubbles. Amicus' attitude toward the journey does reveal a pragmatic viewpoint recognizing that a discoverer will have to act the role of civilizer with the financial resources provided by investors. Columbus dreads the corruption threatened by others' money. With the appearance on stage of a sleepwalker Columbus beholds a mirror image of himself as the supreme dreamer, the object of general ridicule for his insistence on the earth's roundness. The would-be explorer confronts official representatives of the state and the academy in "Le Ministre" and "Le Savant" who condescendingly acknowledge the historical and scientific significance of Columbus's project while obdurately holding onto past institutions and theories. Bergson's notion of the comic in *Le Rire* as mental inelasticity is illustrated by the scholar's retention of Ptolemaic geography while the minister of state maintains a cowardly neutrality neither discouraging nor encouraging Columbus. Compared to the dynamic explorer, the monolithic regime upholds stasis fearing the chaos that might follow upon the projects of innovators, inventors, and discoverers. But since Columbus's dream quest might result in enriching the state, there could be no official condemnation of his efforts but pressure for him to withdraw. Before the glib exponents of intellectual and governmental status quo the navigator offers a gracious but firm resolve to pursue his dream.

Because of the long history of Spanish oppression in Flanders, Ghelderode represents the Hispanic monarchy as a capricious and menacing force. Instead of introducing the traditional situation of Queen Isabella's threat to pawn her jewels to finance Columbus's voyage (as occurs in the play by Tucholsky and Hasenclever), the author brings onto scene a generic King and his court jester Foliai, the same duo who also appear in his drama *Escorial* (from the same period, 1927) as antagonists engaged in a battle of wits to the death. Here the King plays a petulant straightman to Foliai's comic observations while an explosive tension vibrates beneath the superficial politeness of court protocol. While the King seeks to maintain control of his realm by discouraging change, Columbus's self-transcending

mission points to a future of ever increasing opportunities and challenges that will radically alter the state. Both the King and Columbus are fully aware that they have become arbiters of historical progress, reluctantly as in the monarch's case and ambivalently for the explorer in quest of psychic spheres rather than terrestrial continents. Although political expediency might permit the King to order Columbus's arrest as an artistic subverter of traditional beliefs and values, the ruler also decides upon a pragmatic course to authorize the voyage and ultimately determine the realm's destiny as a world power. Without men of artistic insight, the monarch concludes, the kingdom's chronicles could never be written. After the stage brightens with the multicolored pennants of a flag ship and the King approves of Folia's exclaiming "Soir historique" (p. 163), a woman appears whom Columbus confusedly addresses as mother, fiancée, and country since she represents the eternal feminine to inspire agents of historical movement like the great navigator. At last the Homme-Foule simulates a crowd's cheerful send-off of the ship while the Reporter jots down his final notes. A point like Julius Caesar's crossing the Rubicon has been reached as Columbus and the King have fully assumed their mission in history.

Throughout the second tableau of the sea voyage to America, Columbus attempts to resist and undermine historical change, even intoxicating his crew with whiskey so that they will not sight land. For the admiral what matters is the mystery of a spiritual adventure, not the disillusioning discovery of uncharted territories. The explorer's vision of the new world combines the marvelous Isles of the Blest from the *Voyage of St. Brendan* with the fearful lands described in the tales of Edgar Allen Poe (here called by Columbus as "Sir Edgar"). The reality of discovery would demolish the perfect dream of another Eden where the navigator could lose himself in cosmic awareness, like a tiny crab wandering over an infinite shore. Yearning most of all for complete solitude, Columbus confronts apparitions of the threatening siren Visquosine and his protective angel Azuret: opposed facets of his psyche as the destructive seductress and the male guardian. On the verge of discovery Columbus finally breaks through to an understanding of his quest for the ideal in a universe that always remains imperfect: "A chacun son illusion. La mienne est sévère, inaltérable . . . Sphère, je t'évoque comme une femme et j'épouse ta forme accomplie . . . Mais toi, Terre, tu n'es plus la sphère idéale; je te quitterai pour une autre où je serai seul, une sphère d'avant-garde" (p. 173). At this instant of inner illumination America is discovered, and the dream is forever annihilated. A delegation of Indians, led by a resplendently garbed Montezuma (the historical archetype of an Indian ruler), boards the flagship as two cultures, European and Amerindian, face each other in full comprehension of their destinies: the imperialist future of Spain and the subjugation of indigenous peoples with whiskey and warfare. As in the

drama by Tucholsky and Hasenclever, the Indians in this play possess a superior soul to that of the voracious Europeans, a poetic vision that makes them: "Des poètes qui ne sont ni des fonctionnaires, ni des maquereaux. Ils ont infiniment de culture et de tact. Ils savent les plus anciennes fables de la terre. Quant aux astres, ils sont leur souci et le motif de leurs chants. Ces poètes vivent dans la solitude et n'ont pas de nom et se font obéir des bêtes. Ils sont chastes, n'écrivent point et jamais ne révèlent au vulgaire le secret de leurs extases" (p. 181). While the historical Christopher Columbus in his letters to the royal treasurer Luis de Santangel emphasized the enormous generosity of the Indians, the navigator in Ghelderode's drama recognizes in the natives a kindred poetic spirit not yet alienated by European culture.<sup>5</sup>

History as art and dream emerges in the final tableau when a disillusioned Columbus returns to Spain amidst the jingoistic and anti-Semitic hurrahs of *L'Homme-Foule*. In his despair the explorer speaks in paradoxes, realizing how he has never lived but wasted his life in dreaming. A Minister of State comes on scene to congratulate the admiral for having expanded the confines of the realm—the only genuine concern from a political point of view. But just for that very successful imperialist venture the King condemns Columbus to the restful retreat of a prison. Both men must accept the burdens of history and social mission: the heavy crown of sovereignty and the chains of incarceration. The King knows that he has to debase the discoverer in order for posterity to glorify him. As with the King's murdering Foliol in *Escorial*, Ghelderode produces what Antonin Artaud affirms in *Le Théâtre et son Double* as a theater of cruelty: the sacrifice of the scapegoat, here in the cynical interests of the monarchy. When a foppish "Poète" later visits Columbus in prison, the admiral lyrically evokes the wonders of the New World as a parade of blood and plumes while in a vision-scene Montezuma and three Indians dance a mime about the death of sacred birds. In retrospect the explorer sees history as the loss of poetic splendor. Death comes to Columbus as an admiral who will take him to travel "parmi les bulles lumineuses" (p. 182) of the day of Creation, away from the ashen, puerile and perverse globe of the earth. Death is the reality that makes all of history an illusion. Having passed through the doors of Shame and Death, the navigator enters into a raucous glory in a final sequence when he is transformed into a statue adorning an American celebration of Columbus Day where an orator, Buffalo Bill, and a prima ballerina join with a brass band playing "A Mighty Fortress is our God" to hail the discoverer of America for his role in their history. Time has deprived Columbus of Life and petrified him into pure Form, like the celebrated poet in Luigi Pirandello's play *Quando si è Qualcuno* (*When You Are Somebody*, 1933) who feels he has lost all genuine emotions and natural ties to become merely the statue of a famous writer. But in the silence and shadow following the boisterous celebration, humanity triumphs to close

the play when Columbus's statue weeps authentic tears as life reanimates history.

For Michel de Ghelderode the theater was to be an instinctive art of dreams that release the public from the artificial restraints of repressive society. His drama *Christophe Colomb* is a meditation on the poetic spirit imprisoned in his historic role as explorer. The solitude afforded by imprisonment causes Columbus to appreciate the vision of natural innocence and beauty that he glimpsed among the Indians of America. As prisoner and petrified statue the discoverer becomes the sublime buffoon figure having played out to the full his mythic role in historical progress. While physical death could bring the man escape from the responsibilities of Time, the accomplishment of his vision-quest made him an eternal actor in history, chronicle, and poetry. As the poet-artist of global exploration Columbus must suffer a martyrdom that will be redeemed in Ghelderode's theater. In this vaudeville review of history the hero pursues an Edenic obsession that will forever alter the destiny of two continents. Ghelderode's poetic farce of lost purity recaptures the pathos of a spiritual mission of discovery and sacrifice beyond a new horizon of human imagination and experience.<sup>6</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. George Wellwarth, 22-26, comments on the remarkably similar conclusions reached by Soyfer as well as Tucholsky and Hasenclever in leading their dramas to a confrontation between an idealistic Amerigo Vespucci and a disillusioned Columbus.

2. Ritchie, 15-20, describes the main traits of Expressionistic theater.

3. Giorgi, 481, points out Ghelderode's spirit of insight into the past.

4. Deberdt-Malaquais, 31-32, speaks of the spherical bubbles in these terms: "Emblème de la perfection absolue, la sphère codifie en quelque sorte l'aspiration la plus fondamentale: refus de la séparation, élan vers l'unité, confluence du sujet et de l'objet."

5. Cantarella, 98-102, provides the text of a key letter from Columbus to Luis de Santangel.

6. I would like to thank my former colleague Helen Hellman for sharing with me work in progress on the figure of the buffoon in Ghelderode's dramas.

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## Alienation and Form in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* Trilogy

*Huck Gutman*

Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality); in short, it becomes space. . . . As the commodity becomes universally dominant, this situation changes radically and qualitatively. The fate of the worker becomes the fate of society as a whole. . . . The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society; that—for the first time in history—the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws.

—Georg Lukacs, "Reification and the  
Consciousness of the Proletariat"

John Dos Passos was a well-known writer in 1927, when the committee which organized the defense of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Niccolo Sacco asked him to come to Boston and help cover, for the national press, the appeals of their conviction for murder. The effort to save these two men, symbols to the right of growing anarchy in America, symbols to the left of the persecution of the powerless by the powerful bent upon defending their interests, affected Dos Passos profoundly, and he spent the next decade writing a massive trilogy of novels which investigated the crisis into which he felt American had plunged, headlong.

The trilogy, ambitiously entitled *U.S.A.*,<sup>1</sup> took as its subject America in the first thirty years of the twentieth century; no less a critic than Jean-Paul Sartre was overwhelmed by its breadth and historical density: "Dos Passos' world—like those of Faulkner, Kafka, and Stendahl—is impossible because it is contradictory. But therein lies its beauty. Beauty is a veiled contradiction, I regard Dos Passos as the greatest writer of our time."<sup>2</sup>



The central concern of the three novels is history, the historical transformation which brought into being the modern economic and social structure we call corporate society, and which we still inhabit today. The novels detail the rise of the corporation man, the advent of advertising, the curious social mobility whereby the children of the lower classes can rise to become the highly paid managers and executors of the interests of the ruling elite. Each of the novels' major characters either moves into the upper middle class, serving the interests of regnant powers, or struggles against those interests in radical causes, a struggle which dooms the character to failure and impotence.

What is most stunning about *U.S.A.*—still, some half century after the novels were published—is Dos Passos' radical experimentation with novelistic form. Each novel is comprised of four different modes of narration: conventional third person narration in a realist mode, free verse biographies, stream of consciousness episodes, and collages of newspaper clippings and other items of verbal popular culture.

The first mode, a rather conventional form of fictional narration, was easily recognizable to readers of Victorian fiction. It relates the chronological development of a variety of characters who, as has been mentioned, either rise or sink in social status. An example is this description of the eighteen-year-old Eleanor Stoddard's workweek:

Evenings she used to sit in her little sordid cubbyhole of a room with its ugly bedspread and ugly iron bed, while a sound of hymn singing came up from the common hall, reading Ruskin and Pater out of the public library. Sometimes she would let the book drop on her knees and sit all evening staring at the dim reddish electriclight bulb that was all the management allowed.

Whenever she asked for a raise Mrs. Lang said, "Why, you'll be marrying soon and leaving me, dear; a girl with your style, indefinable chic can't stay single long, and then you won't need it."

Sundays she usually took the train out to Pullman where her mother's sister had a little house. . . . After supper if it was fine the old people would walk down to the station with her and put her on the train, and Aunt Betty would say it was a shocking shame for a lovely girl like her to be living all alone in the big city. Eleanor would smile a bright bitter smile and say she wasn't afraid.

The cars going home would be crowded Sunday nights with young men and girls sticky and mussed up and sunburned from an outing in the country or on the dunes. Eleanor hated them and the Italian families with squalling brats that filled the air with a reek of wine and garlic and the Germans redfaced from a long afternoon's beerdrinking and the drunk Finn and Swedish workmen who stared

at her with a blue alcoholic gleam out of wooden faces. Sometimes a man would try to start something and she'd have to move into another car. (*The 42nd Parallel*, 192-3)

The originality of these sections, otherwise exemplars of a realism practiced in America since the time of Howells, lies in the flatness with which the characters are drawn. The reader maintains a certain distance from the characters—J. Ward Moorehouse, Daughter, Mary French, Ben Compton, Richard Savage—despite the close attention the narration pays to the events of each character's life, a distance which grows greater as the narration of that life proceeds. Despite the intimacy of detail—the narration about a character usually begins with the years around puberty—time has shed, as Lukacs maintains of the period dominated by industrial capitalism—its "qualitative, variable, flowing nature."<sup>3</sup> Again, as Lukacs claims, the character's life—his or her existence through time—"freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things.' "

Lukacs, of course, is referring primarily to the member of the working class, whose life has become so alienated from himself (or herself) that it presents itself to him as an object, or more particularly as a series of objects, the series of objects which he, in his working time, has produced. Dos Passos extends this self-relation, this alienation, this self that has reproduced itself as a series of objects, so that it is comprehensive, so that every human being, every series of actions, becomes objectified to all observers, as the characters are objectified to the reader.

What Dos Passos accomplishes, in the narrative sections of *U.S.A.*, is to transfer to each of the characters the kind of objectification that characterizes individuals who live under capitalist modes of production. Alienation has become endemic: it is clear that the lives of all Dos Passos' major characters have become distant to themselves, that the intense motivations of their youth, their poignant self-awarenesses, have become so vitiated that they feel themselves to be automatons, progressing upon tracks which they once, for reasons no longer recognized, laid down for themselves. But such alienation encompasses more than the relations of individuals to themselves, for it characterizes human relations as a whole. Alienation describes the fundamental relation between the reader and the images of human beings which the reader encounters in this fictional universe of *U.S.A.*

A second narrative mode in *U.S.A.* is biographical. In loosely structured free verse Dos Passos presents the potted biographies of great or emblematic men and women. Henry Ford, Samuel Insull, Randolph Bourne, Isadora Duncan, Woodrow Wilson: these are representative of the dozens of figures he presents. There is an odd tension between the biographies and

the narrative sections, for all of the historical personages are not only clearly drawn but memorable, memorable not so much because they are famous, but because their lives *matter*. Dos Passos subscribes ironically, within the confines of this narrative mode, to Emerson's famous dictum that history is nothing but the biographies of great men. What is ironic is that this biographical approach is yet another symptom of alienation, for the life of the whole society is objectified in the lives of a few of its most prominent individuals. Yet paradoxically these personages do not seem alienated, either from world-historical process (even when they feel as alienated as do Thorstein Veblen or Bourne), or from the reader.

That the biographies often present them as failures—Dos Passos often limns them as severely warped human beings, or exposes their failure to accomplish what they wished to do—is also ironic, for few readers can recognize the historical figures' failures as sharply as Dos Passos drew them. These biographical personages are all actors in a grand historical drama, and even if their effect is not what they intended, yet their lives have a profound historical purpose, as in this episode from the biography of Henry Ford:

Henry Ford had ideas about other things than the designing of motors, carburetors, magnetos, jigs and fixtures, punches and dies; he had ideas about sales;

that the big money was in economical quantity production, quick turnover, cheap interchangeable easilyreplaced standardized parts;

it wasn't until 1909, after years of arguing with his partners, that Ford put out the first Model T.

Henry Ford was right.

That season he sold more than ten thousand tin lizzies, ten years later he was selling almost a million a year.

In these years the Taylor Plan was stirring up plantmanagers and manufacturers all over the world. Efficiency was the word. The same ingenuity that went into improving the performance of a machine could go into improving the performance of the workmen producing the machine.

In 1913 they established the assemblyline at Ford's. That season the profits were something like twenty-five million dollars, but they had trouble in keeping the men on the job, machinists didn't seem to like it at Ford's. (*The Big Money*, 45.)

Still, the historical purpose is one which is beyond the control of any of the subjects of the biographies, and thus despite their connection to history—which does lend them a stature and dignity which the fictional characters lack—they finally appear as characters in a great naturalist drama,

in which the forces of history and environment finally tend to turn them into objects themselves. Less than a page after the passage cited above, Dos Passos writes: "The American Plan: automotive prosperity seeping down from above. It turned out there were strings to it."

Yet all of the men and women described in the biographies *do* have a role to play in history. In contrast, the fictional characters are limited to playing the role of 'one amongst the multitude': their importance is that they—although not a single one of them recognizes this—are the types of modern men and women. They are the crystallized, individualized, residue of the mass of men and women. They feel their own individuality, but it is not that individuality, but rather their lack of it, that characterizes them. Or, as Lukacs had described it, "The fate of the worker becomes the fate of society as a whole."

Opposed to both the fictional characters and the biographical personages is the first-person narrator of the "Camera Eye" sections. Written in a poeticized, hot-house language that is associated with self-consciously poetic stream-of-consciousness narration, these sections coalesce into an impressionistic autobiography of Dos Passos himself. The narrator is indeed the representative of the "atomization of the individual." Although he reacts to external events, although history impinges upon his consciousness and forces its way into his considerations, this first-person narrator gives the overwhelming impression of a self almost totally locked within itself. 'Reality' is reduced to a matter of impressions, and no matter how strenuously the narrator tries to connect up with a world about him, a historical world, he is almost always unsuccessful.

The only episode which successfully reaches through the excessive self-consciousness, the insufferable rhetoric of puerile sensitivity, is not surprisingly the episode which portrays the narrator's response to the final rejection of Sacco and Vanzetti's appeal, and their subsequent execution. Only at this moment, when there surfaces a strong current of democratic and class solidarity, can the reader penetrate the smog of subjectivity and encounter the profound felt experience of a human life. "We stand defeated America," the narrator mourns, and in this instant he comes alive. The passage begins, "they have clubbed us off the streets they are stronger they are rich" and concludes with Vanzetti's final stirring words from prison:

*If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at streetcorners to scorning men. I might have died unknown, unmarked, a failure. This is out career and out triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as now we do by an accident.*

Now their work is over the immigrants haters of oppression lie quiet in black suits in the little undertaking parlor in the North

End the city is quiet the men of the conquering nation are  
 not to be seen on the streets  
 they have won why are they scared to be seen on the streets? on  
 the streets you see only the downcast faces of the beaten the streets  
 belong to the beaten nation all the way to the cemetery where the  
 bodies of the immigrants are to be burned we line the curbs in the  
 drizzling rain we crowd the wet sidewalks elbow to elbow silent pale  
 looking with scared eyes at the coffins  
 we stand defeated America (*The Big Money*, 414)

But the exception proves the rule. For the rest of the "Camera Eye" sections reveal nothing so much as the atomization of each individual consciousness, proving in the process that the alienation which afflicts the fictional characters has encumbered the first-person narrator as well: he is cut off from relating his experience, and his subjective view of things is not a platform on which to build—as Emersonian self-reliance had maintained it would be—but a prison which precludes effective human intercourse.

The final narrative mode of *U.S.A.* is a literary presentation which finds its visual analogue in the collage. These "Newsreel" sections present the reader with the welter of social and cultural detritus which assaults the consciousness of each human being who lives in modern society: newspaper headlines, popular songs, bits of journalistic information, newsreel narration, codified gossip. Dos Passos captures, perhaps more effectively than any writer before or since (with the possible exception of Thomas Pynchon) the white noise which is omnipresent in all modern social settings. One strains, in reading, to find a logic to these presentations, to find an underlying motif which might transform the noise into some secret music. But the effort is in vain: the sheer mass of sound overcomes every attempt to adduce some codifiable, summarizable understanding. In some ways the most successful aspect of the novel—they recreate the historical milieu instead of trying to capture its essence—the "Newsreel" sections powerfully reinforce the notion that for those living in history the history that is being made around them is primarily a welter of individual incidents which have no connection to one another.

*Oh the eagles they fly high  
 In Mobile, in Mobile*

Americans swim broad river and scale steep banks of canal in brilliant capture of Dun. It is a remarkable fact that the *Compagnie Generale Transatlantique*, more familiarly known as the French Line, has not lost a single vessel in its regular passenger service during the entire period of the war.

## RED FLAG FLIES ON BALTIC

"I went through Egypt to join Allenby," he said. "I flew in an aeroplane making the journey in two hours that it took the children of Israel forty years to make. That is something to set people thinking of the progress of modern science."

*Lucky cows don't fly  
In Mobile, in Mobile*

## PERSHING FORCES FOE FURTHER BACK

SINGS FOR WOUNDED SOLDIERS; NOT SHOT AS SPY

*(Nineteen Nineteen, 198)*

Dos Passos recreates for the reader, in these Newsreels, the daily historical reality of the first thirty years of the century: one sees a plethora of isolated details, each of which bombards consciousness with an insistent but meaningless concreteness.

*U.S.A.*, with its multiple modes of narration, is one of the more successful American efforts at recapitulating history within an esthetic frame. Dos Passos epitomizes the underlying pattern in individual lives in the narrative sections, showing through quite disparate examples how youthful expectations are never fulfilled, how social forces warp individual desire, how the trajectory of such lives—be they outwardly perceived as successful or failed—is always a movement from enthusiasm towards despair, desperation, and above all alienation. His biographies chart the social currents which impel both institutions and the lives of individuals within them, for it is these currents, rather than the achievements of the men and women who are the subjects of the biographies, which ultimately come to the fore. His "Camera Eye" sections reveal the profound atomization of the subject, while at the same time portraying the manner in which historical events are subjectively felt. And his "Newsreel" presents history not as history but as actuality, as events as yet unshaped by any historical imagination. History, in *U.S.A.*, is personal and social, subjective and objective, public and private, writ large and writ small.

But *U.S.A.* is somehow more than the sum of its parts. For what the multiple narrative styles of the novels reveal more than anything else is the end result of the "unified economic process" of corporate capitalism. The multiplicity of narration is a concrete manifestation of the loss of organic unity in modern society; it is itself a reification of the freezing "into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' " that Lukacs had described as the condition of perception of alienated man and woman. What is on one level an esthetic triumph—the ability to sustain a multi-faceted view of a historical period—is on another level

a symptom of modern malaise. The voice of the narrator of these novels is profoundly alienated, split off from any coherent sense of self into a formulaic quartet of voices.

It may be objected that Dos Passos is only indulging in the experimentalism which characterized the period of high modernism. But that is exactly the point: the emergence of modernism is homologous to the triumphant ascension of modern, technological, managerial, corporate capitalism. Modernism is a profound response to alienation, to the feeling that one's self is not one's own: it responds by rejecting the inauthentic and alienated self and searching for a new one. But, as Dos Passos so eloquently reveals, the new self, the new voice, is unattainable, for as it is based on the discovery and subsequent manipulation of new techniques of saying, it is therefore inherently technological rather than authentic, formulaic rather than organic. Modernism seeks to overcome alienation by consciously embracing an inescapably alienated voice, and so manifests in its attempted overcoming exactly what it had hoped to overcome.

This is not to criticize Dos Passos, nor his contemporaries. We can see in the case of *U.S.A.*, that Dos Passos has at the profoundest level engaged the history of his times. For history in all its complexity requires that the historian embody, in his or her historical inquiries, not only the subject of history, but also its *specifically historical* shape. In *U.S.A.* that shape is the shape of alienation, for the novels reveal clearly to the reader the shaping force that has brought them into being. "The 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended" as Lukacs claims, "to cover every manifestation of life in society:" the lives of individuals, the lives of their leaders, the subjectivity through which these laws are perceived, the flow of information. And, finally, the very form in which one is able to see one's own history is subject to these laws: the four-part narrative form of the novels of *U.S.A.* reifies the very alienation which is its central subject.

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#### NOTES

1. The three novels which comprise *U.S.A.* are *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). The edition cited hereafter is *U.S.A.*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963; each novel is paginated separately.

2. "John Dos Passos and 1919" in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson, New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, p.96.

3. Lukacs, George. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat." *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. All citations from Lukacs are from the passage which serves as the epigraph to this essay, and which is drawn from pp. 90-92 of the work cited.

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Reimagining the Arts of War: Language & History in  
Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* &  
Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness*

*Phyllis Lassner*

In an article about what's new in British fiction in *The New York Times Book Review* a couple of years ago, Salman Rushdie responded to the claim that the English do not write about politics by saying:

If you think of World War II—America, Germany and Italy all produced extraordinary novels about it; England didn't. Perhaps that also has something to do with the fact that the end of the war and the end of the Empire happened at almost the same time. There's a certain amount of living in a green world of the past in England. . . . There have been few attempts to come to terms with contemporary England, though perhaps that's beginning to change" (*New York Times Book Review*, 23).

While war and the end of Empire coincided, British women writers salvaged what was left of home and family to create from the rubble of the Blitz an art that has largely been ignored. These writers depict a crumbling world which locates the end of war and the end of the Empire as having originated from within. For these writers, the green world of the past is not worth returning to, either in an attempt to rebuild it or in nostalgic fantasies. This paper will deal with only two of the many significant works of fiction written by British women about World War II.<sup>1</sup> Together, they capture the effects of war on those who had no part in creating it, but who were left homeless and in exile, and who suffered losses of family, lovers, and friends. Out of a world shattering around them, Elizabeth Bowen and Rose Macaulay shatter the absolutes through which wars are conceived, fought and won to explore the moral, psychological and linguistic ambiguities which brought both victory and the end of Empire.

In both *The Heat of the Day* by Elizabeth Bowen and *The World My Wilderness* by Rose Macaulay, women artists find themselves forced to reexamine those traditional values which were supposed to sustain them and



their world. Behavior and language become discordant as words such as duty, loyalty and national identity become suspect. The war unveils the absurdity of equating the spoken and body language of decorum and civility with emerging feelings about family and cultural unity. The shock of recognition comes with the aftermath of heroics. When men and women are reunited, they discover that the different battles they fought at home or on fields of combat parallel the different moral and psychological territory they have always occupied. Victory cannot conceal the deep fissures war has exposed on the home front. The experience of women in war transforms the domestic novel into personal epics which show the complex difficulties of coming to terms with contemporary England.

Both *The Heat of the Day* and *The World My Wilderness* were written after the war—1949 and 1950 respectively.<sup>2</sup> While Bowen's novel deals with the Blitz itself, Macaulay's shows the aftermath of war and its lingering effects. At the center of each novel is a woman who, as an artist figure, casts doubt on the arts of this righteous war. Helen, in Macaulay's novel, is a painter who also invents twelfth century Provençal poetry, passing it off as scholarly discovery and who prefers gambling to domestic arts. Stella, in Bowen's novel, works for the Ministry of Information decoding language that, like the fictive arts, may have no utility in the "real world." Having been caught at the outbreak of war in Vichy France, Helen finds herself more compatible with the contingencies of resistance masquerades and with her French lover who "collaborated mildly" than with the certitude in the morality plays of her lawyer husband and his world (4). Likewise, Stella glides easily between worlds of patriotic duty and treason as she is pursued by a British counter-intelligence agent who looks to her for the true story about her lover, suspected of spying for the Nazis. Both women embody the no man's land of moral ambiguity felt by women writers who served their patriotic duty in a war they did not create and could not end.

If Helen and Stella are lost in a world made and destroyed by others, their children create a new art which critiques their fathers' art of war and their mothers' artifacts. In their child's play they invent a tragic-comic theater in the rubble, or on their return from battle, imagine a revitalized past. Two generations thus encircle each other in interpretive and creative arts, each discovering that the process is necessarily endless if one is to imagine a sustaining world.

Conventional definitions of artistry are questioned in both novels through the interplay and distinction between the art of men and women, between definitions of action and acting and of reality, representation, and interpretation. Although the men really collaborate with the enemy, their treachery seems authentic and real only as the women represent it as stories. As Harrison the counterspy pursues Stella more relentlessly than he does her treasonous lover, Bowen's narrative suggests that there is more to spy stories than ferreting out the traitor or trading secrets. Making

Robert Kelway's guilt a given allows Bowen to focus on the more difficult task of finding meaning in the language of secret stories and hidden selves. As Stella protects herself from and yet yields to the spy plot, the novel shows that the events of war are only reified by the stories which interpret them. Both spy and counterspy need Stella to make sense of their plots and their actions. In a war where such interpretation seems impossible, the woman is suspected of harboring secret meaning.

Once optimistic about the ability of middle-class England to reconcile traditional family values with the discontents of modern life, by World War II Bowen saw only "the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power, and permanence attaches to bulk and weight" (*Ivy Grips the Steps*, XIII). In *The Heat of the Day* the art of war exposes the incoherence of conventional moral dualities. Distinctions between "good guys" and bad break down and all clues become canards as each meeting of Harrison or Kelway with Stella diffuses the differences between motives for spying for the homeland and spying for the enemy; indeed explodes the representation and definition of spying itself, as Stella tells Harrison: "you *are* a counterspy, which I understand to be some sort of spy twice over . . ." and then at their next meeting, "Below one level, everybody's horribly alike. You succeed in making a spy of me" (40,152).

Despite their frantic reliance on a rhetoric of absolutes to make sense of their actions and plotting, spy and counterspy enact the futility of such language to provide an interpretive key. Thus Kelway justifies his treason to Stella by equating "freedom" with a "racket, a slave's yammer" which provokes such anxiety that men yearn for unbreakable law, unambiguous order (302). As he speaks, however, Kelway retreats into silence, becoming as unpalpable as the abstractions he bases his life upon. He becomes interchangeable with his nemesis, Harrison, with whom he shares the same first name, Robert. Like the man from nowhere who cancels himself out by speaking only in double negatives and becoming only "a ghost or actor," a "face with a gate behind it," Kelway uses a language which cancels his individuality, indeed, which leads to his disappearance into the chaos he fears (155,159). His death, either by "fall or leap," confirms the failure of language to construct absolute boundaries of definition. He disappears from the narrative in ambiguity.

The threat of ambiguity to destroy a self modeled on absolutes resonates through the triangular relationships between Kelway, Stella, and Harrison. Each man brings his plot to Stella for interpretation, all the while fearing that she will either withhold the meaning of their stories from them or that the meaning she holds within her may cause their dissolution. Stella, however, cannot satisfy them, for she is fully aware of the duplicitous and unstable nature of stories and interpretation, as in the one about her divorce. Like Kelway's guilty acts and Harrison's sleuthing, the end of Stella's marriage to Victor Rodney is not dramatized, but narrated as a man's

story. Like that of Kelway and Harrison, its language of polarities threatens to destroy its subject. This narrative is made even more dangerous as the coherence of Stella's interpretation of her husband's story is threatened by her inability to assert the authenticity of her feeling in more tenuous language and to make meaning of the absolutes in men's deployment of the language of feeling. Just as Stella is betrayed by Kelway's Nazi rhetoric and Harrison's reliance on the war to sort out the "crooks" and "put the other lot of us in the right" (34,33), so her husband suppresses her story by insisting on a language of absolute definition which lies beyond her comprehension. Telling her husband that she loves him is proof to him that she does not because she cannot "have the remotest conception of what love was" (249-250).

The power of absolute definition to remain stable is subverted by the imposition of a woman's story in her own words. Unable to fathom why Victor wanted a divorce, Stella encourages belief in a different story: that he gallantly allowed her to divorce him because she had a lover waiting in the wings. Preferring to be characterized as a "monster" instead of a "fool" (251), Stella uses Victor's story as a passive-aggressive strategy, concealing her character while inventing one. She uses Kelway and Harrison in the same way. As she divides her allegiances between them she protects herself from the treachery of believing in permanence and continuity by a story of continuing elusiveness. Her fictionmaking, however, only reinforces suspicions that she is corrupt.

Stella's past reveals that war did not make language tentative and duplicitous, but that war stories by women reveal the danger in relying on the literalness of language.<sup>3</sup> Stella is threatening to Victor because he suspects that she is searching for a confluence of meaning in language and life, but that she does not trust in its existence as he does: "Having been married by Victor, having had Roderick like anyone else, made me think I *might* know where I was" (250). Kelway cannot depend on Stella to create a plot that will save him because her ability to revise reality through storytelling may translate into interpreting his spy story as a sham. Hence he sees Stella's questions as a "crazy thriller" which "seeds itself in some crack" between them, "locked up inside" her, "but always being taken out and looked at" (212,213). Telling her, "You're two months gone with this," he equates her interpretive questions with a malignant pregnancy or autistic text. She carries the seeds of his life and death within her as a mystery whose clues are unfathomable to him.

That Stella is suspected of powers she does not possess is confirmed by Harrison's pursuit and abandonment of her. A mysterious character, he is in search of a story in which his character can be stabilized. But even as he feels at home in Stella's flat, she refuses him a place in her story. Although his cynicism validates her own distrust of abstract principles, she refuses to sleep with him to save Kelway or validate Harrison's char-

acter. Just as Kelway suspected, being unknowable means that this woman must possess the secret all their spying is after: the power to affirm their plots in her inaccessible story, even if she hasn't found the key herself.

The power to correct the historical fiction of war stories is left to the child of this enigmatic woman and to a younger woman who searches for her own story. Both young people must create their own fictions in order to rebuild after the chaos of war. For Louie Lewis, the war represents the need to find a story that will give her stability and purpose. Alone and without a sense of herself since her parents died in the Battle of Britain and her husband left for the front, Louie turns to newspaper stories to discover a character with which to identify and feel whole. She discovers, however, that other people's language and stories are discordant with their behavior. The fact that Stella "spoke beautifully" does not accord with the impression that she "walked like a soul astray" (275,279). When the story of Kelway's death and involvement with Stella appears, Louie feels "infected" by "ununderstandable languages" (278). In a world where other people's absolute and closed fictions have wrought havoc, Louie creates her open-ended and ambiguous story. She uses the telegram announcing her husband's death to provide a fictional father for her illegitimate child and returns to her home town to invent a heritage for him.

If Stella proves that either resisting fiction-making or continuous invention cannot undo history, her son Roderick will risk rebuilding the "fatal connection between the past and future" by restoring his father's ancestral home and traditions, that is, if he survives the war (195). Stella's reaction to Mt. Morris, however, confirms that "her own life should be a chapter missing from this book" (194). The historical narrative of an ancestral patriarchal past cast its women into a "society of ghosts" (193). As Stella leaves Roderick to his "green world of the past" and leaves the narrative as well, Bowen leaves him to the fate of a traditional plot which she critiques. The only language available to men to rebuild their civilization is that which signified its destruction by first driving its women into "deep silence" (194). Identifying with the portraits of women driven "not quite mad" by "suspecting what they refused to prove," Stella chooses ambiguity and rootlessness over the threat of historical continuity.

In Macaulay's novel, the young must first reinvent the present by reenacting its incoherence. Barbary, Helen's daughter by her English husband, followed the Maquis with her French step-brother Raoul and now in 1946, "still waged their war, resisting policemen . . . capitalists, collaborators . . . and trains" (36). Sent to London to be civilized, Barbary and Raoul play a "barbaric war," stealing and hiding from the police, whom they think of as Gestapo in "the waste land" of the bombed-out East End (17,70).

For Barbary and Raoul, playing in the ruins makes an art of survival in the emotional, moral, and linguistic confusions that constitute the post-

war. Barbary is an artist born of war, transforming its rubble into a personal epic of the "wilderness we carry with us" (201). The form of this woman's epic is ungentle: postcards of her haunts in the East End ruins peddled to tourists. Like her stealing, this art assaults those traditions which make her an inheritor of war, but it momentarily empowers her. Otherwise, she suffocates in the "wasteland" of decorous behavior in her father's orderly household. Barbary thus brings to England the anarchy which may have sustained her mother. But as the fall which leaves Barbary in a coma shows, this is no solution, only an escape into inertia. Helen has actually chosen inertia as a strategy to cope with a history in which "the crook in all of us is bursting out and taking possession, like Hyde, while Jekyll slowly dies of attrition" (88). Like Stella, Helen's response recognizes the failure of a language of polar oppositions to distance ourselves from our own desire to do violence, from the possibility that we will turn into our opposites. By contrast, Helen's son, like Helen's, hopes for "a little more time for beauty" to save "western culture . . . from ensuing chaos" (144). In order to inherit and sustain their "green worlds of the past," both sons must rely on tradition, the language of which appears to hold the fusion of opposites at bay.

Just as their husbands and lovers suspected, women's language threatens dissolution. Although Helen is portrayed as larger than life and equally irresistible, like Stella, she embodies the "ensuing chaos" in her ambiguous responses to "beauty vanishing." Like a "lotus eater," (83) Helen languishes in pleasure, uttering cynical pronouncements about the state of the universe, but assuming no responsibility for it. Returning to London to care for Barbary who falls while running away from the police, Helen moves into the house of her ex-husband, encouraging his passion for her as the embodiment of secret vitality and truths, but of emotional and moral chaos as well.

Although the art of Helen and Barbary seem to contrast, they each sabotage the rebuilt world of London. While Helen dallies, indifferent to her vision of impending "catastrophe and the abyss," (89) Barbary lives her artistic vision. The unrelenting and uncritical intensity of Barbary's commitment to revivifying the morality of the maquis has no place anymore, however. The war has become either a brutal memory transformed into pre-war manners and morals or colorful postcards; or for those like her mother, accepting the fall of civilization as inevitable, the war has been a morality play which she has resisted but in which one participates by translating the meaning of "good" into a very private "chosen life" (89).

Helen's elaborate fictionmaking proves disastrous until she realligns herself with traditional arts but also abandons them. When Barbary's play-acting turns to disaster, Helen's sense of maternal responsibility heals her. But rather than legitimate the ordered world of Barbary's father, she insists that Barbary return with her to France. She will leave behind her son Richie

who, like Stella's son Roderick, will inherit his father's world in a process of historic continuity Helen is powerless to stop. But as she encourages Barbary to study art, she suggests the beginning of a new history, one which is narrated in forms created by women's language.

It is very possible to see the female protagonists in both novels as fulfilling traditional feminine, passive-aggressive stereotypes. This is, after all, their condition in a catastrophic war over which they have no control. But in each novel a transformation of character takes place in which the body and soul of a woman embodies an active protest against a world out of control. In their intense sexuality, Stella and Helen become aggressive. Their lovers read into their sexuality the embodiment of secret knowledge, as though women know something men cannot fathom about themselves. Women, however, cannot satisfy the desire for stable interpretation because they, too, cannot fathom the stories in which they find themselves. Victimized by expectations they cannot fulfill, they retaliate by being both present and absent in the stories created about them. Accused of duplicity, both Stella and Helen reflect the moral and emotional life behind men's posturing and rhetoric. The secret and guilty truths which each woman is suspected of harboring become an artful dodge by which Bowen and Macaulay dislodge myths about women being both stable and threatening to make critical statements about women writing war fiction.

As Stella and Helen remain secret and save their vitality, even from themselves, they save themselves from the assault of being encoded in traditional war stories. Secrecy and withdrawal saves these women's autonomy by keeping their stories separate. Since war has traditionally been imagined as deriving its meaning only from the battlefield, the experience of women in war has been devalued, indeed, as Mr. Rushdie demonstrates, ignored. This happens easily as the language of the battlefield is dissonant with the war experiences of women and cannot be used to describe it.

But if women cannot use existing language, how can they write their own war stories? They do so only through the metaphorical experience in which their bodies enact how they feel about the duplicity of war. This expresses experiences of being pursued as vessels of solace, as harborers of both cure and chaos, but of never being perceived as embodying a separate and equally significant experience.<sup>4</sup> They are enigmas living in "ununderstandable languages" so that they can come to grips with war as it assaults them and as they are expected to serve in it while treasuring their autonomous interpretations of its arts.

The language of women's war experience in both novels calls for the presence of children. If women struggle to connect feeling and morality by using the language of their bodies, they are responsible for the birth and lives of their children who will inherit the world of war.<sup>5</sup> Bowen and Macaulay leave their weary heroines in watchful positions, transmitting

to their children the empowerment to translate their fathers' traditions into the post-war. As they remain silent and withdrawn, however, these female characters also inscribe the negation of such tradition. Refusing to participate in the creation of fictions based on a language they know to be duplicitous, Helen, Stella, Louie Lewis, and Barbary enact a new kind of fiction: one which acknowledges the necessity of invention, of lying, to create and sustain a self which cannot be known in the language of men.

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#### NOTES

1. Some of the more notable novels about World War II written by British women writers are: *Over the Frontier* by Stevie Smith, *The Balkan Trilogy* and *The Levant Trilogy* by Olivia Manning, *The Moment of Truth* by Storm Jameson, *On the Side of the Angels* by Betty Miller, and *The Survival of the Fittest* by Pamela Hansford Johnson.

2. The editions cited in the text are: Elizabeth Bowen *The Heat of the Day*. N.Y.: Knopf, 1950 and Rose Macaulay. *The World My Wilderness*. Boston: Little Brown, 1950.

3. Margaret Homans argues that women writers of the nineteenth century work with two languages: the literal that, according to Lacanian psycholinguistic theory, they learn in symbiosis with their mothers, and the symbolic or figurative which they learn from their fathers. Bowen and Macaulay are suspicious of both as they see the intersection of world destruction and the destruction of individual integrity.

4. In their discussion of women modernist writers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point to "women's fantasies of autonomy [and] . . . the relationship between literary or cultural experimentation and female sensibility" (8). Marking "women's shocking entrance into history," these writers dislodged patriarchal language (4).

5. French Feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, call for women's language to express and valorize their biological nature as a way of conjoining self and language. Bowen and Macaulay use metaphors of the female body to validate difference, but also to dramatize how patriarchal writing uses women's bodies to legitimate myths of female destructiveness. See Luce Irigaray, "Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un" and Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa."

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Nature, History, and Art in Elizabeth Bishop's  
"Brazil, January 1, 1502"

*Barbara Page*

Elizabeth Bishop has been described as a poet of geography, and this is accurate as far as it goes, but there is also a fair amount of history in her poems, usually introduced with studied casualness, as something she happens to have read or recalled. By history, in the first and simplest instance, I mean matters about which historians write and generalize: for instance, the Assyrian wars (in her poem "Wading at Wellfleet,") or the Christian Empire (in her "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance").<sup>1</sup> But she also thinks about history itself, as a way of knowing. In "At the Fishhouses," she writes of "our knowledge" as "historical," meaning that it is drawn from our bitter but briny sense of life on earth as "flowing and flown." And in "Questions of Travel," defending the serendipity of the tourist, she offers as example that it would be sad "Never to have studied history in / the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages . . ." In this regard, Bishop would have agreed with the poet Czeslaw Milosz, in his remark that "historicity may reveal itself in a detail of architecture, in the shaping of a landscape, even in trees like those oaks close to my birthplace which remember my pagan ancestors."<sup>2</sup> Like Milosz', her resistance to official versions of history takes the form of attentive care paid to homely and natural life, and of sympathy with those harmed by the rule of force.

Bishop is not nearly the poet of isolated sensibilities she has sometimes been taken to be; often enough the narrator of her poems is not the imperious "I" but rather the sociable "we." In a number of her poems she searches the immediate past for her own forebears, and the historical past for correspondence with our present.<sup>3</sup> For her, though, the past has been a place of painful losses and inevitable change, so that what remains is a matter of fragile remnants. As partial compensation, she sometimes invokes natural process, time felt as cyclical and recurrent. Distrusting both abstractions that scour the landscape of its signatures of distinctive life, and magisterial claims to truth, Bishop presents her observations with a deliberately naive freshness of vision—looking, she would call it—and a voice that steadily declines all amplifiers. In the natural and the familiar she locates talismanic figures that steady and protect the onlooker against

the imperium of history, with its rules, customs, and decreed order. Against such forces, she offers two strategies, which may seem paradoxically at odds. The first is the assertion of the irreducible presence of particulars that can be seen, touched and loved by—and only by—individual persons. The second is a yielding to the grand but impersonal powers of Nature, against which history, though still menacing, is proportionately reduced in power and diminished to caricature.

In this essay I want to examine one poem, "Brazil, January 1, 1502," which Bishop wrote in the middle of her long residence in Brazil, to see how its historical subject—the arrival of the Portuguese colonists—intersects with the subject announced in the poem's epigraph—". . . embroidered nature . . . tapestried landscape"—from Sir Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, I want to consider how Bishop used and rearranged knowledge derived from her study of Brazil. Bishop read widely in the history and geography of the country, and wrote a popular book for a series produced by Time, Life. Though she was unhappy with the distortions and omissions imposed by the editors, her bibliography to that work offers insight into both history and nature as presented in the poem.<sup>5</sup> Finally, I want to consider recent discussion of Bishop as a woman artist countering male-imposed powers with a subversive, revisionary art.

The title directs us to an account of the voyage from Lisbon of the Portuguese colonists, led by Amerigo Vespucci, who, as he sailed along the Brazilian coastline, named each landmark after the saint on the Christian calendar whose day it happened to be. According to this story, he reached the site of present-day Rio de Janeiro (River of January) on New Year's Day, 1502.<sup>6</sup> Here, history begins with an almost fussy particularity of time, through an appropriative act of naming, by which a foreign culture is read onto a scarcely glimpsed landscape. In the first stanza, however, that landscape is viewed, not through the lens of history, but directly through the senses, noting, counting, describing. This description yields to a simile: the landscape, as the epigraph suggests it will, resembles a freshly woven tapestry. From the beginning, then, we have two ways of looking, theirs and ours, past and present, mediated by the possibility of permanent forms of nature and art.

In stanza two, the descriptive reading of the landscape as tapestry continues, and the natural forms begin to acquire cultural meanings: the birds are "symbolic" (though of what we do not yet know), and the foreground composes itself into an allegory of Sin: "five sooty dragons near some massy rocks . . . / threatened from underneath by moss / in lovely hell-green flames." Against the leap to allegory—to meaning at the expense of natural form—the observer will at the end of the stanza rename the "dragons" as, simply, "lizards." Fascination with detail and esthetic response undercuts moral judgment, so that the hell-green flames are seen as "lovely." The counting off of the scaling-ladder vines, "one leaf yes and

one leaf no' (in Portuguese)" intermixes a childlike, folkloric voice into the language of the invaders. At the end of stanza two, the Sin is identified as sexual, through the emblematic female lizard, with "her wicked tail . . . red as a red-hot wire."

The opening of stanza three sharply juxtaposes this allegory of Sin with the arrival of the Christians, and introduces a quick shift to their perspective. By contrast with the intense looking and interpreting of the previous stanzas, the language through which the viewpoint of the invaders is presented is remarkably flat: they "came and found it all, / not unfamiliar." Their outlook, blocked by stale culture, is governed by negatives; they see "no lover's walks, no bowers, / no cherries to be picked, no lute music." Against a large tapestry of natural meanings, the rampaging colonists appear as tiny, the perspectives of historical distance and of art exposing pettiness through an ironic diminution of their egocentric aggression. The armored Christians, "hard as nails, / tiny as nails," come armed as well with "an old dream of wealth and luxury / already out of style when they left home," to which they add the anticipated pleasure of sexual license as conquerors of a "new world." In this poem, cultural and sexual imperialism are equated: the Indians the Christians want to catch are women.<sup>7</sup> Returning to the opening, we see that Nature "greet[s] our eyes / exactly as she must have greeted theirs." But to the invading conquerors the natural tapestry appears only an impediment to delusory self-engorgement, a "hanging fabric" to be "ripped away."

At the opening of the poem, Bishop plays with shifting perspectives on history and nature by juxtaposing the historically particular title, "January 1, 1502," immediately with the first word of the poem, "Januaries," signalling a shift from historical moment to the recurrent present of natural process. The cultural baggage the colonists bring to their encounter with nature in Brazil is "old," "out of style." It is also insidious, and here Bishop's choice of detail is telling. The tune "*L'Homme armé*," which begins "Fear the armed man . . .," enjoyed huge popularity in Europe during the half century leading up to 1502, and was repeatedly set to the Mass, sanctioning the militarist ambition of the Christians.<sup>8</sup> In the poem, the Christians go directly from Mass, humming *L'Homme armé* to their mission of rape and despoliation. Against culturally justified violence stands what they see as an impassive hanging fabric, but what we have seen as Nature—the largest figure in the poem—variegated and fertile, but also symbolic, that is, suggestive of incipient as well as manifest meanings. And in the equation of the poem, the invaders, militarist and feudal, are masculine to the point of caricature, whereas Nature and the aboriginal life that maddens and eludes them is female.

Mediating among the oppositions in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" is the speaker who presents and shares the landscape: "Januaries, Nature greets our eyes. . . ." Discussion of Bishop's work has often focussed on the

elusiveness of the poet's voice in the poems, and here I want to look at two recent readings of the poem which address this question. David Bromwich argues that we, the narrator and audience, "are like the conquistadors" in our "imperial habits of seeing," and like them, suppose that "we can make Nature over in a language we know." Nature's revenge is to draw us in, but suspend "our knowledge of the thing that claims our pursuit." The poem, he believes, is "about something that evades our grasp in every object that appeals to the human love of conquest." The Indian women and the female lizard both "entice, and bind their spell," leaving the invaders "victims of their own conquering perspective."<sup>9</sup> There is some justification for Bromwich's view, in that Bishop, as a North American, knew herself to be an outsider in Brazil, and in "Questions of Travel," which she placed next to this poem, she raises doubts about her right to intrude into foreign lands. Significantly, though, in "Questions of Travel" she does not present herself as an imperialist, but as a simple tourist, childish, self-indulgent, and perhaps lacking in imagination. Bishop does set up a parallel between the invaders of 1502 and modern visitors to Brazil. Bromwich, however, universalizes the love of conquest by describing it as "human," and views the attitude of the poet as analogous to that of the conquistadors, obliging us to suppose that Bishop aligned herself with aggressive masculinity and with intending rapists. Another reading, by Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller, seems more promising.<sup>10</sup> They see, instead, an affiliation between Bishop and the female figures in the poem—the Indian women, the lizard, and ultimately Nature herself—in what they describe as a poetry of indirection. While the ironic parallel Bromwich points out between the 16th-century invaders and the poet, as a present-day traveler to Brazil, seems correct enough, they are more sensitive to the weave, so to speak, of the poem's imagery. In their feminist reading, the woman artist, who cannot directly assert herself, retreats behind protective strategies of language, turning apparent weakness into strength, just as the Indian women retreating into the landscape become part of the large tapestry of Nature. To take the argument a step beyond Keller and Miller, the artist, in this reading, is not an imperialist but an emulator of natural process, and it is plausible to view this art as arising from the culture of women. The language of the speaker is that of intimate female affiliations: of the "fabric" of nature, the "satin" underleaf, and "lovely" hell green flames. By contrast the artifices of the Christians in their creaking armor, with their out of date conventions of courtly love and soldiery, authorized by the Mass, are satirized, distanced, and diminished.<sup>11</sup> It is within the Christian allegory of Sin, we recall, that the sexuality of the female lizard—and presumably of the Indian women, as well—is judged as "wicked."

I want to consider next some further implications of Bishop's choice of

title; the date "January 1, 1502," as we noted, is not that of the first landing in Brazil, but of the naming of Rio de Janeiro by a colonial party. The small kingdom of Portugal had been unified in a struggle with the Moors, and was blocked from expansion into Europe by its neighbor Castile. In 1494, the pope, claiming ownership of New World lands as the "spiritual father of the world," drew an arbitrary line dividing the territory and ceding most of the east coast of Brazil to Portugal, *before* it had been explored. Christian claims to the souls of all human life on earth sanctioned the remorseless exploitation of aboriginal peoples by the invaders. In the New World, European women were scarce, and the Portuguese were, in any event, too few in numbers to populate the territory.<sup>12</sup> The invaders became, in the words of Bishop's *Time-Life* book about Brazil, "eager miscegenationists."<sup>13</sup> Gilberto Freyre one of Bishop's sources, described the "sexual intoxication" of the Europeans as they leaped ashore. Even the priests, he wrote, "had to take care not to sink into the carnal mire."<sup>14</sup> The result of this aggressive sexual colonization was the destruction of Indian culture. Against the onslaught, the Indians retreated from the coastline into the virgin forests. Charles Wagley, another of Bishop's sources, remarked, "There are few Indians left in modern Brazil. . . . The aboriginal population has been decimated by disease, slavery, and force of arms—or assimilated into the total population."<sup>15</sup>

With this historical context in mind, I want next to examine the paired oppositions, male and female, culture and nature, historical moment and perennial recurrence, as they operate in the poem. All of these, however, must be read against the governing image, announced in the epigraph, "embroidered nature . . . tapestried landscape," for it is an intersection of art and nature that alters the dialectic of these polarities. Writing as an historian of art, Kenneth Clark points out that symbols by which human beings orient themselves can go out of date. He describes what he calls the "triumph of symbol over sensation in the middle ages," and observes, with reference to a 15th-century fresco, that "the landscape of symbols had already ceased to reflect the true creative impulse of the time."<sup>16</sup> This recalls the arrival of the Christians in the New World, who attempt to impose on the landscape a baggage of symbols "already out of style when they left home." By contrast, the direct looking in the first stanza of the poem produces an image "solid but airy," as of a freshly finished tapestry. Discussing the formulaic symbol, which he regards as the outcome of medieval Christian philosophy, Clark describes a set of oppositions, which Bishop replays in the poem: "If our earthly life is not more than a brief and squalid interlude, then the surroundings in which it is lived need not absorb our attention. If ideas are Godlike and sensations debased, then our rendering of appearances must as far as possible be symbolic, and nature, which we perceive through our senses, becomes positively sinful."<sup>17</sup> In stanza two

of Bishop's poem, the corrupt idealism of the invading Christians gets entangled with the natural perspective of the senses. And the meaning the Christians intend to impose on the New World—and the new year—turns ironic against the counter-perspective of those who greet Nature and Januaries with childlike observation. In another context, Clark remarks on the familiar paradox "that it is chiefly through the instinct to kill that man achieves intimacy with the life of nature."<sup>18</sup> But in Bishop, "man" the war-maker and conqueror is the enemy of nature, resisted by the elusive Indian women who retreat into the natural tapestry. And a quite different kind of intimacy is achieved in Bishop's poem through the speaker's patient attention to particulars and the repetitions that recreate the pattern of nature as limitless vitality.

With these distinctions in mind, we can see that Bishop's poem suggests a way to rethink the terms of a tiresomely familiar dichotomy, namely the identification of women with nature and men with culture. The traditional view, as summed up by the anthropologist Sherry Ortner, holds that woman is like nature, "immanent and embedded in things as given," whereas man is like culture, "transcending and transforming things through the superimposition of abstract categories and transpersonal values."<sup>19</sup> For Bishop, however, nature is not so much immanence as creation, not so much the given as the infinitely various. Nature, in this reading, offers a paradigm of art. In her description of Nature—with a capital N—she recalls the naturalist Konrad Guenther, another of her sources for the book on Brazil, who described his own method in terms suggesting Bishop's habitual narrative reticence: that of keeping personalities in the background so that Nature may speak with her own voice. "Multiplicity of form," he wrote, "is the essential characteristic of Nature; uniformity that of civilization." His descriptions of the flora of Brazil were both patient and inventive; and in a significant parallel to the governing image of Bishop's poem, he remarked that the dense lianas seemed to turn the forest "into a monstrous loom."<sup>20</sup> Where Bishop sees simply "giant" leaves and water lilies, however, Guenther imagines something "mechanical," the work of a giant stretching the cables. Contrary to his romantic grandiosity, her tapestry is seen as if from within its landscape, close up and familiar.

Of landscape painting, Kenneth Clark wrote, "Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality, . . ."<sup>21</sup> and in her poem Bishop weaves a unity of history, nature, and art which radically transforms the implications of things female. Historically particular men and women—the tiny Christians and the little Indians—assume their proportions within the perspective of nature. The invading soldiers still have destructive power: they can rip the fabric of the natural tapestry. The Indian women are "retreating, always retreating" behind that fabric, but continue to be heard, "calling, / calling to each other"—their voices indistinguishable from those of the "symbolic" birds. These

actions are finally absorbed into Nature, which is impressively large, perpetually renewed, tantalizingly alive. And as tapestry, the meaning of which is created by diffident description, not by the appropriative, destructive colonization of abstractions, the art of nature is female.

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#### NOTES

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1. All references to Bishop's poems are from *The Complete Poems 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983).

2. *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 4.

3. Bishop makes a punning use of "correspondence" in her poem "The Bight." See also "From Trollope's Journal," and "Crusoe in England."

4. (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1976).

5. Elizabeth Bishop and the Editors of Time, Life World Library, *Brazil* (New York: Time Inc. 1962, 1967).

6. German Arciniegas, *Amerigo and the New World: The Life and Times of Amerigo Vespucci*, tr. Harriet De Onis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 215-16.

7. Of the association of imperial and sexual exploitation, Tzvetan Todorov observes, "Indian women are women, or Indians to the second power; hence, they become the object of a double rape." *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, tr. Richard Howard (New York, etc.: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 49.

8. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

9. "Elizabeth Bishop's Dream-Houses," *Raritan*, 4 (Summer, 1984), pp. 88-90.

10. "Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Rewards of Indirection," *New England Quarterly*, LVII:4 (December, 1984), pp. 539-42.

11. In another pertinent discussion of Bishop, Willard Spiegelman remarks that "The frequency with which Bishop attacks and transforms military formulas, forays, and glory shows her grappling with received values and ideas, and struggling toward new ones." "Elizabeth Bishop's Natural Heroism," *Centennial Review*, 22 (Winter, 1978), p. 34.

12. See Regina Johnson Tomlinson, *The Struggle for Brazil: Portugal and "The French Interlopers" (1500-1550)* (New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 10-11, and Rollie E. Poppino, *Brazil: The Land and People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 46 and 70. For a discussion of Catholic ideology during the colonization, with particular reference to the exploitation of women, see Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock, Introduction to *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1980), especially p. 18.

13. *Brazil*, p. 28.

14. *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, tr. Samuel Putnam (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 85.

15. *An Introduction to Brazil* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 13-14.

16. *Landscape into Art*, pp. 28-29.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

19. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 82. For a discussion of the roots in Western philosophy of the association of women with body, nature and immanence, and men with soul, will, and transcendence, see Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views," *Feminist Studies*, 8:1 (Spring, 1982), 109-31.

20. *A Naturalist in Brazil*, tr. Bernard Miall (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931), pp 10, 162-63, and 99.

21. *Landscape into Art*, p. 33.



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From a Far Country:  
History, Myth, and Fiction in  
Anthony Burgess's *The Malayan Trilogy*

*Anne Ricketson Zahlan*

At the very hour that he abdicates home and position to a Malay successor, the protagonist of Anthony Burgess's *The Malayan Trilogy* (1956-59) tells a story of an imperial past remote from the realities of mid-twentieth century. The story concerns a man reminiscent of the legendary Raffles of Singapore, establisher of British influence in the Malay Peninsula and the seas around it, liberator of slaves, and accomplished student of Malay language and lore. It is "the story of the man from the far country who tried to help, the man who developed miraculous powers, killing the pirates and the bandits and diseases and teaching the final marvel of the word" (328). Sir Stamford Raffles was an adventure hero and as close as the *Trilogy* comes to a "world-historical individual." Burgess's Victor Crabbe moves Raffles beyond even a stylized history and assigns him a place among old and anthropomorphic gods: "And as he developed wings and an unconquerable fist and the gift of invulnerability, he ceased to be a man from a far country, he joined the heroes of the Malay Valhalla . . ." (328). In elevating Raffles to a pantheon destined for destruction, Crabbe "regresses," as Frank Kermode would see it, into myth. Teacher of history and student of history, he nonetheless betrays a longing for imperial apotheosis even as he associates both the White Man of the colonial heyday and himself with gods that fail, an old order doomed. In the interpolated tale with which Victor Crabbe regales his rapt audience of Malays, Anthony Burgess reflects the dialectic of myth and history that is both subject and method of *The Malayan Trilogy*.

In 1957 the "Federation of Malaya," set up by the British after World War II, was granted a shaky independence. A State of Emergency was in full swing, the jungles infested with Marxist insurgents. As the sun set on yet another outpost of Empire, it was far from certain what the new day would bring. The uncertain period when the new nation was cut adrift from the moorings of old empire—and imperial expatriates cut loose too from their justifying myth—is the setting for Burgess's chronicle. Recounting lives shaped by the place and the age in which those lives are lived,

the novels of *The Malayan Trilogy* are, according to Georg Lukács's definition, "historical" (see Lukács 21 and *passim*). The "chronotope" of Malaya on the verge of independence serves as the space-time setting for a fiction of transition and in so doing represents the larger chronotope of end-of-empire.

An English schoolmaster expatriated in the years following World War II, Victor Crabbe is the unifying character of the *Trilogy*. Evoking Valhalla in the tale he tells his Malay auditors, he associates himself—and in mythic terms—with the sublimer chapters of Great Britain's colonial adventure. The *Twilight of the Gods* provides the trilogy with a central motif and the trilogy's central character with a motivating myth. Even Crabbe's given name does more than suggest conquest and empire; "Victor" links him to the mythic foundations of the Ring Cycle and specifically to the heroic figure of Siegfried. But he is a schoolmaster and traditional antithesis of a man of action; by virtue of his passivity and also according to Lukács's criteria, Victor Crabbe is a "mediocre hero." Like a Scott hero faced with the passing of an old order or Cooper's Leather-Stocking roaming a frontier pushed ever-westward, Burgess's expatriate protagonist occupies a neutral ground between east and west, past and present, myth and history. As Natty Bumppo moves between Indians and settlers, not fully of either party, so Burgess's Victor Crabbe distances himself from colonial society and the colonialist ethos without being assimilated into Malaya. As the Leather-Stocking inhabits a space between wilderness and white men, so Crabbe functions in a neutralized time, an instant between the imperial era and whatever was to follow. In the case of Malaya as it prepared to cut loose from the moorings of empire, what was to come was not yet revealed. *The Malayan Trilogy* is a history without resolution, a fiction of transition that registers Kermode's "lack of confidence in ends," a "conviction that the end is immanent rather than imminent" (101). Crabbe's attempt to impose apocalyptic myth on the "ending of British imperial power" in Malaya exposes his ineffectualness: the mythic resonances of "Victor" are all but drowned out by the Prufrockian echoes of "Crabbe." It also serves to underscore the transitional character of contemporary reality. Myths, as Kermode tells us, are "agents of stability, fictions the agents of change" (39); in his fiction, Burgess manipulates the stabilizing function by settling on a myth that deconstructs itself.

Past, present, and future are clearly marked in the transitional world of the *Trilogy*. The collective title of the continuously paginated American edition, *The Long Day Wanes*, makes explicit one organizational principle—that of the cycle of the day. The action of each of the three books begins in morning and ends in evening; in addition, the first evokes a morning world, the second a shadowless noontime, and the third, as its opening makes clear, the time when dark gives way to daylight—the dawn. Then too there is history of which Victor Crabbe is both teacher and student,

and he sees his presence "in a brown country, sweltering in an alien classroom" as "prefigured and ordained by history" (49). From the perspective of history, the trilogy's first book, *Time for a Tiger*, is tied to the past, the sun-scorched noontime of *The Enemy in the Blanket* suggests a present, and *Beds in the East* hovers on the brink of a vision of the future.

In the retrospective morning of *Time for a Tiger*, events are mythic: they include expulsion from the garden, the punishment of the flood, and a promise of redemption. This novel effects some of those ritual connections with the past necessary to Anthony Burgess's self-imposed task of recording the "obsequies" for a dying empire (see *Urgent Copy* 271). In *Time for a Tiger*, there is a second colonial Englishman and he, unlike Victor Crabbe, is a man who towers above other mortals—Police-Lieutenant Nabby Adams. The lieutenant's great height ("six feet eight inches of Caucasian manhood" [28]), his veiled origins, his attendant beast in the guise of scruffy mutt, his prodigious thirst combine to create an indubitably mythic aura. In spite of his addiction to alcohol and the lengths he will go in the service of his craving, Nabby maintains a kind of grandeur. To Victor Crabbe's wife Fenella, who is a poet, he seems "a walking myth: Prometheus with the eagles of debt and drink pecking at his liver; Adam himself bewildered and Eveless outside the garden; a Minotaur howling piteously in a labyrinth of money-worries" (110).

Early in his stay in Malaya, Victor Crabbe falls in love with the land, and the infatuation is made fleshly in an affair with a woman who embodies for him the land and its charms. Lying with Rahimah, Crabbe feels he is "somehow piercing to the heart of the country" (41); nonetheless, he rather casually abandons her. In Burgess's trilogy, the Englishman, as private man and as public man, is both betrayer and betrayed. Throughout the work Crabbe labors under a burden of guilt for his role in the death of his beloved first wife; in the last of the three novels, her infidelity to him is revealed. Even as Victor Crabbe travels towards the painful knowledge of his wife's unfaithfulness, a curious friend examines a bundle of her letters, carefully saved from "another age." The signatures are but half-legible, and it is by this device that Burgess makes clear that Crabbe has lost more than even the memory of the dead woman he had never stopped loving. The name at the end of the letters was "Mal, May, Maya, something like that" (436). The cherished dream that his wife had reciprocated his love is shattered; shattered too is the equally cherished delusion that his love for Malaya is returned, if only by some barely acknowledged need. The trilogy's design, according to Burgess, was symphonic, and its movements were meant to echo structurally the demarcated "stages" of his protagonist's "love affair with Malaya, as well as the stages of the [historical] process which brought Malaya from British protection to independence" (*Novel* 34).

Not presuming to rule, Victor Crabbe does presume to instruct. Hardly

conscious, in the inexperience of his life in the first novel's Lanchap Province, that "the occidental bias in the curriculum" of his Mansor School serves to deracinate the graduates, to inculcate in them contempt for "their own rich cultures" (33), he all the same implements in his classroom an "ineluctable process" of superficial westernization that he comes to see "spreading even to the core of the snaky, leechy jungle" (124-25). Crabbe, like the Leather-Stocking as viewed by Gorky, "unconsciously" serves "the great cause of the geographical expansion of material culture in a country of uncivilized people only to find himself estranged from that culture" (Lukács 65). Crabbe, as naive as Natty Bumppo if not as innocent, conceives of his role in shamelessly romantic terms: "I love this country. I feel protective towards it. Sometimes, just before dawn breaks, I feel that I somehow enclose it, contain it. I feel that it needs me" (54).

From the seductively ignorant Eden where their closest friend was a man named Adam, Victor Crabbe and his wife are expelled into a fiery domain dominated by a pitiless sun. The trilogy's second novel, *The Enemy in the Blanket*, takes place in Dahaga (the word means "thirsty" in Malay), and its "pitiless sun" shines on the spiritually parched fallen world of British expatriates for whom a place that ignores the West can lay no claim to history: "History? The State had no history. It had not changed in many centuries, not since the Chinese had stepped ashore and soon retreated, carrying its name back in three ideograms: DA HA GA. The British had hardly disturbed the timeless pattern" (175).

The merciless glare of Dahaga's noon exposes the corruption of present reality: the compatriots the Crabbes encounter are dominated by bodily greeds, and Crabbe's car and his blonde wife Fenella become objects of the acquisitive lust of the province's feudal ruler. The *Abang* (literally "Big Brother") collects automobiles and fair-haired women, and these two products are the sum of what he wants from the West. The Crabbes hold what the *Abang* must have, and he sees them as necessary offerings on the altar of his needs. Conscious that his days are numbered along with those of the expatriate British, he views Victor and Fenella as a valedictory oblation: "The Prawns or Shrimps or whatever their ridiculous fishy name was, had to be the last sacrifice, because they were the last in. No new expatriates would come to Dahaga now, except perhaps for Indonesian philologists or theologians, and the Lobsters or Crayfish were a sort of tangible twilight" (249). When an anti-colonialist bomb leaves the coveted car "just a mass of old iron," then Crabbe leaves off stalling and turns the rubble over to the *Abang*, fully aware of the portent of his act. "It is perhaps appropriate," he writes the recipient of this doubtful donation, "that one of the last of the Western expatriates should bequeath to an Oriental potentate all that the West sees now to be able to offer the East, namely a burnt-out machine" (311).

"The end is nigh," an English compatriot tells Crabbe not long after-

wards, as earlier another exiled Briton had preached the ending of the white man's day in the East and warned against delusion: "You've only got to the third drama of the cycle," he cautioned; "After the grubbing for Rhinegold come the thundering hoofs. And then Rhodes and Raffles, Siegfrieds in armour and bad verse" (255). Responding to this second admonition, Crabbe quotes words spoken by Christ preparing to restore the sight of a blind man: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). "The night in which no man can work," is Victor Crabbe's abbreviated answer (320), conveying a sense of urgency about that work he feels he must do. More presumptuous surely than ever was soldier or magistrate, he has come to Malaya "to bring the great gifts of the West." But all that remains of the great gifts of the West is the smouldering ruin of a burnt-out machine.

The night in which no foreigner could work, in which nothing alien could be built, was fast approaching. It is this dark that, in the third volume of Burgess's *Malayan Trilogy*, follows the sun-drenched afternoon of *The Enemy in the Blanket*. Bereft of wife, friends, finally even of home, Victor Crabbe soon finds himself displaced at work where his sole and appropriately "crepuscular" function is to turn over his post to a youngish Malay successor (371). Far from resenting this falling off and still stubbornly romantic in his fancied devotion to Malaya, he comes to find great charm in the state of "an Education officer waiting to hand over to the brown man he was training in the twilight of British rule" (347). During this period of transition, sitting on the veranda dressed in his tropical whites and looking out on bougainvillea and a papaya tree, Crabbe was easily persuaded to think of himself as part of some "novel about the East" (367). The sky at sunset was a "Bayreuth montage of Valhalla," and all to him "romantic—the last legionary, his aloneness, the lost cause really lost" (367, 347).

Burgess was in Malaya and working on his Malayan novels during the very pre-independence years he writes about. All too aware of the ethnic tensions and hostilities waiting to erupt within the racial and religious mosaic of Malayan society, he was aware too of Britain's role—as both "common enemy" and "common lawgiver" in holding conflict at bay. The long day waned as much for Burgess himself as for his creation Crabbe, but the dawn does follow the dark and the laws of nature could be expected to apply in Malaya as elsewhere: "Dawn of freedom for yet another nation, freedom and all the rest of the abstractions. Dawn, dawn, dawn, and people waking up with various kinds of mouths and carried forwards of the night or day before. Dawn anyway" (333). With these words, Burgess begins *Beds in the East*, the trilogy's final novel and a book in which there is an emphasis on Malayan characters absent in its predecessors. In *The Enemy in the Blanket* Burgess did introduce a chorus—a pair of dish-towel-beturbaned Malay laborers who convey Malay attitudes by from time to

time commenting on the desirability of clearing the peninsula of Tamils, of Sikhs, of Chinese, and above all of white men. But *Beds in the East*, rather self-conscious in its representation of an array of ethnic communities, begins and ends with Malayans. Burgess does succeed in weaving the disparate strands of a fragmented society (soon to lose at one stroke common enemy and common lawgiver) into a bright tapestry. At the work's end, however, the question remains as to whether out of it all a viable nation could emerge.

Determined to help bring about reconciliations—it is this that he comes to view as his mission—Victor Crabbe decides to give a party. Designed to bring members of the communities together in social harmony, the gathering was “carefully enough planned”: “many canapes—no beef to annoy the Hindus, no pig-meat to enrage the Muslims—and various beverages, including harmless hideous coloured liquids lying, a clinking reef, in a tub of ice water” (394). Crabbe insists upon making a speech, heavily-handedly proclaiming the purpose and the principles behind the party. Under British rule, there was, he intoned, “cold, purely legal unification provided by the State,” which, with in recent times the unlikely assistance of a “superficial culture of American films, jazz, chocolate bars and refrigerators,” allowed the “component races of Malaya” to pursue their separate cultural courses. Now, however, Victor insists, “the time has come”: “there must not merely be mixing, there must be fusion” (398). Not fusion but confusion is the actual outcome of his well-meaning English efforts, confusion precipitated by the drunken entrance of a disgruntled Malay thirsting for the blood of the Tamils.

Although Malaya's destiny remains undetermined, Victor Crabbe's fate is tragic. On the upcountry trek, Crabbe is stung by a scorpion and moved a step towards death. For Malaya there may be a new day, but the scorpion and then the crocodile usher a redundant Crabbe into the dark that precedes no earthly dawn. Before his end, however, he must encounter a newly-arrived rubber planter who, as he is revealed to have alienated the affections of Crabbe's first wife, robs him also of the myth of empire. Vociferously denying the validity of Crabbe's own mission and speaking out for the “feudal tradition,” George Costard mouths a paternalistic creed the pretentiousness of which would have made Kipling blush: “I'm the father of these people. They can look up to me, bring me their troubles and let me participate in their joys. Don't you think that's good and beautiful? They're my children, all of them. I correct them, I cherish them, I show them the way that they should go” (483). Thus Victor Crabbe, student of Toynbee, witnesses the cycle of Empire nostalgically turning back upon itself, producing at its end only the specious dregs of its own ideological beginnings.

Moments after the fateful encounter in which Crabbe's last illusions about the colonial vocation are cruelly stripped away, he is dead. Among

the people, as within the landscape, his passing makes no real difference. "His death, though little mourned," was, however—at least by a few—"resented" (496), and in this he resembled the dying Empire of which he was an instrument. At Britain's departure too, there was little grief and much resentment. With the overshadowing of Crabbe's experience by the experience of Malaysians and the stilling of his voice in an inglorious death, Burgess marks the transition to a post-colonial world.

From the sad vantage point of July 1969—so soon after the violent racial clashes that in May of that year had shaken Malaysia (see Ross-Larson 10)—Anthony Burgess admitted despair. Reminiscing about the excitement life had held in a country where "Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and free thought" interacted, he recalls having felt that "if the new world was going to be made, it might be made in Malaysia" (quoted Aggeler 10). In the pessimism of the moment, he refers to his *Trilogy* as having prophesied the dissolution of this pluralistic society as it undertook nationhood: "the Chinese and Malays are killing each other again, and I have no more hopes there" (quoted Aggeler 10).

Night does fall for England and for Crabbe, but surely the *Trilogy* allows at least the possibility that new generations may salvage the new day. The image Burgess uses to express a vision of what the dawn *could* bring is that of a little band of Teddy boys—inter-racial, international, and very young—who together prance about the Kenching streets. United in the wearing of their anachronistic "uniform of drain-pipe trousers and serge waisted jacket and bootlace tie," a costume ironically "suggestive of a more tranquil and prosperous age than this . . ." (501), the young form a new sodality. The trilogy has moved from the fellowship of exiles in *Time for a Tiger* to a new fellowship of those who do not recognize exile, a fellowship that will, the text assures us, "prove more fruitful in promoting inter-racial harmony than any of Crabbe's vague dreams" (502).

The dawning of the Malayan new day with which Burgess concludes the trilogy counters with comedy the tragic pattern of Britain's decline and Crabbe's fall. The structural tension between comedy and tragedy is but one instance of the trilogy's multi-faceted narrative strategy: Burgess's fiction of the threshold between colonial and post-colonial world is at once romantic and tragic, comic and satirical. This multiplicity of narrative modes is buttressed by a multiplicity of voices: we hear Crabbe's voice, of course, but we hear also the voices of other expatriates and—with increasing frequency—the musings and pronouncements of polyglot Malaysians. The racial, religious, and linguistic variety of the society Burgess depicts and the polyphonic character of the narrative suggest contradiction in the text's ideological position on empire and its end. In his own colonial career in Malaya, Burgess found himself torn between "self-mockery" and an increasing regard for the "colonial image of order [as] itself a kind of work of art" (*Urgent Copy* 271); his fictional treatment of the history of the end

of British dominion in Malaya reflects ideological and affective ambivalence. Refusing to be limited to romance or tragedy, comedy or satire, Burgess employs them all. The myths of the imperial past, of "Rhodes and Raffles," belong to romance; "the age of Raffles," the text points out, "was also the age of Keats and Shelley, the East attractively misty, apt for the muffled clang of the romantic image . . ." (295). Burgess's Victor Crabbe is, however, forced to relinquish "the romantic dream he had entertained, the dream that had driven Raffles to early death . . ." (295), and the work that recounts his disillusionment is marked by a narrative perspective that is essentially satirical. Burgess's technique aptly conveys the ambiguities inherent in an ending that is also a beginning. In *The Long Day Wanes*, Anthony Burgess has created a fiction of transition that pits myth against history to produce—in Frederic Jameson's phrase—a "meditation on the destiny of community" (70).

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## The Historical Context of Yeats's Byzantium

*David Roessel*

Yeats's Byzantium poems have usually been discussed from a spiritual or aesthetic perspective.<sup>1</sup> If history enters the picture, the references are to the reign of Justinian or some other Byzantine emperor. What has been overlooked is that from 1919 to 1922 Constantinople, or Byzantium, was a topic of some importance in newspapers and magazines. Twentieth-century events help explain why Yeats chose as a symbol of a holy city a place which had been a symbol of decay and decadence at the end of the nineteenth century. Since Modern Greek history is not well known, some background information is needed.<sup>2</sup>

The Kingdom of Greece achieved independence from Turkey in 1831, but there were still large amounts of territory where Greeks were the majority of the population, such as Crete and Thessaly, under Turkish control. A major part of Greek policy for the next century was "The Great Idea", the incorporation of those areas considered "Greek" into Greece. By World War I, the Greeks had increased their territory and population by over a third, most of the new additions occurring from 1909-1913. The Great War provided an opportunity to side with the Allies against Turkey and gain important lands in the event of victory. The Allies dangled such prizes before the Greeks, including the island of Cyprus, but the king of Greece was related to the German royal house and thus it was not until 1917, after the king had been forced to abdicate and leave the country, that Greece joined the Allied cause. Nevertheless, the Greeks came to Versailles in 1919 anticipating the return of the islands of Lesbos, Chios, and Samos, and the territories around Smyrna, Thrace, and Constantinople.

In England, France, and America organizations were formed to support the Greeks. Numerous pamphlets were published urging the Greek claims, especially in England where Phil-Hellenism had run deep since the time of Byron. One manifesto written in 1919 has an introduction by T.P. O'Connor, an Irish Member of Parliament. He upbraids the Italians for not supporting the Greeks and says the Italians, who had recently undergone the *risorgimento*, should have sympathy for the Nationalist feeling of the Greeks as he, an Irish Nationalist, does. On Constantinople, he says:

I speak with some hesitation on the future of Constantinople, though my own strong hope is that the Greeks may be placed by the Peace Conference once more in the capital of the great Greek Empire, of which Constantinople was for centuries the head. One thing is by this time settled in the mood of all Europe, that, so far as Europe is concerned, there is no policy for the Turks but the old Gladstone policy of driving them out of Europe, bag and baggage. If International difficulties stand in the way of giving Constantinople to the Greeks, it might be converted into an international state under the protection of the League of Nations."<sup>3</sup>

Constantinople should be Greek or International, it was to be Turkish no longer. This sentiment was also expressed by J.B. Bury, Yeats's history teacher at Trinity College, in a letter to the London *Times* entitled "Greeks in Constantinople". Bury said: "I agree that, if any one Power is to inherit the sovereign possession of Constantinople, Greece alone has a good claim."<sup>4</sup> Whatever the fate of Constantinople, Bury insists that the Greek population must be protected and a Greek university established there. Bury does not mention St. Sophia, the famous church built by Justinian, but its fate was not ignored in Western capitals.<sup>5</sup> There were rallies in support of the return of the church to the Greek Orthodox Christians. There was a crusading aspect to this outlook, best revealed in a pamphlet *Hellas and Unredeemed Hellenism* by G. Bourdon: "I would venture to express the opinion that . . . if on the morrow of the fall of Turkey, the Greeks of Constantinople had again the possession of St. Sophia, which belongs to them, a great sign would suddenly illumine the black sky with light."<sup>6</sup> He reiterates this position at the conclusion of his essay: "On that day when the Cross, the symbol of the law of ages, rises above St. Sophia, the peace of the orient will be secure."<sup>7</sup>

When Yeats wrote in an early version of "Sailing to Byzantium": "I long for St. Sophia's sacred dome," it was a very contemporary expression.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Treaty of Versailles made Constantinople and the straits of the Hellespont "free" territory, there was good reason for hoping it would eventually come under Greek control. The Greeks did obtain Thrace and an area in Asia Minor. At the beginning of 1921, "The Great Idea" seemed a reality just beyond the horizon.

The dream crashed quickly. The causes were twofold. Internal squabbling between Royalists and Democrats weakened the army, and the Greeks undertook a disastrous campaign to destroy the Nationalist Turks in Ankara. They suffered total defeat and were driven out of Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace. In 1923, those areas were restored to Turkey and Constantinople was no longer within sight. In an attempt to end further conflict a population exchange was enforced,<sup>9</sup> although Turks in Thrace and Greeks in Constantinople were exempt. By 1924, there were no Greek

areas in Turkey, and Constantinople was forever beyond reach. It would now begin to be called Istanbul in the Western press.

This excursion into Greek history has been somewhat lengthy, but it was important to show that Constantinople was news. When Yeats begins writing of disembodied souls travelling to Byzantium in 1926 and of the Constantinople of Justinian when St. Sophia was built, it has great poignancy. For a few years before, Greeks were avidly talking about meeting "next year in Constantinople," and foreigners could think of seeing the cross again adorning St. Sophia. Now it would only be as souls, in a timeless frame, that they could view Constantinople as a holy Greek city.

Yeats nowhere speaks openly about Greek problems in the early 1920's, but it seems clear he was aware of them. For example, in "A Statesman's Holiday" he writes:

"Or am I de Valera, / Or the king of Greece" (18-19).

Jeffares takes the latter to be the monarch, King George, who returned to Greece in 1935 from exile.<sup>10</sup> It seems more likely, however, that it is King Constantine, who returned to Greece in 1921, about the time de Valera returned to Ireland. Both upset the negotiations that were in process. The return of King Constantine and the rejection of the Republican Venezilos severely hindered Greece's negotiations with the Entente, while de Valera's rejection of the negotiations of Arthur Griffith helped feed the Irish Civil War. The juxtaposition of these statesmen and the similarity between their roles was surely intentional.

Yeats writes in the play, *The Resurrection*, published in 1931: "All are from the foreign quarter, to judge by face and costume, and the most ignorant and excitable class of Asiatic Greeks, the dregs of the population. Such people suffer terribly and seek forgetfulness in monstrous ceremonies."<sup>11</sup>

The Asiatic Greeks had suffered terribly when they were forcibly uprooted in the early 1920's. Greece was not prepared for this mass of people who had lost nearly everything. Their fate was well known from descriptions of their plight printed in newspapers. Here again Yeats seems to allude to contemporary Greek politics.

It is also hard to ignore such a connection in the *Player Queen*, written in 1922 before the final Greek collapse in Asia Minor: "You will make Ionian music—music with its eyes / on voluptuous Asia."<sup>12</sup>

For one hundred years Greece had made music with its eyes on Asia Minor. Such music was the sound of Nationalism, Resurrection, and hope. By 1923, it would have been played for the last time.

The importance of these historical observations should be clear. A title such as "Towards Byzantium" (Yeats's first title) or "Sailing to Byzantium" in 1926 would instantly have a wistful, paradoxical meaning.<sup>13</sup> There is a conflict between the past, that holy city that can be visited out of the body, and the present in which the holy city seems to have disappeared.

There are certain similarities between the Greek and Irish Nationalist struggles between 1919 and 1924. Both come close to a goal which has consumed them for centuries. Both movements have religious motivation, the Orthodox Greeks versus the Muslim Turks and the Catholic Irish against the Church and State of England. The problem of minorities is crucial in each case. The Greek example might have a sobering lesson for Ireland. After one hundred years of fighting, from 1821 to 1922, the Greco-Turkish problem is only solved by an exchange of populations. The trouble in Northern Ireland could have no more sinister omen, and both nations looked back to golden ages, which were temporally coterminous. In a BBC broadcast Yeats said: "When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells and making jewelled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city."<sup>14</sup>

Yeats wrote in his diary for 1930: "Subject for a poem. Death of a friend . . . Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millenium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in golden trees, in the harbor (dolphins) offering backs to wailing dead that they may come to paradise."<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the first Christian millenium, Byzantium under Basil II was the great power of the East. Ireland at this time was united under the High Kingship of Brian Boru, but Brian died in 1014 and Basil in 1025. A period of decline began in both lands, symbolized in Yeats's description above. This decline would end for both in a long period of captivity. Once again a curious historical symmetry is found between Byzantium and Ireland. Yeats recognized these similarities, and Byzantium, the lost holy city of the Greeks, became a useful symbol when Yeats was confronted with a Free Ireland which lacked six counties and ushered in something quite inferior to the golden age he expected. It is no coincidence that the adjective "holy" is associated with both places. In "I am of Ireland" Yeats writes:

I am of Ireland,  
And the Holy Land of Ireland,  
And time runs on,' cried she,  
'Come out of charity,  
Come dance with me in Ireland.' (1-5)

In "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats says:

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium. (15-16.)

This poem begins:

That is no country for old men. The young  
 In one another's arms, birds in the trees  
 —those dying generations— at their song (1-3)

The young, dying generations are all the Greek and Irish soldiers who died for the dream between 1919 and 1924, and earlier. I would disagree with the view that there is a difference between *that* country, Ireland, and *this* city; Byzantium.<sup>16</sup> Rather it is a difference between *that* country, the Greece and Ireland we hoped for, and *this* country, the Greece and Ireland we have or can obtain.

The equation of Ireland and Byzantium is seen clearly at the beginning of "Byzantium."

The unpurged images of day recede;  
 The emperor's drunken soldiery are abed. (1-2)

This is an echo of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", and the drunken soldiers are not the emperor's, but Irish:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare  
 Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery  
 Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,  
 To crawl in her own blood, and go scot free. (25-8)

Yeats alludes here to the murder of Ellen Quinn in the Irish Civil War.<sup>17</sup> When Yeats begins "Byzantium" with an echo of this murder, he shows how far reality is from the world of superhuman shades, golden handiwork, and dancing spirits.

Yeats began "Sailing to Byzantium" after a trip to Sicily in 1925, where he saw the Greek mosaics in the Norman churches of Monreale and Cefalu. These surely refreshed his memory of a trip to Ravenna in 1907 and played an important role in the creation of the Byzantium poems. There is no record of whether he visited the Church of the Holy Spirit just outside Palermo. It was there on Easter Monday, 1282, that an uprising known as the Sicilian Vespers began. This was a native uprising but it had been supported by the gold of the Byzantine emperor, as Yeats could read in Gibbon. Further the Greek artwork Yeats saw in the city may have made him connect Palermo with Byzantium. For Yeats would have thought of another uprising which began on Easter Monday, 1916. Here again, Irish history seems to have a connection to Greek history.

From 1916 on, Yeats was very active in the movement to bring the Lane pictures back to Dublin from London. Yeats was certainly aware that Greece had been trying for years to have the Elgin marbles returned. Yeats had seen the marbles in the British museum. When writing letters and a

poem on the Lane pictures, Yeats must have been conscious of the famous lines about the Elgin marbles by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II. 11-15.

Byron is another important link between the Easter Rising and Irish Nationalism with Greece for Yeats. However true it may be, most English readers and many Greeks themselves feel the independence of tiny Greece from powerful Turkey was insured by the sacrifice made by Byron at Missolonghi. This caused a dilemma for Yeats, for he knew that one poet, by becoming a man of action at the right moment, liberated a nation. Byron performed this feat as an outsider in Orthodox Greece, just as Anglo-Irish Protestant Yeats was something of an outsider in Catholic Ireland. When Yeats thought of Byron he most often thought of the man of action. On February 21, 1924 (two years before starting "Sailing to Byzantium" and the very year of the centennial of Byron's death), he wrote H.J.C. Grierson thanking him for a copy of *The Background to English Literature*. He says "I am particularly indebted to you for your essay on Byron" and continues about the need for natural momentum in poetic syntax. "Byron . . . , though he always tries for it [natural syntax], constantly allows it to die out in mind-created construction, but is I think the one great English poet—though one can hardly call him great except in purpose and manhood—who sought it constantly."<sup>18</sup>

"One can hardly call him great except in purpose and manhood." There is little doubt to what Yeats refers to here, for Byron's purpose and manhood rests in the main on one act and how it played out. Yeats and John Quinn discussed in letters of 1919 whether a career in life and letters could be joined together. Byron was one of those Quinn adduced to show that it could.<sup>19</sup>

The Greeks would find no Byron in the 1920's to aid their cause. The Irish would have their martyrs of the Easter Rising. Like Byron, they would ensure their success by dying in failure. Neither MacDonaugh nor Pearse had the ability or the stature in letters of Yeats. In 1916, however, Yeats was 51 (not 36) years old, in a country not for old men. Rather than the glory of a great sacrifice, Yeats lived on to deal with the troubles freedom caused, and to write about, not to be, one of those who made Ireland free.

The importance of Byron for Yeats deserves investigation. I can only give a few indications of it here. T.P. O'Connor wrote in the introduction to *Greece Before the Conference*: "I have been so moved all my life—from the time I read the story of Greece in the lines of Byron—by claims of the race to redemption of its nationality and of its race."<sup>20</sup>

Byron created a sympathy for modern Greeks in England by stressing their descent from the glorious forebears. In *Childe Harold* he wrote of how the present Greek compared to the ancient:

In all save form alone, how chang'd! and who  
 That marks the fire still sparkling in each eye,  
 Who but would deem their bosoms burn'd anew  
 With thy unquenched beam, lost Liberty! (II.75.711-1715).

Byron says that when the Spartans and Athens' children rise again, "Then may'st thou be restored; but not till then" (II. 84.796). Yeats would also try to stir a race through use of past greatness and insistence on their connection to old heroes. As O'Connor's words show, Byron was something of a model for this endeavor.

Byron also provided a precedent for the analogy of Greece and Ireland. In the notes to the second canto of *Childe Harold*, Byron said:

The Greeks also—a kind of Eastern Irish papists—have a college of their own at Maynooth—no, at Haivali; where the heterodox receive much the same kind of countenance from the Ottoman as the Catholic college from the English legislature. Who shall then affirm the Turks are ignorant bigots, when they thus evince the exact proportion of Christian charity which is tolerated in the most prosperous and orthodox of all possible kingdoms? But though they allow all this, they will not suffer the Greeks to participate in their privileges: no, let them fight their battles, and pay their haratch (taxes), be drubbed in this world, and damned in the next. And shall we then emancipate our Irish helots? Mahomet forbid! We should then be bad Mussulmans, and worse Christians; at present we unite the best of both-jesuitical faith, and something not much inferior to Turkish toleration.<sup>21</sup>

Yeats may have been building on Byron's observation when he used the analogy of Greece and Ireland in his own work.

Byron may have had a more direct influence on "Sailing to Byzantium." *Childe Harold* II.79.747-51 read:

And whose more rife with merriment than thine,  
 Oh Stamboul! once the empress of their reign?  
 Though now turbans pollute Sophia's shrine,  
 and Greece her very altars eyes in vain:  
 (Alas! her woes will still pervade my strain!)

For both Byron and Yeats, Byzantium was a holy Greek city. For Byron, there was still the hope that the real city would be redeemed. For Yeats in 1926, those hopes were gone.

The historical background I have discussed is not, in and of itself, a suitable interpretation of the Byzantium poems. It is just that, a background, of which an interpretation of the poems that includes the spiritual and aesthetic aspects should take account. If this paper stimulates some new thoughts on Yeats's Byzantium, it will have done its work.

CORNING, NEW YORK

#### NOTES

1. For a survey of past views, see James Lovic Allen, "Charts for the Voyage to Byzantium: An Annotated Bibliography of Scholarship and Criticism on Yeats' Byzantium Poems, 1935-70" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 77 (1973) 28-50. All quotations from poems of Yeats are to *The Poems of W.B. Yeats* ed. R.J. Finneran (Macmillan: New York, 1983). The line numbers of the quoted sections are provided in the text.

2. The best account in English of Greece after the Great War is Michael L. Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor* (London, 1973). The period is covered less fully in Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, 1979).

3. *Greece Before the Conference* by "Polybius" (London, 1919) xxi-xxii.

4. *London Times* Feb. 4 (1919) p.7 Col. d.

5. On this see Paul Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres* (Columbus, Ohio, 1974) 191 and 198n48.

6. *Hellas and Unredeemed Hellenism* tr. from the French by Carroll Brown and published by the American Hellenic Association (New York, 1919) 23.

7. Note 6, 32.

8. See John Stallworthy, *Between the Lines: Yeats' Poems in the Making* (Oxford, 1961) 95.

9. This population exchange took place almost simultaneously with the massacres of Armenians in Smyrna where many Greeks were among the victims of that slaughter.

10. *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Stanford, CA, 1968) 506.

11. *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats* ed. Russell K. Alspach (Macmillan: New York, 1966) 915.

12. Note 11, 750.

13. Stallworthy, (note 8) 102.

14. The passage can be found in Jeffares, (note 10) 253-4.

15. This passage is quoted in Jeffares, (note 10) 352.

16. So Jeffares, (note 10) 254 and Stallworthy (note 8) 102-3..

17. On the murder of Ellen Quinn, see Joseph Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865-1939* (New York, 1942, rev. ed. 1961) 329.

18. *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* ed. Allan Wade (London, 1954) 710. See also Yeats' comments on Byron in a letter to S. Cockerell on Jan. 22, 1906 (p. 467).

19. *The Letters of John Quinn to William Butler Yeats* ed. Alan Hember (Studies in Modern Literature 28: Ann Arbor, 1983) 192-3.

20. *Greece Before the Conference*, (note 3) xxv.

21. I use the text *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* Vol. II ed. Jerome McGann



(Oxford, 1980) 211. In an unpublished draft of *Per Amica Silentiae Lunae* Yeats also equated the Irish Catholics with the Greek Orthodox, He wrote of finding a simple, Medieval faith in rural Ireland, ". . . now that of Rome, now that of the Celtic church, which turned rather to Byzantium, . . ." See Richard Ellman, *The Identity of Yeats* (Oxford, 1954) 305-6.

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## The Officer-Figure Aestheticized: Some Biographical Speculations on Hofmannsthal's "Reitergeschichte"

*Thomas A. Kamla*

Richard Alewyn stated years ago that the story of Rittmeister Rofrano in Hofmannsthal's "Reitergeschichte" still remained to be written and the observation holds true even today.<sup>1</sup> To date, analyses of the narrative have concentrated, and understandably so, on the dominant figure of Wachtmeister Lerch, while discussions of the Rittmeister have served the purpose of contrasting the superior with, and thereby bringing into sharper focus, the character of the subordinate by speculating on whether Lerch's execution was socially or psychologically motivated, a matter of military necessity, or none of these inasmuch as they are called into doubt by the narrator himself.<sup>2</sup>

The question as to why Alewyn felt that more could be said about the rather sketchy portrayal of the Rittmeister prompts the critic to go beyond the text and consult statements in Hofmannsthal's essays and letters that address the role of the officer-nobleman in his performance of military duty. To be sure, investigations into the biographical background of "Reitergeschichte" have not failed to establish the connection with Hofmannsthal's own periods of military service, most notably those carried out in the remote Eastern provinces of the Austrian monarchy,<sup>3</sup> but only to the extent that these experiences illuminate, once again, the inner life of Lerch as he encounters one episode of instinctual perversion after another during his fateful ride through the desolate village. With the exception of the march through Naples and the closing scene, the officer-figure, a more likely candidate for the author's persona than a sergeant, becomes rather conspicuous by his absence in the events recounted and, as Hofmannsthal's correspondence points out, perhaps with good reason.

In letters written from the forsaken military outposts of Göding and Tlumacz, his quarters during manouvers in 1894-95 and again in 1896, Hofmannsthal makes it quite clear that within the various commissioned ranks one finds officers—"sonderbare Existenzen," in some cases—<sup>4</sup> whose tastes and temperament better suit them to soldiering than others. Included among these officers, we learn, are "einige Rittmeister . . . , die

sich ohne Verbitterung mit einem sehr bescheidenen Leben abgefunden haben" (B I, 195). More important to our discussion, though, is the other group mentioned, "die jungen Offiziere," who, although basically "gutmütig," are also "ziemlich wertlos" (B I, 195), as well as the group comprising Hofmannsthal's own Rittmeister and "alle Zugskommandanten," whom he finds "entweder enorm gutmütig oder sehr elegant . . ." (B I, 127). Elsewhere he refers again to his Rittmeister, this time in the company of a "hübschen und indolent-graziösen Leutnant" (B I, 175) with whom he, by his own admission ("ich bin so unglaublich indolent" [B I, 184]), shares a definite affinity.

"Gutmütig," "wertlos," "elegant," "hübsch," "indolent," "graziös"—these epithets would seem, on reflection, not exactly to fit the image of the leader expected to give example by distinguishing himself on the field of battle. Instead, they point more to a preoccupation with less vital matters such as refinement and form, with inactivity and a sense of ennui, all of which explains perhaps why Hofmannsthal holds to the opinion that "im Grund hassen alle Offiziere, die eleganten und uneleganten, den Dienst" (B I, 197).

It is not surprising, then, that Hofmannsthal should assume a certain authorial distance to his subject matter by electing to portray as his dominant character a figure who has risen from the ranks of the troops, one whose less refined sensibilities better enable him, therefore, to stomach the ravages of military confrontation. The efficiency with which Lerch and his soldiers go about the business of war has been duly noted<sup>5</sup>; indeed, they seem almost to revel in its mindless brutality as the final skirmish, a veritable bloodbath, erupts in a flurry of brandished swords and hacked bodies accompanied each time by the gleeful faces of the victors. In contrast, reference to the Rittmeister is only fleeting, and the picture evoked by it—a look of terror cast by "weit aufgerissenen Augen und grimmig entblösten Zähnen"<sup>6</sup>—makes the officer seem oddly out of place in this scene. It is as if Hofmannsthal were more concerned with "deactivating" his squadron commander by freezing his appearance in a momentary pose which promptly disappears as the description of the battle continues.

One is reminded here of another of Hofmannsthal's letters in which he ruminates on the poses of officers whose portraits adorned the wall of the club at his cavalry barracks. Singling out certain of their features, he recalls: "Ja, sie haben sogar einige ganz einzige Bewegungen der Arme und der Augenlider, die im übrigen Europa nur mehr in Museen zu sehen sind und die ich sehr goutiere" (B I, 119). The museumlike, and thus artificial, quality that Hofmannsthal delights in imparting to features he considers unique, especially the eyelids, underscores the impression of posing noted in the above reference to the Rittmeister. This fleeting image, with its suggestion of formal exclusivity, in effect obstructs the narrative flow of the passage, and the same holds true for the Pisa students taken prisoner

during the battle that opens the story. The phrase, "wohlerzogene und hübsche junge Leute mit weissen Händen und halblangem Haar" (50), has the function in this scene of a self-reflexive, hermetic construct and by its reference to attributes of refinement impedes, if only momentarily, the more earthy pace of the narrative.

That these captives happen to be students rather than ordinary soldiers is more than just coincidence. Like the officers mentioned in Hofmannsthal's letters, indeed like the Rittmeister himself in the closing episode, their very existence is defined by a sense of form that renders them incapable of interacting with the vulgar side of life presented in the story.<sup>7</sup> In one of the letters from his military period, Hofmannsthal addresses this very issue and is forced to admit that life as he had envisioned it bears little correlation with his present circumstances. "Ich korrigiere meinen Begriff vom Leben," he states, "von dem, "von dem, was das Leben für die meisten Menschen ist: es ist viel freudloser, viel niedriger, als man gerne denkt, noch viel niedriger" (B I, 182). Throughout this correspondence, de-personalized images such as "schmutzig," "elend," "hässlich," and "stinkend" crop up repeatedly and elaborate this sordid view, to the point where Hofmannsthal finds himself at a loss to explain just how "alle diese Dinge eine solche Gewalt über mich haben können" (B I, 184).

In 1895 Hofmannsthal published an essay entitled "Theodor von Hörmann," which provides still further insight into his views concerning Austrian officers and the military. As in the letters, here too his interest focuses on a particular type of officer ("einer ganz bestimmten Art von österreichischem Infanterieoffizier"<sup>8</sup>), one whose facial expression, as revealed in the bust of the artist Hörmann and his paintings, exhibits features unique ("anders als alle andern" [TvH, 224]) within the officer ranks. Besides the generally appealing character (again "jung und hübsch" [TvH, 224]) of these faces, that which sets them apart ("das Besondere" [TvH, 224]) from faces that appear "stumpf," "leer," "hart," and "nichtig" (TvH, 224) are the eyes as well as indescribable things ("unnennbaren Dingen" [TvH, 224]) under the eyes, about the lips, and on the forehead.

What Hofmannsthal finds captivating about these eyes is their apparent remoteness from immediate experience, their non-confinement to material objects with which they come in contact ("sie vermögen auch . . . das, vorüber sie hinschauen, gar nicht zu sehen" [TvH, 224]). Interestingly, Hofmannsthal regards this detached bearing as something exceptional ("etwas ziemlich Hohes und Seltenes" [TvH, 224]), as a gift even ("Gabe" [TvH, 224]), and in doing so draws a contrast to eyes that register images circumscribed solely by vulgar and coarse impressions, that view objects much in the way animals would ("ihre Augen sehen nicht brutal gerade die Objekte, die rund herum sind, es sind weder die Augen junger vernünftiger, noch alter misstrauischer Tiere, sondern sie sehen weit mehr" [TvH, 224]). Accordingly, the singular, identifying feature of all these phy-

siognomies, as he terms it, is "innere Form" (TvH, 225), suggesting an attitude of refined aloofness that distinguishes these officers, sets them apart from "the others."

Hofmannsthal then goes on to describe Hörmann's officer-type in a pseudo-social setting with other officers and soldiers. The type is rather rare, to be sure. In one regiment one might find three or four, in another perhaps only one or none at all. Between these officers and the other members of the regiment there exists, furthermore, a concealed antipathy ("verschleierte Antipathie" [TvH, 225]), a relationship intimating not so much mutual dislike but a fundamental incompatibility spawned, in large part, by the way the "inner form" of the select group translates into social perception. Outwardly, these officers might appear to the others as "arrogant," "egotistic," and "affected" ("hochmütig," "Egoisten," "affektiert" [TvH, 225]); but then again this appearance, as the tenor of the essay suggests, seems more the expression of an aesthetic posture born of cultural conditioning than a psychological predisposition molded by petty interpersonal relationships.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the air of elevated detachment surrounding these officers relates directly to a profession in which the concept of military service, i.e., "Dienst," is viewed in the context, not of productive activity, but of a life unlived ("einem sogenannten Leben" [TvH, 225]), one tantamount to a purely formalized existence ("einem rein formalen Dasein" [TvH, 225]) devoid of a soul ("deren Seele . . . eben nicht da ist" [TvH, 225]). Thus the entire ambiance in which Hofmannsthal envisions these officers' portraits is rooted in a life of appearances ("Scheinleben" [TvH, 225]), or of form, in which the attributes of "jung," "leichtsinzig," and "elegant" (TvH, 225), all reminiscent of Hofmannsthal's army letters, become but stylized descriptions of an exclusive class.

Throughout his early period Hofmannsthal, always sensitive to the demands of form but also to the enervating toll they could exact on the writer, wrestled with a concept of life which usually implied a productive interaction with the artistic nonself to counterbalance the spent energies of an overrefined intellectual aristocracy.<sup>9</sup> The fact that the "Scheinleben" outlined in the Hörmann essay can hardly lay claim to this condition only makes it more aesthetically palatable. The effete qualities emanating from the "shy, reserved" ("schüchtern, zurückhaltend" [TvH, 225]) faces that Hofmannsthal ponders, faces that will "admirably" bear the pallidness of great hours ("die Bläße grosser Stunden" [TvH, 225]) with modesty and indifference ("Bescheidenheit und Nonchalance" [TvH, 225]), is far superior, in his perception of things, to the triumphant fanfare ("grosses glorreiches Rufen" [TvH, 225]) that characterizes army life. In calling this circle of officers "die Überlegenen . . . in der Hand des Todes" (TvH, 225), Hofmannsthal thus rules out the possibility of their embracing life in military terms and fosters, by way of reaction to this "life unlived," a "Schein-

leben" of exclusiveness that has aesthetic implications in any fictional rendering of the officer-type treated in this essay.

With these observations in mind, then, as well as those culled from Hofmannsthal's letters, we note in the concluding scene of "Reitergeschichte" that the Rittmeister's reaction to Lerch's battle report is one of apparent disinterest ("zerstreut" [60]) in its commendable results. It is as if he were preoccupied with matters other than victory and the booty gained from it, for the casualness with which he receives the report and then proceeds to order the disposal of the howitzer ("er winkte den Leutnant . . . zu sich" [60]) stands in pronounced contrast to the restless mood of the troops, who are just itching for another fight and the chance to amass their spoils even more. The Rittmeister's nonchalant manner of overseeing the roll call thus conveys the impression of aloofness, but it is an aloofness originating more out of a sense of refinement than authority, an aestheticized detachment, in other words, that runs counter to—"demilitarizes," if you will—the surface impression of superiority emanating from his position as squadron commander. As his large eyelids ("grossen Lider" [60]) open to reveal eyes tired and blue ("schläfrig" and "blau" [60]), we are reminded of the "Augenlider" mentioned earlier (B I, 119) whose movements had a museumlike, i.e., formal, quality about them which rendered them unique among certain officers. The movement in the Rittmeister's eyelids is no less striking and reveals by the juxtaposition of "blueishness" and "tiredness" a relationship that is really complementary if one regards "schläfrig" as an allusion to the devitalization born of a life unlivd and "blau" as a form-related concept which, through its suggestion of clarity and beauty, impacts aesthetically on this condition.

Within the framework of the story's outer action, the Rittmeister's order to release the enemy horses, issued with characteristic restraint, it should be added ("vernehmlich, aber ohne seine Stimme zu erheben" [60]), has consequences of an obvious military nature the moment it goes unheeded, an issue which has already been investigated in considerable detail.<sup>10</sup> But it is arguable whether the inner motivation that prompts the order, and here one ought not overlook von Wiese's analysis, is equally one of military necessity. Aesthetic reasons can also be inferred,<sup>11</sup> especially when one takes into account the incompatibility that exists between an army that desires booty acquired by power and a commanding officer whose attitude of refined indifference renders him unmoved by this desire. Possession and power are two key leitmotifs in the story that impel both the army's actions on the battlefield as well as Lerch's fantasies concerning the sensual Viuc and the portly gentleman occupying her boudoir. They are motifs that clearly convey an instinctual message, be it in reference to the army's lust for blood or Lerch's erotic reveries. In a later essay, Hofmannsthal himself once noted the incompatibility between possession and beauty ("Erwerb" and "Schönheit"<sup>12</sup>); preoccupation with things of an aesthetic

nature, and to him this was customarily linked with beauty and form, necessarily precluded any dependency on base motives. Accordingly, the Rittmeister's command to release the horses has the effect of neutralizing this incompatibility, thereby affirming a posture of indifference to the inclinations of "the others."

The strongest argument for an interpretation of the Rittmeister as a figure more at home in the "Scheinleben" of form than, as the Hörmann essay points out, that of military power is, of course, the iron grey captured so indelicately by Lerch during the final clash with the enemy. That this graceful mount happens to be the property of an officer, one with a face young and pale ("jung" and "bleich [59])," no less, seems only appropriate to the situation. Like the Pisa students during the opening skirmish, this enemy officer, *separated* from those actually involved in the conflict, seems also ill-suited to do battle as we see him futilely attempting to negotiate a brook with his shying steed. That the grey fails at something so practical and routine as crossing a small stream is perhaps not so alarming when one considers what this horse signifies. Because his qualities seem out-of-the-ordinary, they imply a certain impracticality in, but also indifference to, matters that smack of the mundane and distasteful. Thus the lofty air ("leicht und zierlich wie ein Reh" [59]) with which he steps over the body of his slain master symbolizes at once avoidance of, and superiority over, a reality whose utter formlessness is manifested in the gruesome manner of the officer's death.

The impression of exclusiveness conveyed by the grey's actions, of total self-absorption in the face of a chaotic reality, receives still further confirmation during the roll call. "Jung," "schön," and "eitel" (60) complement the above descriptions as we see the grey, a veritable model of beauty and form, capering "mit gehobenem Kopf" (60), quite unconcerned about whose possession he has now become. Yet the narrator leaves no mistake as to where the true affinity lies since it is not Lerch's mount that the grey nestles up to but the Rittmeister's at the moment he gives the order to relinquish possession of the horses. It would thus appear from Hofmannsthal's selection of images in these scenes that he indeed meant to create a symbol of refinement out of the grey, whose very proximity to the Rittmeister has the effect of forging an aesthetic identity of the two.<sup>13</sup>

At first glance, certain difficulties seem to surface with this interpretation, especially in the closing episode depicting Lerch's execution at the hand of the Rittmeister. One could easily infer from the Rittmeister's alert response to the insubordination a bearing very much in touch with reality, one that reflects the qualities of leadership necessary to make snap decisions in a crisis situation. And yet the perfunctory, almost insouciant manner in which he carries out the execution runs counter to any real military grasp of the situation since it is but an extension of the same attitude of noninvolvement that had characterized his aloof bearing all along. The

look of disinterest informing the commander's action, reflected in the veiled glance ("verschleierten Blick" [61]) fixed upon the Wachtmeister, suggests that the shooting itself is done merely as a matter of form, without regard for the subordinate's own leadership position or the rashness of the act. That the author dispenses with subjective characterization in the Rittmeister's case and selects images which point, instead, to a stylized attitude or outward pose indicates, in turn, preoccupation with the more formal aspects of superior bearing.

It is no wonder, then, that the narrator questions whether psychological factors or military necessity play a role in the Rittmeister's reaction to Lerch's refusal to free the iron grey. That he distinctly calls these "explanations" into doubt ("bleibt im Zweifel" [61]) suggests more strongly a disavowal of their validity than narrative indecision, as some critics maintain.<sup>14</sup> When the Rittmeister nonchalantly raises his arm to take aim, we are reminded of the "ganz einzige Bewegungen der Arme" (B I, 119) mentioned in Hofmannsthal's letter concerning the officers' portraits. The casual ("nachlässig" [61]), almost affected ("geziert" [61]) nature of the movement reinforces, once again, the impression of a pose and, with that, of distance accentuated by a certain artificiality. The attitude of exclusivity that sets this officer-type apart from "the others" implies, at the same time, distaste for the formless life they represent. Thus the "verschleierte Antipathie" (TvH, 225) that had made these officers outsiders to the rest of the army in the Hörmann essay becomes fictionally distilled in the Rittmeister's facial expression as he is about to discharge his pistol. "Die Oberlippe verächtlich hinaufziehend" (61), as it stems from a posture of continuing noninvolvement, evokes an expression not so much of psychological disposition but of affectation, thus complementing the image of aestheticized superiority in which the Rittmeister is cast in the closing scene. Having gone through the mere *motions* of a military execution, he can now calmly ("ruhig" [62]) holster his weapon, itself a stylized motion, an affected movement, and one that bears analogy to the "Scheinleben" of "die Überlegenen" described in the essay.

Viewed against the broader historical background of fin-de-siècle Vienna, the officer-figure in "Reitergeschichte" symbolizes those liberal intellectuals who, like Hofmannsthal, viewed social progress as decline and compensated for their inability to acculturate by accommodating themselves to an illusory realm of beauty. The result was a cultural aristocracy whose values, once internalized, were unsullied by the realities of the sociopolitical sphere. The outside world itself therefore took on a semblance of the unreal since the only valid, albeit illusory reality was the one emanating from the aesthetic viewpoint.

And so it is with Hofmannsthal's perceptions of life in the Austrian army and of the soldiers that comprise it when he remarks: ". . . doch fallen einem ihre Gesichter fast zuerst ein, wenn man darüber nachdenkt,



ob unsere grosse Armee ein wirkliches und starkes Ding ist, oder ein Scheinding" (TvH, 225). Not only does this statement appear to cast doubt on whether the army can in fact be said to reflect a reality bustling with life; Hofmannsthal even goes so far as to impart to this segment of society an illusory existence of its own. Hence the contrast that sets certain officers apart from the rest of the army, i.e., the outside world, lies not so much in the distinction between evading life and embracing it, but in the incompatible illusions of life—the one reflecting a dissolute vitality, the other an austere form—that both project. Such is the situation at the close of "Reitergeschichte."

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#### NOTES

1. Richard Alewyn, *über Hugo von Hofmannsthal*. 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 86.

2. Commentators addressing these points are Benno von Wiese, *Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1964) 1: 284-303; Alewyn, 78-87; Gerhard Träbing, "Hugo von Hofmannsthals 'Reitergeschichte': Beitrag zu einer Phänomenologie der deutschen Augenblicksgeschichte," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 43 (1969): 707-25; Rolf Tarot, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Daseinsformen und dichterische Struktur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1970) 332-53; Heinz Rieder, "Hugo von Hofmannsthals "'Reitergeschichte,'" *Marginalien zur poetischen Welt*, eds. Alois Eder, et al. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971) 311-23; Volker O. Dürr, "Der Tod des Wachmeisters Anton Lerch und die Revolution von 1848: Zu Hofmannsthals *Reitergeschichte*," *German Quarterly* 45 (1972): 33-46; Hugo Schmidt, "Zum Symbolgehalt der *Reitergeschichte* Hofmannsthals," *Views and Reviews of Modern German Literature*, ed. Karl S. Weimar (München: Delp, 1974) 70-83; Marianne Burkhard, "Hofmannsthals *Reitergeschichte*: Ein Gegenstück zum Chandosbrief," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 4 (1975): 27-53; Theodore Fiedler, "Hofmannsthals 'Reitergeschichte' und ihre Leser: Zur Politik der Ironie," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 26 (1976): 140-63; and Wolfram Mauser, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Konfliktbewältigung und Werkstruktur: Eine psychosozilogische Interpretation* (München: Fink, 1977) 101-17.

3. See Mary E. Gilbert, "Hugo von Hofmannsthals 'Reitergeschichte': Versuch einer Interpretation," *Der Deutschunterricht* 8 (1956): 101-12 and Carl V. Hansen, "The Death of First Sergeant Anton Lerch in Hofmannsthal's *Reitergeschichte*: A Military Analysis," *Modern Austrian Literature* 13.2 (1980): 17-26.

4. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Briefe I: 1890-1901* (Berlin: Fischer, 1935) 183. Hereafter cited in the text as B I.

5. See especially von Wiese, 289-90; Tarot, 335-36; Dürr, 35; Schmidt, 76; and Burkhard, 31-34.

6. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die Erzählungen*, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1968) 58-59. Further citations are to this edition.

7. Von Wiese began the discussion of the story's form-related characteristics, which has since generated a variety of diverging opinions on the symbolic content of the novella.

8. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Prosa I*, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1956) 224. Hereafter cited in the text as TvH.

9. See, in this regard, Thomas A. Kovach, *Hofmannsthal and Symbolism: Art and Life in the Work of a Modern Poet* (New York: Lang, 1985) 116-41.

10. See note 2, especially Träbing, 718-19, and Fiedler, 161-62. See also Hansen, 21-24.

11. Unlike the biographical approach I am taking, von Wiese's investigation into these reasons is entirely text-oriented.

12. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Prosa III*, ed. Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1952) 235.

13. On this point, see von Wiese, 300-01, and Dürr, 37-38.

14. See, for example, Gilbert, 109, and Rieder, 320.

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## Il ruolo della politica nel canzoniere di Pavese

Fabio Girelli-Carasi

Nell'affrontare il tema del ruolo della politica nella raccolta di Pavese *Lavorare Stanca* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968),<sup>1</sup> penso siano necessarie alcune premesse per inquadrare i criteri a cui si affida la presente analisi.

È necessario ricordare innanzitutto che Pavese non fu mai né un militante né quello che Gramsci e Vittorini (e tantomeno Togliatti) definirebbero *intellettuale organico*. Dalle note biografiche in *Il Vizio Assurdo* di Davide Lajolo (Milano: Mondadori, 1972), e *Lessico Familiare* di Natalia Ginzburg (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), possiamo escludere che Pavese provasse interesse attivo per la politica, per il dibattito ideologico, e per la lotta clandestina, pur aderendo emotivamente all'area ideale del gruppo di intellettuali antifascisti radunati attorno alla casa editrice Einaudi.<sup>2</sup> Pertanto "l'opposizione al fascismo e la sua adesione al Partito Comunista, rischiano di falsare, se assunti come metro di valutazione estetica per le poesie di *Legna Verde*, il discorso poetico-ideologico che Pavese volle di proposito sviluppare in quelle liriche."<sup>3</sup>

La seconda premessa concerne direttamente la metodologia d'indagine basata sulla lettura di *Lavorare Stanca* quale canzoniere. Partendo da tale presupposto, in quest'opera la politica appare con un valore strumentale, in funzione cioè di altre categorie dell'esperienza, e, in particolare, di categorie pre-razionali. La politica in questo contesto non costituisce l'oggetto della indagine poetica pavesiana, ma rappresenta piuttosto un passaggio intermedio verso altre conclusioni. Per provare questo punto è necessario procedere ad una analisi a due livelli: a livello di canzoniere nel suo complesso, ed a livello della singola sezione in cui le poesie politiche sono raggruppate. È mia opinione che la lettura parallela del ruolo della politica in contesti di diversa ampiezza permetta di coglierne il valore in relazione sia agli altri temi che al disegno complessivo dell'opera.

La natura e la struttura di *Lavorare Stanca* come canzoniere sono intrinseche al processo creativo stesso. Nel 1943, nel pubblicare una nuova edizione di *Lavorare stanca* (Torino: Einaudi), Pavese rimaneggiò la precedente edizione del 1936 (Firenze: Solaria) togliendo alcune poesie, aggiugnendone altre, ma soprattutto sconvolgendo l'ordine di apparizione delle liriche,

riordinate e suddivise in 6 gruppi autonomi recanti ciascuno il titolo di una poesia in essi contenuta.<sup>4</sup> Il risultato di questa ristrutturazione era una raccolta che narrava "l'avventura di un adolescente che, orgoglioso della sua campagna, immagina consimile la città, ma vi trova la solitudine e vi rimedia col sesso e la passione che servono soltanto a sradicarlo e a gettarlo lontano da campagna e città in una più tragica solitudine. . . ." (Pavese, 1968 [136]). Con queste parole Pavese riassunse la trama naturalistica del racconto, aggiungendo inoltre: "Hai scoperto in questo canzoniere una coerenza formale che é l'evocazione di figure tutte solitarie ma fantastichamente vive in quanto saldate tutte al loro breve mondo per mezzo dell'immagine interna" (136). I termini-cardine sui quali soffermare la nostra attenzione sono: "figure," "immagine interna," e "coerenza formale." Le "figure" sono gli archetipi, cioè i personaggi, o meglio ancora le varie fattispecie del personaggio centrale nelle sue manifestazioni diacroniche, dal ragazzo al vecchio. Per quanto riguarda l'"immagine interna," essendo il pensiero di Pavese quantomeno sgusciante (Pavese, 1968 [136]), proporei la seguente definizione: "La sostanza ontologica di una figura in relazione alla propria fenomenologia, e in relazione alla fenomenologia di altre figure con le quali interagisce." Per quanto concerne la "coerenza formale" delle figure, essa consiste nel fatto che la loro storia, il loro sviluppo fisiologico e psicologico viene ripetuto in modo strutturalmente identico nei tre livelli costitutivi dell'opera: nel canzoniere nel suo complesso; in ciascuna delle sei sezioni; e, in un numero frequentissimo di casi, nelle singole liriche. Molti hanno inoltre attribuito al canzoniere di Pavese valore autobiografico e persino profetico. Se elemento autobiografico esiste, questo riflette un atteggiamento psicologico del poeta in una fase della sua vita, proiettato sui ricordi del passato e su di un immaginario futuro. Tale prospettiva, centrale rispetto allo spettro panoramico di *Lavorare Stanca*, conferisce all'opera uniformità concettuale e di attuazione.

Sono così presenti gli elementi costitutivi del canzoniere: un soggetto la cui realtà esistenziale non muta (il protagonista); l'elemento dinamico, cioè il procedimento della sua evoluzione spirituale e fisica; e infine abbiamo accennato alla presenza di una unitarietà prospettica e concettuale.

Il punto focale di *Lavorare Stanca* é, per usare un termine divenuto classico, *il male di vivere* di uno spirito incapace di "prendere parte alla vita" (Pavese, 1968 [91]). Identificata alternativamente con la depressione, la scontrosità, l'angoscia esistenziale, l'introversione, questa sindrome si manifesta come incapacità di instaurare rapporti fecondi con gli altri. É una paralisi emotiva da cui nasce un senso di solitudine e di esclusione che si fa tanto più profondo quanto più falliscono i tentativi di rompere l'isolamento derivante da essa, fino a risolversi nella più totale aridità emotiva.

*Lavorare Stanca* é la storia di questi tentativi e fallimenti di rompere un isolamento esistenziale. L'adolescente, con cui si apre l'opera, si affaccia

alla vita e sente l'esigenza di sviluppare rapporti con gli altri. Egli si dibatte fra l'orgoglio e l'imbarazzo della propria genia familiare, e fra il desiderio e il terrore dell'esperienza sessuale. Il giovane uomo aspira all'amore, al rapporto sentimentale significativo, ma ne esce sconfitto e amareggiato. L'uomo maturo tenta senza successo di collegare la propria vita a quella dei compagni di lavoro per il tramite della comune condizione e sofferenza. Il responso finale é racchiuso nell'immagine del vecchio, o dell'uomo solo, lucidamente impietoso sullo scacco esistenziale che lo isola dal mondo. Le figure del ragazzo, del giovane uomo, del lavoratore, dell'uomo solo (o le varianti di quest'ultimo: l'ubriaco, il pezzente, il vecchio, cioè i segni dell'inutilità e del decadimento) rappresentano le costanti fisse di ciascuna sezione, presenti con identico significato pur se con differente rilievo. All'inizio il protagonista é l'adolescente, mentre le altre figure fungono da termine di confronto. Nelle sezioni seguenti, sono prima il giovane uomo, poi l'uomo maturo ed infine le varie immagini dell'uomo sconfitto che si avvicinano nel ruolo del protagonista, mentre gli altri si aggirano sullo sfondo come fantasmi.

Anche i molti sotto-temi presenti, che costituiscono il supporto narrativo del canzoniere, assumono vari gradi di rilevanza a misura dell'importanza della figura cui sono associati: l'ascendenza familiare, la donna, la campagna, la città, il lavoro, vedono accresciuto o diminuito il proprio ruolo a seconda che sia il ragazzo, il giovane o l'adulto al centro della narrazione.

Tra questi sotto-temi, quello del lavoro, apparso nella fase adolescente come elemento satellite, si trasforma dapprima in componente caratteristica e, azzarderei, simbolica, della maturità, per divenire infine l'esperienza totalizzante riassuntiva dell'età adulta, quella che conferisce all'individuo un significato in quanto membro del consorzio umano.

La connessione tra l'individuo e la politica in *Lavorare Stanca* passa attraverso il lavoro. Nella classica interpretazione marxista, nel lavoro si manifestano le tensioni sociali ed economiche tra le classi. Esso é inoltre veicolo e misura del valore individuale di una persona. In virtù della molteplicità delle sue funzioni il lavoro diviene il catalizzatore della identificazione tra esigenze esistenziali e dinamiche storiche, la cui naturale sfera di espressione ed espansione é la politica.

Vorrei a questo punto tralasciare il riferimento al contesto del canzoniere, che riprenderò più tardi, per analizzare la sezione *Legna Verde* (Pavese, 1968 [99-108]) autonomamente. Il fatto di poterne estrarre una trama,<sup>5</sup> come in un'opera narrativa, é il risultato della poetica esplicita di Pavese, la "poesia-racconto," (Pavese, 1968 [124]) basata sulle proprietà fabulatrici dei testi.

Come accennato in precedenza, sia lo schema del canzoniere che quelli delle singole sezioni e quindi di *Legna Verde* hanno pressoché identica struttura narrativa. I temi che vi appaiono seguono un ordine sperimentato: la fuga del ragazzo, la campagna, l'avventura della città e la delusione che

ne deriva, il lavoro. Il lavoro é il segno della maturità, dell'età adulta e dei suoi obblighi. É uno stato che l'adolescente rifiuta e che é subito senza gioia dall'adulto, quello in cui Biasin ha visto emergere "a masculine sense of responsibility."<sup>6</sup>

*Leqna Verde* si apre in "Esterno" (99) con l'immagine del ragazzo riluttante ad entrare nel mondo degli adulti e del lavoro.

Quel ragazzo scomparso al mattino, non torna.

Ha lasciato la pala, ancor fredda, all'uncino

- era l'alba - nessuno ha voluto seguirlo.

.....

Ci pensano tutti

aspettando il lavoro, come un gregge svogliato.

In questa fase il lavoro, lungi dal rappresentare l'ambito in cui si esprime la sofferenza esistenziale, é accettato con passiva rassegnazione, come una blanda condanna inevitabile. Un atteggiamento questo che riflette la prospettiva dell'immatunità precedente la presa di coscienza propria della condizione adulta.

In "Fumatori di carta" (101) troviamo sviluppato il segmento di transizione dall'adolescenza all'età adulta: il ragazzo si fa uomo, il contadino diventa operaio e in questa nuova condizione incontra l'angoscia di un destino condiviso da altri sventurati. Da questa scoperta scaturisce una spinta emotiva di solidarietà che stabilisce le basi di un legame profondo, senza peraltro trasformarsi ancora in iniziativa politica:

. . . . . Venne a Torino, cercando una vita  
e trovò ingiustizie. . . .

.....

. . . . . Tentò darsi pace  
camminando, assonnato, le vie interminabili  
nella notte, ma vide soltanto a migliaia i lampioni  
lucidissimi sulle iniquità: donne rauche, ubriachi,  
traballanti fantocci sperduti.

.....

. . . . . Accettava il lavoro  
come un duro destino dell'uomo. Ma tutti gli uomini  
lo accettassero e al mondo ci fosse giustizia.

Per ingiustizia Pavese intende un destino di sofferenze, significativamente colto nelle immagini degli sconfitti, i "traballanti fantocci sperduti," che popolano le strade notturne.

In "Fumatori di carta" dalla solidarietà tra sfruttati nasce "la volontà

morale di uscire dalla propria solitudine, nell'ansia veramente eroica di instaurare un rapporto proficuo con gli altri."<sup>7</sup>

Ma si fece i compagni. Soffriva le lunghe parole  
e dovette ascoltarne, aspettando la fine.  
Se li fece i compagni. Ogni casa ne aveva famiglie.  
La città ne era tutta accerchiata. E la faccia del mondo  
ne era tutta coperta. Sentivano in sé  
tanta disperazione da vincere il mondo.

Il momento della ribellione non è però ancora maturo, e il senso di rabbia impotente si traduce nell'anarchismo dell'urlo finale:<sup>8</sup>

. . . . . Almeno potercene andare  
fare la libera fame, rispondere no  
a una vita che adopera amore e pietà  
la famiglia, il pezzetto di terra, a legarci le mani.

La protesta è però quasi metafisica, diretta contro la natura umana e gli affetti naturali.<sup>9</sup> Non è certo la passione di una proposta rivoluzionaria anche se è chiaro che la presa di coscienza passerà attraverso l'identificazione del proprio malessere con l'ingiustizia sociale. Due versi soprattutto mi sembrano importanti:

Ma si fece i compagni. Soffriva le lunghe parole  
e dovette ascoltarne, aspettando la fine.

Pavese allude qui alla dinamica del coinvolgimento del protagonista: attratto emotivamente alla comunione con i "compagni" (termine significativamente politico), egli deve tuttavia tollerarne "le lunghe parole" che identificherei con i sermoni ideologici. Nonostante lo scarso interesse "dovette ascoltarne, aspettando la fine." Per potere essere ammesso ai benefici dell'amicizia, egli deve accettarne le condizioni, e condividere gli ideali e gli obbiettivi comuni. Egli scopre così la necessità di una struttura concreta come base di un rapporto emotivo.<sup>10</sup> Con queste premesse la dimensione politica entra nella vita del protagonista per poi seguirvi il proprio itinerario.

Le tre poesie che seguono, collocate al centro di *Legna Verde*, formano una unità narrativa semi-autonoma in cui si articola un discorso organico. La genesi di queste liriche si fa risalire al ricordo di repressioni politiche nelle strade di Torino (Calvino 241) dove una dimostrazione operaia fu soffocata nel sangue dalla milizia. Nella prima delle tre liriche "Una ge-

nerazione," (103) per sottolineare il grado di maturazione politica intervenuta nel frattempo, Pavese contrappone all'archetipo del ragazzo addirittura la figura degli operai finiti in prigione:

Un ragazzo veniva a giocare nei prati . . .  
 .....  
 (Domattina i ragazzi ritornano in giro  
 e nessuno ricorda il clamore. In prigione  
 c'è operai silenziosi e qualcuno è già morto.  
 Nelle strade han coperto le macchie di sangue . . . )  
 .....  
 Vanno ancora ragazzi a giocare nei prati . . .  
 .....  
 In prigione ci sono gli stessi.

La lirica seguente, "Rivolta," (104) con le immagini dei combattenti morti per strada, ha il duplice ruolo fondamentale di portare all'estremo le conseguenze della ribellione operaia, e di svelare senza equivoci come i veri moventi della partecipazione alla lotta siano di natura esistenziale, preludio del tracollo della volontà. Anche qui Pavese accosta al protagonista un'altra figura-segno, in questo caso il pezzente:

Quello morto è stravalto e non guarda le stelle:  
 ha i capelli incollati al selciato.  
 .....  
 Pare morto anche il mucchio di cenci, che il sole  
 scalda forte, appoggiato al muretto. Dormire  
 per strada dimostra fiducia nel mondo.  
 .....  
 . . . . Sto vecchio  
 che poteva morire stravalto nel sangue,  
 pare invece una cosa, ed è vivo.

La reiterazione di "morto stravalto" e "morire stravalto" riferiti rispettivamente al dimostrante ucciso e al pezzente stabiliscono la simmetria delle due condizioni. Il pezzente, simbolo del fallimento come uomo, è una inutile espressione di vita. Al contrario il compagno che vede nell'ideale una ragione di vita, vi trova la morte. Per il protagonista l'ideale non si è trasformato nella finalità suprema, rimanendo mero strumento di partecipazione: in questo senso il sacrificio della vita è un prezzo non solo troppo alto da pagare, ma è la negazione stessa dell'obiettivo originario. Non vediamo tra l'altro alcun indizio che ci consenta di speculare sul sacrificio come riscatto o esempio morale. Nel mondo poetico di Pavese "l'urne dei forti" non accendono l'animo "a egregie cose."



La ribellione che da fuga é diventata il movente della attività politica, é il tema approfondito nella lirica seguente, "Legna Verde," che dà il titolo alla sezione. Anche qui troviamo la contrapposizione tra due archetipi di condizioni diverse: il contadino come esempio dell'isolamento e dell'individualismo del mondo della campagna; opposto all'operaio, la sua maturità e le responsabilità collettive assunte nella città.

L'uomo fermo che é stato in prigione - domani riprende  
il lavoro con pochi compagni. Stanotte é lui solo.

.....  
..... Hanno pure una gioia  
i villani: quel pezzo di terra divelto.

.....  
I compagni non vivono nelle colline  
sono nati in città dove invece dell'erba  
c'è rotaie.

.....  
Ma l'odore di terra che giunge in città  
non sa più di villani. È una lunga carezza  
che fa chiudere gli occhi e pensare ai compagni  
in prigione, alla lunga prigione che attende.

La riflessione del prigioniero liberato, una volta contadino e oggi operaio, compagno, "[testimonia] che [il] processo di crescita morale é avvenuto e l'uomo pensando ai compagni mantiene il suo posto di lotta." (Bagnoli 399). La pienezza di questa condizione è però anche il limite oltre il quale il sacrificio non é più accettabile.

La vicenda infatti si conclude bruscamente. Con un non-sequitur sorprendente, in "Poggio Reale" (107) appare descritta in toni lirici una natura petrarchesca dai caratteri di pacata serenità: "Il cielo é tranquillo," "L'acqua é limpida come il respiro del vento," appaiono "Viandanti tranquilli." In questo panorama di distacco idillico, emerge l'immagine apparentemente tranquillizzante di un uomo disteso in un prato, immobile. La lirica si chiude su quest'immagine con un sussulto: "Dev'essere morto," parole che risvegliano il ricordo dei tragici avvenimenti precedenti e si legano ad essi in una analogia di suggestioni. L'ultima lirica infine, "Parole del politico" (108), ha come argomento il giubilo di confinati che si apprestano al ritorno a casa. L'atmosfera di smobilitazione riflette la caduta della tensione e dell'angoscia che avevano sostenuto le liriche precedenti. Ciò segna il distacco da questa esperienza di sofferto coinvolgimento, ed il ritiro in una condizione di disimpegno.

É possibile a questo punto trarre alcune conclusioni sui limiti della funzione della politica in Pavese. Nel contesto di "Legna Verde" abbiamo visto una certa logica narrativa autonoma, distinta da quella della raccolta.

In particolare nel procedimento che ha portato al coinvolgimento e all'azione, si è notato come le vere motivazioni della solidarietà scaturiscano dal bisogno di legami affettivi. Il protagonista persegue il rapporto con gli altri e nel procedimento viene coinvolto nella loro lotta, autoconvinto di dividerne le premesse e le finalità. Non essendo il trionfo di un supremo ideale universale il proprio obiettivo, ad esso egli non è disposto a sacrificare la vita. Considerata in relazione ai grandi avvenimenti del periodo, quando dottrine totalitarie promettevano soluzioni eterne, e milioni di persone si scontravano con violenza in conflitti sociali, *Legna Verde* presenta un atteggiamento anacronistico di introiezione delle esperienze sociali, senza sapersi elevare dalla dimensione intimista alla sfera storica.

Riportando il discorso a livello di canzoniere, *Legna Verde* costituisce il culmine della vicenda che precede l'epilogo, ampliandone ed espandendone i motivi fondamentali, e dirigendoli verso il loro esito finale. Come tale questo gruppo di liriche va visto all'interno della sequenza al cui centro sta l'ansia di partecipazione alla vita, passante, per usare la terminologia corrente, dalla sfera del privato alla sfera pubblica o socializzante. L'intento rimane quello inesausto di spezzare l'isolamento di cui il protagonista si sente vittima. In questo contesto è ancora più apparente come la partecipazione politica sia un mero strumento, o tutt'al più un veicolo, al servizio di altri obiettivi di natura emotiva, e cioè il bisogno primario di appartenere ad un'entità attraverso il suo possesso. Le prime fasi, o capitoli, ricercano la soddisfazione di questo bisogno nel rapporto sentimentale con la donna. In un secondo momento l'orizzonte si amplia ed appaiono i compagni di lavoro, alle prese con i problemi della vita. Ma per il protagonista il problema è la vita stessa, mentre per i compagni sono le condizioni di ingiustizia della società. Il protagonista o fraintende o si illude, e cerca una soluzione applicando le categorie della politica ed investendovi temporaneamente energie e risorse.

Con *Legna Verde* si assiste anche alla lenta discesa nella disperazione: mentre la donna rappresenta la sfera della gioia e della gratificazione, la politica è all'insegna del dolore e della sofferenza, come terreno comune di intesa con gli altri.

La sintesi di *Legna Verde* proclama come le vicende collettive tradotte in passione politica non riescano a surrogare il legame emotivo necessario a collegare la vita del protagonista con quella altrui. Per incapacità o inadeguatezza, egli non è in grado di costruire e mantenere questo legame con i rischi che esso comporta. Si conclude pertanto in modo definitivo l'alternarsi di speranze e delusioni, infrantesi prima nella donna ed ora nei compagni. A questo incessante lavoro emotivo succedono il vuoto ed il freddo della solitudine in una esistenza priva della "corrispondenza di amarsi sensi" che è l'unica esperienza che possa dare significato alla vita.

## NOTES

1. Tutte le citazioni e riferimenti sono tratti da questa edizione.
2. "[I]l ne s'y engagea jamais à fond, parce que il se sentait, au plus intime de lui même, étranger à ces luttes et qu'il se refusait à mourir pour une idée." Renè Comoth, "Psychanalise et critique littéraire: le cas Pavese," *Marche Romane*, 19 (1969) 89.
3. Paolo Bagnoli, "Dimensione politica di Pavese lirico," *Il Ponte*, 26 (1974) 394.
4. Cesare Pavese, *Poesie edite e inedite*, a cura di Italo Calvino (Torino: Einaudi, 1962) 216-219.
5. La sezione "si presenta come un breve canzoniere, un poemetto autobiografico: la storia d'un eroe, la lezione e il commento dell'esperienza." Anna Maria Andreoli, "Archetipi storici di Pavese lirico," *Lingua e Stile* 7 (1972) 482.
6. Gian-Paolo Biasin, *The Smiles of The Gods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) 10.
7. Gianni Venturi, "La prima poetica pavesiana: *Lavorare stanca*," *La rassegna della letteratura italiana* 1 (1964) 142.
8. Anna Maria Andreoli, *Il mestiere della letteratura* (Pisa: Pacini, 1977) 43.
9. "In fondo la sete di questi personaggi è una sola: la libertà. Libertà per gli individui di fronte alle catene irragionevoli della società." Cesare Pavese, *Letteratura americana e altri saggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968) 11.
10. "[T]hese poems suggest Pavese had begun to believe that adult life was all restriction and suffering because it was then that one lost self-sufficiency of the child and depended, for the fulfilment of one's greatest needs, particularly sexual, upon the will of others." Doug Thompson, *Cesare Pavese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 32

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## Clinging to Words: Czeslaw Milosz and the Catastrophist Era

*Judith Dompkowski*

How does one protect oneself from nature if her law is death, and how does one survive in history which blindly annihilates all individual and collective values?

—Aleksander Fiut

Czeslaw Milosz's war poems, written between 1930 and 1945, offer both a personal and an historical chronicle. The poet fuses attitudes about his own life with aspects of Polish history and presents what amounts to the diary of a pessimist. His tensions have several layers. In the early poems of this period, Milosz's anxieties are very vague personal ones. However, they gradually become highly expansive and defined to include anticipation of World War II, the murder of Jews, the destruction of Warsaw, the ideological imprisonment of Poland and his own exile. Although Milosz is a survivor of all this, he develops a pervasive survivor's guilt with which he leaves his Eastern European world when the war is over.

The term war poems, or Warsaw poems, is often used in discussing Milosz's work from the time frame noted above, suggesting that the war poetry is an interval in his oeuvre similar to the kind we see in the writing of Aragon and Eluard. The style Milosz chooses in these selections alternates between the dreamy imagery of "Hymn" to the surrealist, nightmarish canvas of "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto." Yet the poems are linked by their overall bleakness and sense of despair created by a Polish world in flames—qualities a more hopeful and energized Milosz will later try to reject.

One may trace Milosz's pessimism to the onset of his career when he belonged to a school of writers called catastrophists, men whose work was filled with premonitions of the apocalypse of World War II. Milosz defines his position among them in his autobiography, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*: "The poems I wrote then [1930-1936] did not call for revolutionary action, but there was a terror in them and a foreboding of what was to come. The gloomy visions of our so-called catastrophist's school . . . set us sharply apart from the poets of the older generation.

Our visions had a historical dimension in which all the phenomena and all the laws were a part of Heraclitus's river" (116).

In the pre-war poems, Milosz's concern is for himself. It is not an original concern but one voiced by many poets before his time, fear of mutability and transience. This deep anxiety is the tone of "Hymn," written in 1934. Given the confessional tone of Milosz's poems we can assume that in this case, as in others, the voice is his own.

The title of the poem suggests not hands or voices raised in songs of triumph, but rather those pointed at a vulnerable "him." The images dreamily move to the beat of some invisible pendulum: not only do "seasons come and go" past the poet, but "forms [too] come and go." In addition:

men and women mate,  
children in half-sleep run their hands across the wall  
and draw lands with a finger wet with saliva. (*Selected Poems*,  
30)

Yet as the poem progresses, the greatest pain to Milosz is the destruction of things he deemed untouchable and "invincible."

Ultimately Milosz sees that as time passes he, too, will change. This is pointedly revealed in a 1936 selection, "Encounter," which questions what the motions of living amount to. He seems certain that what is now here will quickly fade, like the maps to unknown places drawn on the wall with saliva:

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn,  
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.  
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,  
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

Oh my love, where are they, where are they going  
The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.

I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

(*Bells in Winter*, 3)

The tension in "Encounter" is created by Milosz's effort to keep the tone subdued, by his remark that he asks his profound question "in wonder." Yet he is not convincing, for "wonder" connotes a child-like, curious amazement, an attitude decidedly at variance with the weight of the question he asks. Aleksander Fiut advances one theory about Milosz's fear of

passing at this moment in history, namely "that one basic problem in all [his] poetry is the philosophic and artistic subdual of change. . . The poet doggedly labors to construct a dam of poetry on the Heraclitean river, a dam which is constantly undermined by the rapid currents of change. It is in this way that he also attempts to save himself from his own disintegration into oblivion and nothingness" (420).

Eventually the catastrophist's anxieties about himself become those about Poland. In poems like "Elegy," written in 1936, Milosz again plays with his title, here by mourning before the fact. He cites the symbolic city of Troy which, George Gomori suggests, "stands for ruins, the inexorable process of historical and societal changes which squashes whole nations, flattens homes and lives" (414).

The imagery of "Elegy" is appropriately funereal, and prophetic: "After years of struggle there will be a cross or a stone, / And a bird will sing on it as on the ruins of Troy." Another set of dreamlike, groping images, however, heralds the style which will dominate Milosz's writing during the war itself:

Love, food, drink are constant companions on the road,  
but the eyes are not turned toward them.

Heavy, sleepy eyelids are burned by cruel light  
and time issues a warning as it steps across the body.

Good faithful animals, shortlived human beings  
fertilely tear apart hands frozen in dazzlement,  
And a voice rises from the ground: Is it in vain shadow  
that we call to you, our descendant.

This *paysage psychologique* also contributes to our understanding of Milosz himself, of the personal and historical beings so galvanized in his poems. As is often the case, events in Poland are redrawn on the poet's inner canvas. They are heightened and made nightmarish because he cannot come to terms with his role in them.

Even though Milosz was active in the Warsaw underground during the war and wrote anti-Nazi poetry, he continuously felt his war efforts to be deficient. Since he was especially troubled by the Jewish issue, he verbally involved himself with the Jews more than with any other aspect of the war, but this involvement was not without its own tensions. In *Native Realm*, Milosz is frank about the polarities between which he was torn, revealing the basis for his deep self-incrimination. On the one hand, he bears the Jews a deep affection: "From the old *Respublica* there had remained the idea of 'our Jews' without whom life was unimaginable, who comprised an integral part of the human landscape, and whom it would never have entered anyone's head to disturb in the exercise of their age-

old commercial functions or in the ordering of their internal affairs" (93). On the other hand, Milosz confesses that he had no "talent for heroism": if he thought his apartment manager suspected that one of his guests was a Jew, he turned "cold with fear" that he would be accused of supporting them (241). So when Milosz wrote "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto" in 1943, he laments that he has been among "the helpers of death" / "The uncircumcised" (*SP*, 49). His is a sin which seeks an outlet in a formal conviction, and the poem is structured to do just that.

In this selection Milosz creates an imaginary scene in which he sees himself judged for the holocaust. His accuser is a mole whom critic Paul Zweig believes is either Moses, God or the devil (7):

I am afraid, so afraid of the guardian mole.  
He has swollen eyelids, like a Patriarch  
Who has sat much in the light of candles  
Reading the great book of the species.

What will I tell him, I, a Jew of the New Testament  
Waiting two thousand years for the second coming of Jesus?  
My broken body will deliver me to his sight . . .

Milosz is further punished when he sees how insignificant his passing is, for although he and the world might be destroyed, the bees, ants, and other characters in this ghetto drama continue to build: the cycle of existence simply goes on. Marisha Chamberlain, however, sees great artistic merit in Milosz's suffering: "But his anger had grief in it and he blamed himself most of all. His assumption of responsibility seems almost a primitive connection to the world, akin to the child's naive assumption that everything going wrong in the house emanates from him. Yet the fact that he took events personally gave him the power to write these poems" (31).

Perhaps Milosz's greatest "crime" is that he has survived, for in a poem of a similar nature, "Song of a Citizen," he divulges:

I have seen . . . the perdition of tribes  
I can say now, in this hour,  
that I—am, while everything expires.

(*SP*, 47)

The hesitation between "I" and "am," a recurrent motif in the war poetry, indicates his discomfort about survival. Paul Zweig remarks that the guilt Milosz expresses is not just personal, but also communal (7): the poet speaks for those who did not help "our Jews," thus accounting for his use of "we" in place of "I" in other poems like "Child of Europe." It is the guilty "we," the "we" of original sin: "We sealed the gas chamber doors,

stole bread, / Knowing the next day would be harder to bear than the day before" (*SP*, 58). The expanded frame of reference may account for some of the emotional intensity in the poem, but it denies Milosz at least one occasion for personal confession and the psychological punishment he feels he deserves.

Milosz and his fellow catastrophists saw other apocalyptic prophecies fulfilled in the actual fires of the war which left Warsaw in rubble. The poems describing such scenes are catalogues of wasteland images unlike those perceived by another modern poet, T.S. Eliot, whose terrors were private and psychological. Milosz's are real; they are the terrors of history, and to this end he offers "Proof":

And yet you experienced the flames of Hell.  
You can even say what they look like: real,  
Ending in sharp hooks so that they tear up flesh  
Piece by piece, to the bone. (*BW*, 18)

Because of this reality, Milosz observed that Eliot's *The Wasteland* was grimly ironic and understated: it "made somewhat weird reading as the glow from the burning ghetto illumined the city skyline" (*NR*, 238).

Images of fire and heat strongly dominate Milosz's poetic imagination. They appear in poems like "Campo di Fiori," "Song of a Citizen," and "Outskirts." Fiut remarks that "falling planets [and] fire consuming the universe [are] all the ways that the Apocalypse of St. John describes the Judgment Day," and that for Milosz "the destruction of the cosmos is shown in the form of a gigantic conflagration" (422-23). The thought of total annihilation of the world by fire, if that was to come, was not at all distressing to him. It offered a resolution to his grief about his powerlessness to protect himself, the Jews, his land, and even his colleagues, whom he sharply accuses in "Child of Europe" of being "gullible, hot-blooded weaklings, careless with their lives" (*SP* 59). The nightmare of apocalyptic fire thus ironically would cleanse and free him: "The impending annihilation was sweet: it would resolve everything: individual destiny lost its significance, all would become equal" (*NR*, 173).

This annihilation, though begun, would not be total, and attempts to annihilate Milosz's homeland would take forms other than a cleansing fire. When the Communists took over after 1945, the battle in Poland was more ideological than military. It was a war of the intellect that would lead to Milosz's *The Captive Mind*. Here we may draw an analogy between an individual pitted against this curious foe, Communism, and the hunter against the dangers of the forest which Milosz writes about in his novel, *The Issa Valley*. Milosz embellishes this point: "Like the primeval hunter



face-to-face with mysterious nature, we learned painfully that if one could hope to subdue the equally mysterious element that has represented nature in the 20th century, it was not by force but by wiles" (*NR*, 126-27).

In order to survive in this milieu one had to be familiar with living on the edge, so to speak, a role easy for Milosz to play given his background. In "Mid-Twentieth Century Portrait" he sketches the supposed ideal man of the times, a Janus-figure who "Shouts: 'Culture,' and 'Art!' but means circus games really," or "Attacks the past, but fears that having destroyed it, / He will have nothing on which to lay his head." The ultimate form of this schizophrenia is defined in this individual:

Keeping one hand on Marx's writing, he reads the Bible in  
private,  
His mocking eye on processions leaving burnt-out churches.  
His backdrop: a horseflesh-colored city in ruins.  
In his hand: a memento of a boy 'fascist' killed in the Uprising.  
(*SP*, 58)

Milosz lived this double life for a while, and at first seemed able to cope with it. Unlike him, many of his close friends, including Tadeus Borowski (author of *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*) could not accept that they had betrayed themselves by serving new Communist masters. In Borowski's case, "the discrepancy between what he said in his public statements and what his quick mind could perceive was increasing daily" (*CM*, 127). He put his head into an oven.

Milosz, however, was as incapable of being the representative survivor of this symbolically dead nation as he was of being a survivor among the Jews. He was ultimately angry and grieved over the price he paid for his life, and the only way he could make amends was to develop a kinship between himself in a figurative death pose and his fallen nation, just as he had earlier joined the suffering of the Jews. In *Fearful Symmetry*, Northrup Frye explains how the concept of a personal fall can carry such widespread implications: "Fallen man sees around him only the ruins of a fallen world which his own fall had produced" (48). Milosz voices the impact of this correlation more clearly and forcibly in a poem entitled, appropriately, "The Fall":

The death of a man is like the fall of a mighty nation  
That had valiant armies, captains and prophets,  
And wealthy ports and ships over all the seas,  
But now it will not relieve any besieged city,  
It will not enter into any alliance,  
Because its cities are empty, its population dispersed,

Its land once bringing harvest is overgrown with thistles,  
 Its mission forgotten, its language lost,  
 The dialect of a village high upon inaccessible mountains. (*BW*,  
 15)

We know that while it can be any nation, for Milosz it is Poland; and while the "man" can be anyone or Everyman, he is Milosz himself expressing, because of a great need to do so, the sorrows of his deeds and losses. Always fearful, searching, and on the run, he decides to leave Poland, and in *The Captive Mind* he comments on the mobility available to him but not to others which made escape possible: "What I saw in Poland in 1951 was so ugly that I guess any normal human being would have reacted the same. The only difference is that others were trapped—and I had some possibility of leaving" (Hoffman, 64).

The hesitation after "trapped" suggests that Milosz was not more than a mobile prisoner who moved from Poland to France, first as a high Polish official, a cultural attache of the People's Republic of Poland who was very well situated financially, and then as an exiled poet. After he settled in California at Berkeley in 1960, Milosz soon found that the contemporary world, typified by California, had inherited the negative traits of the world he had left behind, traits repeated in a present where the earth "changed beyond recognition throwing so many of us into silence, true or noisy" (Valentine, 7).

Milosz labels California an Ulro-bound culture, borrowing the name of one of the grimmest symbols in the Blakean universe. In Olga Scherer's essay, "To Ulro through San Francisco Bay," Milosz offers some explanation as to how it became this symbol of nightmare, in keeping with the catastrophist's visions: "California has not lost its nineteenth-century character, a sudden meeting between opulent, virginal nature, and a late, already Ulro-bound culture. . . . California, as [the] nation's last outpost, can claim to its credit all the new fashions and fads which not only affect folkways and social behavior, but also conditions the mores-shaping mechanisms of the mind" (411). These "new fashions" create in us a sense of arrogance and indifference under the guise of optimism and ambition. Milosz finds modern civilization, therefore, just as duplicitous as Thomas, in *The Valley of Issa*, found nature. Milosz maintains that this type of setting "throws concrete persons like you and me into helplessness, into withdrawal and loneliness to the tune of record music, in the light of a burning fireplace" (412). So Milosz sees some of the horrors he lived through reappearing in other forms, transmutations he once anticipated now ironically taking place.

Thus there is for Milosz "no final reconciliation, no end to the interminable impasse, the crossroads at which he finds himself continually.

History will always intervene and always the same consciousness unwilling to forgive" (Rudman, 27). Disillusioned and disappointed, Milosz has learned that there is, finally, nowhere to go.

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“El Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan”:  
Un cuento de la guerra

Daniel Balderston

Lo que afirmaré aquí tiene la virtud de ser tan obvio que parece que nadie lo ha dicho antes. Sin embargo, es de importancia capital, ya que tiene que ver con el debate sobre si Borges es un escritor metafísico, y sobre la manera de relacionarse las vertientes fantásticas y realistas en su obra. Este debate se prolonga desde *La expresión de la irrealidad en Jorge Luis Borges* de Ana María Barrenechea (1957) hasta *Jorge Luis Borges 1923-1980* de Ramona Lagos (1986). Hasta ahora la posición más sensata a mi parecer ha sido la de Sylvia Molloy, quien afirma en *Las letras de Borges* que hay en Borges un vaivén entre lo real y lo fantástico, o sea, una posición semejante a la que propondré para la comprensión cabal de “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan.”

Este cuento, como todos podrán reconocer, es importante para los que afirman la centralidad de lo metafísico en Borges, ya que casi toda la segunda parte del cuento consiste en una discusión del tiempo. Stephen Albert propone que el tiempo no es sucesivo sino simultáneo, y que las posibilidades no realizadas subsisten de alguna manera en el universo. Su interlocutor (y futuro asesino) Yu Tsun siente la verdad de esta idea al hablar de la pululación de seres: “Me pareció que el húmedo jardín que rodeaba la casa estaba saturado hasta lo infinito de invisibles personas. Esas personas eran Albert y yo, secretos, atareados y multiformes en otras dimensiones del tiempo” (479).

En la discusión de la novela de Ts’ui Pen, Stephen Albert le pregunta a Yu Tsun qué palabra sería la única prohibida en una novela cuyo tema es el tiempo. La respuesta, como se recordará, es la palabra *tiempo* (479). Ahora bien, la palabra *tiempo* se utiliza numerosas veces en el cuento, y siguiendo el mismo criterio habría que excluirlo, por lo tanto, como tema central. En cambio, la palabra *guerra* se utiliza sólo dos veces: en la primera frase, en la mención del título del libro de Liddell Hart—“En la página 242 de la *Historia de la Guerra Europea* de Liddell Hart . . .” (472)—y entre paréntesis en la penúltima frase: “Sabe que mi problema era indicar (a través del estrépito de la guerra) la ciudad que se llama Albert y que no

hallé otro medio que matar a una persona de ese nombre" (480). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan comenta, "A city is named by killing a man—an indirect speech act" (642), y declara, "War dictates Tsun's behavior" (639), pero no amplía esa observación a un estudio más profundo sobre la importancia de la guerra en el cuento.

Stephen Rudy ha escrito que "History, chronological time, has no place in Borges' universe" (133). Este tipo de afirmación ha sido frecuente en la crítica de Borges, pero lo que sorprende en este caso es que ocurre precisamente en un artículo sobre "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan", cuento difícilmente comprensible sin atención a las referencias históricas incluidas en él. Para la comprensión cabal del cuento es necesario atender no sólo al tema filosófico del tiempo, sino también a la presentación de los temas de la historia y la guerra.

La referencia al libro de Liddell Hart ya ha sido ampliamente estudiada por Murillo en *The Cyclical Night* (135-84, 258-59) y por Frank y Vosburg en su artículo "Textos y contratextos en 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan'" (519-20). Sabemos, por lo tanto, que Borges se equivoca al escribir julio en vez de junio; que el pueblo de Albert sobre el río Ancre aparece en un mapa en el libro de Liddell Hart que muestra las líneas británicas y alemanas en el verano de 1916 (302); y que las referencias a la línea Serre-Montauban y a las lluvias torrenciales en el primer párrafo del cuento remiten directamente a descripciones de Liddell Hart (314-15). Las alusiones históricas precisas a la Primera Guerra Mundial son evidentes, aunque los críticos las hayan visto como *pretextos* más que como *núcleos* del relato. Lo que no se ha estudiado es el hecho de que las alusiones implícitas al tema de la guerra en general sean también frecuentes.

El hecho de que Yu Tsun sea "antiguo catedrático de inglés en la *Hochschule* de Tsingtao" (472), por ejemplo, sólo es comprensible en su totalidad en relación con la historia de China a fines del siglo pasado y principios de nuestro siglo (época de la rebelión de los Boxers contra los poderes coloniales europeos). Alemania tomó la bahía de Kiaochow y el pueblo de Tsingtao en 1897, utilizando como pretexto el asesinato de dos misioneros alemanes en la provincia de Shantung, y consiguió en las negociaciones subsiguientes que China le cediera la bahía y la ciudad por un plazo de 99 años (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 15:783).<sup>1</sup> Que Yu Tsun sea súbdito alemán, entonces, no sorprende tanto como el hecho de que haya sido profesor de inglés en el colegio alemán de su ciudad. La confusión de lealtades nacionales en la China de 1900 es imagen del mapa confuso de la Europa de 1916, en que un ciudadano irlandés lucha más tenazmente que nunca para probar su traicionera lealtad a Inglaterra, y en que un espía chino mata a un sinólogo inglés para enviar un mensaje a su jefe alemán, a quien detesta.

La temática de la guerra es también importante en la novela de Ts'ui

Pen. El episodio épico que Stephen Albert lee en dos versiones diferentes es la siguiente:

En la primera, un ejército marcha hacia una batalla a través de una montaña desierta; el horror de las piedras y de la sombra le hace menospreciar la vida y logra con facilidad la victoria; en la segunda, el mismo ejército atraviesa un palacio en el que hay una fiesta; la resplandeciente batalla les parece una continuación de la fiesta y logran la victoria. Yo oía con decente veneración esas viejas ficciones, acaso menos admirables que el hecho de que las hubiera ideado mi sangre y de que un hombre de un imperio remoto me las restituyera, en el curso de una desesperada aventura, en una isla occidental. Recuerdo las palabras finales, repetidas en cada redacción como un mandamiento secreto: *Así combatieron los héroes, tranquilo el admirable corazón, violenta la espada, resignados a matar y a morir.* (478)

De estas frases la que más se ha comentado por la crítica es la penúltima, la que enfoca la oposición Oriente / Occidente (o mejor dicho, espía chino / sinólogo inglés, una doble oposición). Vale la pena notar, sin embargo, que el tema del capítulo en ambas versiones es la guerra, y más precisamente la mentalidad guerrera, la que inspira al soldado a matar y a morir. Este, el famoso problema de la "moral" bélica, preocupaba a Liddell Hart en su historia de la Primera Guerra y en sus otros escritos, como también ha preocupado a Clausewitz y a los demás teóricos de la guerra.<sup>2</sup> El hecho de que Ts'ui Pen llegue a describir la disciplina militar como violencia y tranquilidad, y proponga que el soldado puede prepararse tanto por el sufrimiento como por el placer, sugiere hondas raíces no sólo en las religiones orientales sino también en los tratados clásicos occidentales sobre la guerra.<sup>3</sup>

Son varias las alusiones implícitas en el texto a la guerra, hasta cuando Yu Tsun viaja por el apacible campo inglés. Por ejemplo: "Un pájaro rayó el cielo gris y ciegamente lo tradujo en aeroplano y a ese aeroplano en muchos (en el cielo francés) aniquilando el parque de artillería con bombas verticales" (473). Dolores Koch ha interpretado esta frase como indicio de las "infinitas posibilidades de la imaginación" (185) y también como "una entrega a lo irracional, el derrumbe de las barreras lógicas que impiden que los deseos se cumplan en la imaginación" (186), pero es también importante verla en el contexto de la aventura del espía alemán Yu Tsun, ocupado en transmitir la orden de bombardear las posiciones británicas cerca del pueblo de Albert.

En el encuentro de Yu Tsun con Albert éste dice que en alguno de los universos posibles son enemigos. Yu Tsun responde que no, que en todos los universos posibles serán amigos, pero en el acto le mata a Albert. La guerra moderna presupone que los combatientes serán enemigos, pero

Borges en un texto de su último libro, *Los conjurados*, propone que fundamentalmente no es así. Juan López y Juan Ward, un soldado argentino y un inglés en las Malvinas, “[h]ubieran sido amigos, pero se vieron una sola vez cara a cara, en unas islas demasiado famosas, y cada uno de los dos fue Caín, y cada uno, Abel” (95). De igual manera, la enemistad entre Albert y Yu Tsun es puramente abstracta, como es también abstracta la tarea de Yu Tsun de avisar al jefe en Berlín, pero su abstracción se realiza, de modo extraño, a través de una inscripción en el cuerpo (como se discutirá más adelante).

No es casual que Borges haya escrito este cuento precisamente en 1942, durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial (contienda que sería tema de otro estudio extenso de Liddell Hart). El bombardeo alemán de ciudades inglesas, las alianzas globales (que esta vez juntaban a China con los Aliados y al Japón con el Eje), e incluso la división de argentinos entre grupos que se pronunciaban a favor de los Aliados y un gobierno tácitamente vinculado con el Eje, encuentran amplios paralelos en el texto. Las preocupaciones de Borges con esa guerra son conocidas. “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” termina con referencias a las luchas ideológicas entre los diversos movimientos que proclamaban “cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden” (442). “Deutsches Requiem” y “El milagro secreto” giran en torno al Holocausto, tema que subyace a otros cuentos de manera implícita (incluso “Emma Zunz” y “La muerte y la brújula”). En el plano biográfico del escritor, hay un texto de *Otras inquisiciones*, “Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944”, en que Borges refiere sus sentimientos del día de la liberación de París por los Aliados y resume las divisiones existentes entre los argentinos que apoyaban al Eje y los como él que apoyaban a los Aliados. Afirma que “toda incertidumbre era preferible a la de un diálogo con esos consanguíneos del caos, a quienes la infinita repetición de la interesante fórmula *soy argentino* exime del honor y de la piedad” (727). Al final del breve ensayo propone:

Para los europeos y americanos hay un orden—un solo orden— posible: el que antes llevó el nombre de Roma y que ahora es la cultura del Occidente. Ser nazi (jugar a la barbarie enérgica, jugar a ser un vikingo, un tártaro, un conquistador del siglo XVI, un gaucho, un piel roja) es, a la larga, una imposibilidad mental y moral. El nazismo adolece de irrealidad, como los infiernos de Erígena. Es inhabitable; los hombres sólo pueden morir por él, mentir por él, matar y ensangrentar por él. (728)

Al oponer de este modo orden y caos, vida y muerte, Borges transforma la guerra europea en una lucha por el ser, una lucha metafísica si se quiere, pero una lucha que se sitúa entre cuerpo y cuerpo.

Murillo (160) y Ferrer (180-81) ya han observado que el nombre de Yu

Tsun viene del *Sueño del aposento rojo* o *Hung Lu Meng*, novela china mencionada en el cuento.<sup>4</sup> En la novela china, los siguientes versos están grabados en el arco que marca la entrada a la Tierra del Vacío, donde se encuentra por primera vez al personaje Yu Tsun:

When the unreal is taken for the real, then the real becomes  
unreal;  
Where non-existence is taken for existence, then existence  
becomes non-existence. (11)

El Yu Tsun de Borges es también sitio equívoco de una ideología inhabitable. Su vida es una red de contradicciones. Es un antiguo profesor de inglés en un colegio alemán, es un chino que asesina a un sinólogo. No es leal a Alemania, ni tampoco a China. Su asesinato de Stephen Albert es un suicidio, un puro acto de negación. Como los nazis del ensayo de Borges, su ideología sólo le permite morir, mentir, matar y ensangrentar.

Yu Tsun reduce a Stephen Albert a su nombre para poder transmitir un mensaje, y a su vez es reducido al suyo, a ser mero reflejo de un personaje de una populosa novela china del siglo XVIII.<sup>5</sup> El nombre de ese personaje, Chia Yu-Tsun, significa, según uno de los traductores del texto al inglés, "palabras ficticias y discurso inculto" (*fictitious words and uncultivated speech*, 569). "Palabras, palabras desplazadas y mutiladas", escribe Borges al final de "El inmortal" (544).<sup>6</sup> La palabra mutilada, el cuerpo mutilado: la guerra representa ambas negaciones. La literatura y el cine a menudo aluden a la muerte en la guerra al mostrarnos el nombre en una tumba. Borges utiliza "Inscripción sepulcral" como título de un poema sobre un antepasado suyo, el coronel Isidoro Suárez, de quien se dice: "Escribió su censo de hazañas / en prosa rígida como los clarines" (24). Yu Tsun también escribe un "censo de hazañas" en los cuerpos rígidos no sólo de Stephen Albert sino de los ingleses acampados cerca del pueblo de Albert, y será ahorcado por su hazaña, transformado en prosa rígida.

Borges escribe en "El Golem":

Si (como el griego afirma en el Cratilo)  
El nombre es arquetipo de la cosa,  
En las letras de *rosa* está la rosa  
Y todo el Nilo en la palabra *Nilo*. (885)

Stephen Albert y Yu Tsun son dos melancólicos ejemplos de la teoría del lenguaje de Cratilo: hay una identidad entre el nombre y la persona. Albert es el pueblo en Francia, aún sin saberlo; Yu Tsun, también sin reflexionar sobre el hecho, significa o es "palabras ficticias, discurso inculto". La guerra los transforma en ideas, en cosas, en cuerpos muertos.

En su nota sobre el *Sueño del aposento rojo*, Borges escribe: "Una deses-



perada carnalidad rige toda la obra" (24). Esa carnalidad también rige "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan". El cuento representa los conflictos históricos entre Oriente y Occidente, entre Alemania e Inglaterra a través de una discusión libresca, pero desconstruye esa discusión en un debate de armas y no de letras, o mejor dicho, de letras que ya son armas. La teoría de Ts'ui Pen de que todas las posibilidades coexisten se pone en tela de juicio por la idea de conflicto, de aniquilación del otro, que viene no de la mística sino de los estrategas de la guerra. Aún Stephen Albert, occidental seducido por la mística oriental, reconoce que la proliferación de posibles vidas no es una manera de evitar el conflicto necesario: le dice a Yu Tsun que en uno de los "innumerables futuros . . . soy su enemigo" (478). El cuento narra un conflicto entre la metafísica y el materialismo, y se equivocan quienes ven en él un mensaje puramente metafísico.

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#### NOTAS

1. Utilizo la octena edición de la *Encyclopaedia Britannica* no porque sea necesariamente la mejor fuente de conocimientos sobre la historia china sino porque es la fuente a la que Borges recurría con más frecuencia, un conjunto de libros que conocía casi íntegramente. Pude comprobar la presencia de esta edición de la enciclopedia en un sinnúmero de páginas de las obras de Borges cuando preparé un índice anotado para las obras de Borges, *The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges*.

2. Para un brillante análisis de esta moral bélica se puede consultar el reciente libro *The Body in Pain* de Elaine Scarry, donde se argumenta (a diferencia de Clausewitz y Liddell Hart) que el cuerpo herido o muerto es el propósito esencial de la guerra (60-157).

3. Existió también una amplia tradición de escritos chinos sobre la guerra, incluso un tratado de Sun Wu sobre la guerra, que incluye un capítulo sobre la utilización de los espías (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 6:227).

4. Borges escribió una nota sobre el *Hung Lu Meng* en *El Hogar* (19 de noviembre de 1937, pág. 24). En esta nota ubica la novela en un momento preciso de la historia china; la nota comienza:

Hacia 1645—año de la muerte de Quevedo—el Imperio Chino fué conquistado por los manchús, hombres analfabetos y ecuestres. Aconteció lo que inexorablemente acontece en tales catástrofes: los rudos vencedores se enamoraron de la cultura del vencido y fomentaron con generoso esplendor las artes y las letras.

5. En su nota Borges comenta que el *Sueño del aposento rojo* "prosigue de una manera un tanto irresponsable o insípida; los personajes secundarios pululan y no sabemos bien cuál es cual. Estamos como perdidos en una casa de muchos patios" (24).

6. Sobre esta frase, véase mi libro *El precursor velado*, 171.

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Ghosts of the Past:  
The Return of Maximilian and Carlotta  
in Two Contemporary Mexican Short Stories

*Cynthia K. Duncan*

The romantic figures of Maximilian Von Hapsburg and his mad wife, Carlotta, have only a minor role in the unfolding of Mexico's turbulent history. Their ill-fated Empire, which lasted only three brief years (1864-1867), was never recognized by the majority of the Mexican people as the legitimate government of that country. Civil war had plagued Mexico for more than fifty years, since her first efforts to gain independence from Spain. The treasury was depleted, the nation in ruins, and European powers were deeply involved in Mexico's internal affairs. The French had invested heavily in Mexico and were eager to gain a foothold in the New World while Mexico's neighbor to the north was engaged in its own civil war and unable to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. Casting about for a puppet monarch to represent French interests in Mexico, the Emperor Louis Napoleon settled on the Austrian Archduke Maximilian, an idealistic and ineffectual young man who was greatly influenced by his wife's ambition to occupy a throne. The Imperial couple arrived in a country that was completely unknown to them and attempted to impose the trappings of European culture on their court. Their efforts were in vain, however, for Benito Juárez, backed by a determined guerilla force, continually fought against them to keep Mexico in the hands of the Mexican people. Juárez held on to his title as President of the Republic, and he ultimately succeeded in driving the foreigners from his country. The French troops withdrew, Maximilian was executed by a firing squad in Querétaro, and Carlotta, who had gradually lost her tenuous hold on sanity while in Mexico, returned to Europe, where she lived in isolation and madness for another sixty years.

Most textbooks dealing with Mexican history of the nineteenth century treat Maximilian and Carlotta as relatively unimportant characters, but history extends beyond the pages of a textbook. When it appeals to the people's sense of drama, intrigue, and romance, it has a tendency to pass over into the realm of literature and take on greater meaning as part of a nation's self-image. Maximilian and Carlotta have long evoked mixed feelings in the Mexican people, representing both the threat and the allure of

European domination over New World culture. They have made numerous appearances as literary characters in twentieth-century dramas, such as Rodolfo Usigli's *Corona de sombra* (1943), *Carlota de México* (1944) by Miguel Lira, and *Adiós, Mamá Carlota* (1954) by Dagalberto de Cervantes. Television and film have portrayed the Imperial couple, as well, and popular romantic fiction has made them the protagonists of several paperback historical novels, such as the type sold in drugstores and at newsstands on the street. Carlotta has a role in Carlos Fuentes' first novel, *La región más transparente* (1958), and she also appears in his 1956 short story, "El muñeco."

Of specific interest in this study is the appearance of Maximilian and Carlotta as ghosts in fantastic fiction, for they are by no means ordinary phantoms. They return to threaten modern-day Mexico and to act as vehicles of social criticism in contemporary society. They prey on ordinary citizens of Mexico's capital city, reminding them of their weaknesses, their flaws, and their hesitancy to take action when confronted with a potentially dangerous or harmful situation. They prove that Mexico's past does not lie dead and buried, but lives on, side by side with the present. Two short stories which clearly convey this message are "Tlactocatzine, del jardín de Flandes," (1954) by Carlos Fuentes, and "Tenga para que se entretenga" (1972) by José Emilio Pacheco.<sup>1</sup>

"Tlactocatzine . . ." is presented in the form of a diary by a nameless first-person narrator. He is a quiet, meditative man who lives a solitary life built around dreams and disillusionment. He feels a strong spiritual bond with Europe and with the past, which are tied together in his mind and represent beauty, grace, and a better way of life. The modern-day capital city of Mexico repels him with its throbbing vitality, and he longs to escape from it. When he is offered a position as caretaker of a charming old mansion dating back to the reign of Maximilian and Carlotta, he accepts without hesitation, even though its owner informs him that there is "cierta falta de calor humana en ella, . . . un frío muy especial, notoriamente intenso con relación al que se sentirá en la calle" (38). The narrator soon discovers that the house and its small, enclosed garden have many extraordinary features. For example, the garden contains no native Mexican foliage—all of its unusual trees and flowers are from Northern Europe. Perhaps for this reason, one can detect visible signs of the arrival of autumn in the garden, although the change of seasons goes unnoticed in the rest of the city. More perplexing is the cool, gentle rain which falls continuously in the garden, but not in the street in front of the house. The narrator is surprised by this climatic oddity, but he does not investigate its causes. He becomes more concerned when, late at night, he is awakened by the sound of footsteps and the rustling of silk skirts in the corridor outside his room. He also hears piano sonatas emanating from the downstairs parlor, and he receives mysterious notes, written in a spidery hand on old rose-colored paper, pushed under his door while he sleeps. One bears the

single word, "Tlactocatzine," and the other reads, "Amado mío: la luna acaba de asomarse y la escucho cantar; todo es tan indescriptiblemente bello" (48). He suspects that the intruder is an elderly woman he has seen in the garden a number of times since his arrival, and he correctly assumes that she is mad. He begins to feel real fear for the first time, but he cannot bring himself to leave the comfort and serenity of the lovely old home. Against his better judgment, he decides to ignore the situation, until it is too late. When he finally attempts to flee, he discovers that the doors to the house are mysteriously but indubitably sealed and that he is trapped in the garden for all eternity with the ghost of the Empress Carlotta, who, in her madness, believes him to be her dead husband, Maximilian.

The classic motifs of the haunted house and the enchanted garden are used to create an atmosphere reminiscent of nineteenth-century horror tales. They also function structurally in the story as a bridge between two worlds, for they are in Mexico, but not of Mexico. In this setting, the narrator-protagonist is trapped between the past and the present, between the dead and the living, between the fantastic and the real. The sealed door, another standard trademark of fantastic fiction, suggests the permanence and finality of his entrapment. Everlastings, the flowers which predominate in the garden, appear throughout the text as a symbol of the eternal quality of Carlotta and Maximilian's love. They also foreshadow the irrevocable step which the narrator takes into the fantastic once he becomes Carlotta's prisoner. She tells him, "Desde ahora, no más cartas, ya estamos juntos para siempre, los dos en este castillo . . . Nunca saldremos; nunca dejaremos entrar a nadie . . ." (50).

Many clues are given throughout "Tlactocatzine . . ." as to the identity of the mysterious old woman, but they are subtle and aimed at the well-informed reader. For example, tlactocatzine, of the story's title, is a Nahuatl word meaning "leader," and it was the form of address used by Mexico's indigenous population to address the Emperor Maximilian. Both Maximilian and Carlotta had strong affiliations with Flanders, the place mentioned in the title of the story. Carlotta was, by birth, a Belgian princess, and Belgium occupies, since 1830, part of the territory previously known as Flanders. Maximilian's family, the Hapsburgs, ruled Flanders and the Lowlands for three hundred years. Many other fleeting references are made to Flanders, Belgium, and the Hapsburg seat of power, Austria, in the text. George Rodenbach, whose poetry is quoted by the narrator in the story, was a nineteenth-century Belgian poet. Hans Memling, also mentioned by the narrator, was a Flemish painter of the fifteenth century. The Pleyel piano mentioned several times in the text is a product of the Pleyel family, originally from Austria, who became famous pianomakers in eighteenth and nineteenth-century France. When the old woman first speaks to the narrator in the garden, she cries, "Kapuzinergruft!" This is the German name of the Capuchine crypt where the Hapsburg Imperial

family, including Maximilian, lies buried in Vienna. In addition, shortly before Maximilian's execution, he was held prisoner in another Capuchine crypt in the Mexican city of Querétaro. Carlotta speaks of the letters she wrote to Maximilian from Bouchot, her last home, a medieval castle in Belgium. Historians have observed that one of the symptoms of Carlotta's madness was her failure to recognize the passing of time and to acknowledge her husband's death. Convinced that he was still alive, she frequently wrote love letters to him, expressing her desire to return to him in Mexico. Apparently, in "Tlactocatzine . . .," Carlotta confuses the narrator with her beloved Maximilian because the two men share similar physical appearances and personalities: both are blond, and both are characterized as impractical dreamers.

In "Tlactocatzine . . .," Carlotta symbolizes the seductive quality of foreign cultures which have lured Mexico away from the development of an autochthonous heritage and led the nation into a mad course of action: throughout her history, Mexico has imitated foreign models and defaced national pride. Although of a brief duration, the French Intervention left lasting marks on Mexico. Long after the French were expelled and Maximilian executed, many Mexicans continued to look to Europe to set the standards in culture and learning. The narrator of "Tlactocatzine . . ." exemplifies those Mexicans who do not feel at home in Mexico. His love of European culture and his nostalgia for the past make him an easy prey for Carlotta, who senses in him a strong attraction for a lost era and a growing disinterest in the contemporary world around him. Carlotta, however, is a victim, too, and her crimes do not go unpunished. At the end of the story, in her madness, she lapses into the Nahuatl tongue, a reminder that the indigenous forces, though buried, are always alive in Mexico and will exact vengeance from all who turn away from them.

"Tenga para que se entretenga" conjures up the ghost of Maximilian for reasons that are less clear. If Maximilian has a motive for choosing his particular victim, it is not an obvious one; if his plans are to wreak vengeance, his kind manner and gentle words belie his sinister intentions. Perhaps it is the very randomness with which he selects his victim, the tenderness with which he approaches him, and the lack of clearly defined reasons behind his act which make it truly frightening. This story is also narrated in the first-person but, here, the narrator is merely a witness to fantastic events, not an active participant in them. He is a private detective by the name of Domínguez who has been hired by an anonymous client to reopen an old case dating back to August of 1943. The case involves the disappearance of a young boy, Rafael Andrade, from Chapultepec Park and, despite efforts by influential politicians, the police, and Domínguez to solve the crime, a great deal of mystery continues to surround it.

There are two possible explanations for the boy's disappearance, but neither is completely satisfactory. The police claim that Rafael was kid-

napped by two Mexican youths who were known to be in the vicinity of the park at the time of the boy's abduction. Rafael was supposedly murdered by them, and his body was thrown into a river about twenty kilometers from Chapultepec. Domínguez points out that there is nothing to support this allegation, and that there are many blatant errors in the official police report. He feels that the youths were unjustly accused and punished for a crime they did not commit. Nevertheless, he is hesitant to advance his own theory regarding the case because it points toward the seemingly impossible. Most of Domínguez's information regarding the case comes from testimony given by the boy's mother, Olga, who was with him in the park at the time of his disappearance. She states that young Rafael disappeared into an underground passageway with a tall, fairhaired, bearded stranger who spoke Spanish with a German accent and wore a faded uniform adorned with gold epaulets. The man was deathly pale and a strong, musty odor clung to his person, but his polite and courtly manners assuaged any fears that Rafael or Olga may have felt in his presence. Without further thought to the matter, Olga allowed her son to go off with the man, whom she assumed to be a caretaker or guard at the nearby Chapultepec Castle. Domínguez would be inclined to dismiss Olga's testimony as a product of her imagination, or as a result of shock and grief, if it were not for three concrete pieces of evidence that further point toward the stranger's identity. As a gesture of friendship, the uniformed man had given Olga a rose, a gold pin with which to attach it to her coat, and a newspaper. He said, as he handed her the paper, "Tenga para que se entretenga," but Olga merely put the articles in her handbag without looking carefully at them. When, a few days later, she remembers them and looks inside her bag she discovers a rose blackened and dried with age, a gold pin nearly worn through with use, and a newspaper bearing the date October 2, 1866 and the banner, *La Gaceta del Imperio*. Together with her description of the stranger, these objects clearly suggest that Rafael's abductor was none other than the Archduke Maximilian, returned from the grave in search of human companionship.

Domínguez is more interested in the socio-political implications of the case than in its fantastic qualities, and he uses it as a base from which to make shrewd observations about contemporary Mexico. He speaks with a feigned innocence and tongue-in-cheek irony in order to criticize social injustice and to point out the absurdity of all efforts to solve this crime. He cites several ridiculous theories advanced by local newspapers regarding the mystery of Rafael's disappearance, theories based on invention, not fact, designed to appeal to the public's prurient interest and to sell newspapers. These stories are no less absurd, however, than the official police report, which is built on obvious falsehoods. Domínguez traces the miscarriage of justice as he tells his tale: he notes the innocent behavior of the accused criminals in the park on the day of the crime, their courteous

assistance to Olga when Rafael is first discovered missing, their arrest when police officials are unable to corroborate Olga's story or to find the real kidnapper, their conviction after scurrilous rumors began to circulate about Olga's involvement with an important political figure, and their prison sentence which puts an end to further speculation about the case. Domínguez is not satisfied with this facile explanation of events, but he philosophically observes that "cada cabeza es un mundo, cada quien piensa distinto y nadie se pone de acuerdo en nada" (142). He refuses to take a more firm position, stating, "todo en este mundo es misterioso y no hay acontecimiento, por nimio que parezca, que pueda ser aclarado satisfactoriamente" (144). His refusal to take a firm stand about the nature and meaning of the events he describes leaves the reader in a quandary. The mystery remains unsolved, and many unsettling questions are left unanswered.

No matter how one chooses to interpret the events which take place in "Tenga para que se entretenga," the story carries a disturbing message. The logical solution to the mystery is full of contradictions and lies, whereas the fantastic solution is based on eye-witness testimony and is substantiated by concrete proof. It may strike the reader as "impossible" that Maximilian could return from the grave to claim Rafael Andrade, but what other explanation is suggested by the facts surrounding the case? The official police report is pure invention and is no more acceptable than Olga's extraordinary testimony. A solution based on invented or falsified information, albeit of a logical nature, is no more "real" than a fantastic one, for it brings us no closer to the truth. As Domínguez observes, "official" interpretations of reality are sometimes biased and fraudulently altered to suit the needs of a select and powerful few. In such cases, reality can become a totally relative entity. Perhaps the fantastic can offer a more accurate view of the world than a so-called rational approach, for beneath the surface of seemingly impossible occurrences, there are sometimes deeper layers of meaning.

Maximilian is portrayed in "Tenga para que se entretenga" as a peculiar, somewhat eerie character, but not one who is evil and menacing. He does not seem to be motivated by malevolence or madness, but rather, by the simple desire for human company in "el reino de los muertos," whence he must return. Like an incarnate symbol of the living past, Maximilian emerges suddenly from the shadows to confront the modern world, only to retreat again into his own moment in time. He carries with him, in this case, young Rafael Andrade, an unfortunate victim selected by a chance encounter. If he should reappear another day in Chapultepec Park, he could easily choose someone else. Rafael and his mother, Olga, are but two of the hundreds of contemporary Mexicans who visit the park daily without ever pausing to consider the history that has taken place there, or the impact those historical events have had on their daily lives. Unaware



that the past is lurking there to envelop them, they pursue their carefree pastimes until, like Rafaelito, they are mysteriously caught up in its net and swept away.

Both stories are conscious of their relationship to Mexican history and depend, in large part, on the reader's familiarity with the figures of Maximilian and Carlotta. In "Tlactocatzine . . .," any doubt the reader may have felt about the identity of the old woman is cleared up when the words "Charlotte, Kaiserin von Mexiko" appear in the text, written on a seal that bears her coat of arms. However, in order for the story to have its full effect, the reader must know the role that Carlotta played in history, and identify her with the specific historical moment in which she lived. Only then does it become evident that the old woman is not simply mad; she also happens to be dead. The discovery that she is a ghost comes from the reader's knowledge of history, not from any description or information offered in the text itself. Therefore, the story enters into the realm of the fantastic only when the reader connects the text to history. "Tenga para que se entretenga" goes a step further, in that the uniformed man who abducts Rafael Andrade is never identified by name. It is never stated in the text that he is Maximilian Von Hapsburg, but the well-informed reader will have no trouble recognizing him from the many hints that are offered in the text. The story's success as a fantastic work hinges on the reader's ability to identify the nameless man as the Archduke Maximilian and, again, to situate him in time. Only when the reader becomes aware that Maximilian died in 1867, about 80 years prior to the year in which Rafael disappeared, does it become apparent that a ghost is responsible for the crime. In a traditional ghost story, information must be supplied in the text to let the reader know that he is dealing with a ghost. In these two tales, information is supplied to let the reader know that he is dealing with historical personages, but the realization that they are ghosts must come from the reader's knowledge of history, rather than from the fictional text. This requires the reader to confront historical fact in order to penetrate the works of fiction.

For example, the way in which Fuentes and Pacheco portray the characters of Maximilian and Carlotta in their stories parallels and reflects the image the royal couple has acquired in popular versions of Mexican history. Although at first glance it may seem coincidental, it is important to note that Carlotta and Maximilian do not appear together in the same story. In history, they were separated when Carlotta sailed for Europe to enlist the aid of Louis Napoleon and the Pope, leaving her husband behind in Mexico to struggle with the insurmountable problems of civil war. They were never reunited in life, for Carlotta was stricken by insanity soon after her arrival in Europe and was unable to rejoin her husband in Mexico; Maximilian, in turn, refused to abandon his adopted country and was executed soon after his wife's departure. Despite historical fact which points to the con-

trary, it is popularly believed that Carlotta and Maximilian were devoted to one another and that they were plagued by loneliness during their separation. It is also commonly held that Carlotta and Maximilian's fondest wish was to have a child, specifically a son, and that their inability to produce one caused them both great pain. In the short stories studied here, Maximilian and Carlotta are portrayed in this popular historical context. They both return from the grave in search of human companionship, and they are motivated by loneliness to reestablish contact with the human race. In "Tlactocatzine . . ." Carlotta finds a replacement for her beloved husband, whereas in "Tenga para que se entretenga," Maximilian seems to be seeking the son he never had. It is impossible for them to find one another again, however, for the gulf that separates them has widened with the passing of time. It is significant that in these two stories, Maximilian has remained young, and Carlotta has grown old. History is responsible for this phenomenon. Maximilian died as a relatively young man and, therefore, he returns from the grave without visible signs of having aged; Carlotta, on the other hand, died at the age of 87, and her ghost takes the form of an elderly woman. The separation which took place at Maximilian's death is unbreachable.

Another popular historical belief which surrounds the Imperial couple is that Maximilian was a passive, rather indecisive young man, who was easily manipulated by an aggressive, ambitious and greedy wife. Carlotta is usually regarded as the "villian" in this particular episode of Mexican history; Maximilian is most often seen as a weak and ineffectual man, but one who was essentially harmless. Some versions of Mexican history still portray the Emperor and Empress in highly unfavorable terms, as usurpers who threatened Mexico's growth as an independent nation. In these texts, Carlotta is almost always considered to be more evil than her husband. Not surprisingly, then, Fuentes and Pacheco portray the royal couple in precisely this way in their short stories. Carlotta is by far the more frightening character. It is clearly suggested in "Tlactocatzine . . ." that the aggressive and overpowering nature of her feelings toward the narrator will ultimately bring about his destruction. An element of fear is always present whenever the narrator comes into contact with her. On the other hand, "Tenga para que se entretenga" presents Maximilian as a pathetic and benign ghost. He carries young Rafael Andrade away with him, but neither Rafael nor his mother feel any particular fear when they come into contact with him. Although Rafael was separated from his family and, presumably, taken away to "el reino de los muertos," there is no suggestion that Rafael was physically harmed by Maximilian or that the boy suffered in any way from his contact with the Emperor's ghost. The element of fear, so important in "Tlactocatzine . . ." is conspicuously absent in "Tenga para que se entretenga." In a sense, then, the two stories simply

reflect popular opinion about Carlotta and Maximilian. Carlotta is seen as a more dangerous character than her husband, both in history and in fiction.

The victims chosen by Maximilian and Carlotta in the two stories are different in many respects, yet they share one common feature: either they are ignorant of the lessons taught by history, or they are blind to them. Their failure to see the relationship between Mexico's past and present bring personal tragedy or danger into their lives. There is nothing unique or special about the victims chosen by the ghosts of the Imperial couple, however. They are representative of many contemporary Mexicans who are unaware of the role that history has played in the shaping of their nation's identity. Carlotta and Maximilian represent both the threat and the allure of European culture. They return in these two fantastic stories to remind Mexicans of how easily their country has fallen under the spell of foreign cultures in the past, and how little things have changed in contemporary society. Until the Mexican learns to see himself in his historical context and to heed the warnings found there, he will continue to be haunted by the ghosts of the past and fall victim to their whims.

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#### NOTES

1. For other approaches to Fuentes' short story see: Archibaldo Burns, "Seis cuentos enmascarados," *Revista de la Universidad de México*, 9. 3-4 (1954): 29-30; Emmanuel Carballo, *El cuento mexicano del siglo XX*, México: Empresas Editoriales, 1964: 73-80; Anthony J. Ciccone, "The Supernatural Persistence of the Past in *Los días enmascarados* by Carlos Fuentes," *Latin American Literary Review*, 3.6 (1975): 37-48; Duncan, Cynthia. "The Living Past: The Mexican's History Returns to Haunt Him in Two Short Stories by Carlos Fuentes," in *The Fantastic in World Literature and the Arts*, Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1987: 149-155., Georgia García Gutiérrez, *Los disfraces. La obra mestiza de Carlos Fuentes*, México: Colegio de Mexico, 1981; Daniel de Guzmán, *Carlos Fuentes*, New York: Twayne, 1972; and Richard

Reeve, "Los cuentos de Carlos Fuentes: de La fantasía al neo-realismo," in *El cuento hispanoamericano ante la crítica*. Ed. Enrique Pupo-Walker, Madrid: Castalia, 1973: 249-263. Pacheco's story has received scant critical attention to date. For a general overview of Pacheco's short stories, see: Barbara Bockus Aponte, "José Emilio Pacheco, cuentista," *Journal of Spanish Studies, Twentieth-Century*, 7 (1979): 5-21.

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El rescate de la  
historia/intrahistoria salvadoreña  
en *Un día en la vida* de Manlio Argueta

Raúl Rodríguez-Hernández

La relación entre el fenómeno histórico y la producción literaria se presenta de una forma más evidente en el ámbito cultural latinoamericano que en el resto de las otras culturas modernas. Esto se debe, según parece, a la estrecha relación que ha existido entre estos dos campos del quehacer humano desde el incipiente período de los primeros documentos producidos desde el Nuevo Mundo: diarios de viajes, crónicas, cartas de relación, etc. Sin embargo, conviene agregar que esta correlación no ha estado exenta de conflictos y ambigüedades que han quedado registrados tanto en la crítica literaria como en las estructuras e ideas sobre las obras mismas. Esta situación alcanza mayores dimensiones cuando se la considera a la luz de la *responsabilidad* del escritor con su sociedad y los procesos históricos en que le ha tocado vivir.

Pero la responsabilidad del escritor no existe en un vacío cultural; ésta aparece condicionada tanto en lo político como en lo estético por las diversas tendencias filosóficas e ideológicas que han competido—y aún compiten—en el continente latinoamericano. Entre ellas, baste con mencionar el historicismo de tendencias románticas, el positivismo filosófico y las corrientes indigenistas, entre otras.

Desde los principios del siglo diecinueve hasta nuestros días, los escritores latinoamericanos han mostrado en sus obras reajustes y estrategias para ampliar la zona histórica que habría de servirles de referente para sus propósitos estéticos. Este acercamiento a lo histórico se ha hecho a través de la utilización de los preceptos dictados por el realismo, "entendido éste como la forma estética más general—*mimesis narrativa*—requerida por las condiciones históricas de su producción."<sup>1</sup> Sin embargo, la confianza casi monolítica en el realismo como único vehículo viable para la representación de la realidad latinoamericana se empezó a cuestionar en los últimos treinta años por los escritores de la generación del "boom." Para los escritores como Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar y Mario Vargas Llosa, entre otros, la estética realista resultaba insuficiente (y hasta fraudulenta) para plasmar sus ideas sobre la novela, la realidad política de sus respectivos países y,

sobre todo, al realismo se le veía como un claro obstáculo para la libre experimentación que distinguía a estos escritores. No está de más agregar que junto a esta necesidad de experimentación y universalismo—en detrimento del regionalismo—paulatinamente se comenzó a delinear una actitud de rechazo al concepto lineal de la historia y a las leyes que la sustentan. Fuentes es el escritor que tal vez mejor haya articulado las bases teóricas del proceso en su libro *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*.<sup>2</sup> Para Carlos Fuentes y otros autores del "boom," la historia de América Latina es una historia heredada y adulterada; una historia que para merecer su nombre hay que destruirla y comenzar de nuevo a partir de cero. Los rasgos mesiánicos y apocalípticos sin duda alguna son obvios<sup>3</sup> y apuntan a un nihilismo político y social emparentado con el rechazo a lo histórico. Esta situación vino a ser el resultado del fracaso de programas políticos de orientación liberal por un lado y la derrota de movimientos insurgentes radicales por el otro.<sup>4</sup>

Como contraste a la corriente representada por la mayoría de los escritores del "boom," en los últimos diez años ha surgido una nueva tendencia en la manera de narrar que difiere de la anterior descrita. Esta nueva tendencia (la de la generación de los "novísimos") no reconstruye a manera de mito la historia sino que la problematiza con todos los acontecimientos sociales contemporáneos como parte de una dinámica en proceso y aún por resolverse. Para la generación de los "novísimos" (Antonio Skármeta, Sergio Ramírez, Ariel Dorfman, Manlio Argueta, por mencionar algunos), las luchas de liberación en Latinoamérica les han dotado de abundante material histórico que ha cristalizado en un tipo de literatura—ficción en particular—que se compromete con las revoluciones que describe y al mismo tiempo propone nuevas alternativas estéticas de vanguardia.<sup>5</sup>

Una de las características más notables del grupo de los "novísimos" es la restauración y avance de la corriente realista en las letras hispanoamericanas. Pero se debe insistir en que esta tendencia realista no es una vuelta incondicional a los modelos realistas decimonónicos. Por el contrario, y como lo afirma Angel Rama, con la ficción de los "novísimos," "Eric Auerbach hubiera podido agregar un nuevo capítulo a su *Mimesis*" y agrega el mismo Rama al referirse específicamente al panorama latinoamericano: "el realismo sostiene a veces viejas batallas y otras reinventa fórmulas artísticas de lo que hoy llamaríamos un discurso del verosímil ajustado al tiempo contemporáneo, que por lo tanto ya no puede transitar por una escritura flaubertiana, que dio la pauta . . . de la concepción de *mimesis*."<sup>6</sup>

Las formas que asume el realismo de los "novísimos" son plurales; y aunque—como ya lo explicó Angel Rama—éstas parecen "manchadas" de modelos gastados, su propósito es el de la invención de nuevos sistemas de comunicación que amplíen el término de realismo y lo hagan partícipe de otras posibilidades de expresión como las que lograron las pinturas de

Mondrian y Rothko en las artes visuales. Es decir, un enriquecimiento de la abstracción y la manera de figurar la realidad observada.

Es aquí, dentro de la nueva tendencia realista, donde podemos ubicar sin lugar a dudas la producción narrativa del salvadoreño Manlio Argueta. Su obra, producto del exilio (y escrita la mayor parte del tiempo a contra pelo), es la heredera directa de este tipo de literatura que maneja el discurso social racionalizado y lo propone a los lectores como otra arma de combate. Pero lo anterior no debe entenderse como un tipo de literatura que se acerca al panfleto y se olvida de sus características propias. En Argueta conviven con igual valor el mensaje directo y amplio con las tendencias subjetivistas y obsesionantes que son típicas del existencialismo que vienen a enriquecer el concepto del realismo ya discutido anteriormente.

En líneas generales, los autores de novelas de contenido histórico (como Argueta) cuyos propósitos son los de narrar y/o dar testimonio del pasado, en su forma siguen los lineamientos planteados por Georg Lukács en su ya clásico texto *La novela histórica*.<sup>7</sup> Según Lukács, el surgimiento de la novela histórica realista en una sociedad dada no ocurre en forma mecánica. Sólo cuando existen en una sociedad lo que él llama las "posibilidades concretas" que les permiten a los hombres percibir su propia existencia como históricamente condicionada es posible para los escritores desarrollar dicho género novelesco. El concepto de la conciencia de las "posibilidades concretas" encierra la idea central que promueve este tipo de novelas. Para ilustrar el concepto, Lukács nos ofrece el ejemplo de la novela histórica en la Europa del siglo XIX. Según Lukács, la Revolución francesa y la caída de Napoleón contribuyeron a hacer de la historia una *experiencia masiva*, es decir, de las mayorías. Estas mayorías son en especial los grupos no privilegiados. Más adelante en su libro, Lukács desarrolla el concepto de *masas* como agentes de la historia. Por primera vez, en lugar de los héroes carismáticos heredados del movimiento romántico, el "individuo medio" es el que ocupa el lugar central en la novela. A veces, las masas anónimas aparecen como un personaje colectivo que logra transmitir la experiencia histórica de la sociedad en conflicto. Las "posibilidades concretas" de las que habla Lukács se establecen con los movimientos de liberación sandinista (*El valle de las hamacas*, 1982) y la perenne lucha guerrillera en El Salvador (*Un día en la vida*, 1985). En ambas novelas se perciben las masas de individuos cuyas vidas cotidianas sufren lo que Lukács llama "the dramatic collision" que libera los perfiles psicológicos de todos ellos.

Otra de las características primordiales en la obra de Argueta es la ingeniosa combinación que él hace del testimonio histórico y el género novelesco. Con esto, los límites de los géneros se relativizan al punto de proponer nuevas perspectivas de narratividad.<sup>8</sup> Dentro de esta narratividad, los documentos (testimonios) son despojados de su lógica particular y son incorporados a la estructura de la novela para formar una nueva

ecuación narrativa que pertenece más al campo de la ficción que al documento historiográfico. No obstante, esto no debe interpretarse como una sumisión o derrota del discurso histórico frente a la ficción. Al contrario: lo que vemos aquí es un diálogo interno entre las dos partes que se apoyan mutuamente produciendo nuevos mensajes y significados.

Las dos novelas de Argueta, publicadas dentro de un lapso de tiempo muy corto y condicionadas ambas por el exilio, comparten en mayor o menor grado un acercamiento al fenómeno histórico que traspasa los límites salvadoreños para después volver a fincarse en los problemas netamente específicos de su país. Es decir, por un lado sus reflexiones sobre la historia hacen de sus novelas modelos alegóricos para todo el continente latinoamericano y, por otro, su rescate de la historia de El Salvador asume características arqueológicas.

*Un día en la vida*, aparte de ser un descenso al subconsciente colectivo del pueblo salvadoreño, se puede interpretar como una alegoría de la historia de Centroamérica. En doscientas páginas Argueta articula la historia social y política de El Salvador. La estructura de la novela es bastante ingeniosa ya que su formato se asemeja a la novela *Ulyses* de James Joyce. Toda la historia de El Salvador y la vida de uno de los personajes-narradores principales de la novela (la vieja Lupe Guardado) están contadas en un espacio de sólo doce horas. En este breve tiempo, Argueta comprime y rescata los últimos cincuenta años de historia que los militares han tratado de ocultar. Los recursos estilísticos de que se vale el autor para "comprimir" décadas de opresión y resentimiento sufridas por los campesinos salvadoreños se pueden considerar de tres tipos: primero, la yuxtaposición de los capítulos que rompen el concepto lineal del tiempo histórico; segundo, la ausencia deliberada de signos de puntuación entre un suceso y otro que se podría emparentar con el "fluir de la conciencia" de los personajes; y tercero, el uso de las voces narrativas dentro de la novela.

Como ya se mencionó, la realidad de los personajes en *Un día en la vida* se cubre en sólo doce horas. La novela comienza en el momento en que la protagonista despierta por la mañana (a las 5:30 a.m.) en un día cualquiera (de ahí el título de la novela) para ocuparse de sus labores cotidianas, y termina a las 5:30 p.m. cuando la Guardia Civil aparece en su choza para aprehender a una de sus nietas por haber participado en una manifestación política en contra del gobierno. Dice la vieja ". . . no hay día de Dios que no esté de pie a las cinco de la mañana. Cuando el gallo ha cantado un montón de veces ya voy para arriba. Cuando el cielo está todavía oscuro y sólo es cruzado por el silbido de un pájaro volando, me levanto."<sup>9</sup> La cita anterior proviene del primer capítulo que aparece bajo el encabezado "5:30 a.m.". Lo que continúa, es decir lo que sería el segundo capítulo de la novela, aparece con el encabezado de "5:45" de la mañana y así sucesivamente hasta llegar a las horas de la tarde cuando termina la



novela. Sin embargo, aunque la linealidad del tiempo está marcada con las horas del reloj, Argueta incluye más información en los capítulos que el mero transcurso de la vida de los personajes. A las "5:45" de la mañana se habla de una serie de circunstancias que sólo tendrán significado hasta que se haya leído toda la novela y no necesariamente hacen continuar en forma lineal la vida del personaje en cuestión: se incluyen fragmentos de la adolescencia de Lupe, los asesinatos de sus hijos, el encuentro con su futuro esposo, etc.

Esta yuxtaposición de capítulos y el cambio de tipografía dentro de los capítulos mismos lleva al lector a otros niveles de la realidad que se abarcan en la novela. Por ejemplo, la mayoría de los párrafos impresos en letra cursiva son los que Argueta dedica a la historia suprimida de El Salvador y los que poco a poco, como un rompecabezas, van reconstruyendo los antecedentes de la situación actual del país. A esto, paralelamente el lector se va informando de la vida interna de los personajes que cubren un espacio de tiempo de más de cincuenta años, todos ellos llenos de injusticias a causa de las limitaciones sociales impuestas por la oligarquía patriarcal cafetalera de El Salvador. Un ejemplo del enfrentamiento de las fuerzas sociales en conflicto es el de la iglesia liberal con las fuerzas reaccionarias del país.

Todo esto me lo contaba despuesito José, 'Imagínate, Lupe, hasta dónde llegan con su cinismo.'

*'Abusan de la gente honrada,' le decía yo a José.*

Y en otra ocasión, de visita en la tienda.

—*No sé si le contó Chepe.*

—*Algo me dijo.*

—*Dicen que el comunismo es andar metiendo ideas en la cabeza y que el padre Luna era de los meros rojos.*

—*Ya no va a pensar uno, pues.*

—*Ellos dicen que lo malo son las ideas comunistas, andar metiendo la política en la iglesia.*

—*¿Y qué es eso de política y comunismo, don Sebastián?*

—*Decir que se debe gozar en la tierra para no tener derecho a ganarse el cielo. (Un día en la vida, pág. 38)*

La manipulación de la ignorancia de los campesinos es obvia y facilita la dominación masiva de las comunidades rurales donde el tendero Sebastián (representante de la burguesía) es la autoridad política y moral local. Con ejemplos como estos, Argueta pretende motivar al lector a que tome conciencia de la intrahistoria del problema salvadoreño y, a la vez, establece la dialéctica necesaria para romper con la visión maniqueísta de la realidad en cuestión.

Tanto en los capítulos de narración lineal cronológica como en los yuxtapuestos, se encuentran largos párrafos de dimensiones irregulares que se pueden considerar como el fluir de la conciencia de los personajes. En ellos se puede observar el dote narrativo de Argueta que a través de pasajes líricos cuenta los pensamientos íntimos de los personajes y sus reacciones anímicas frente a la realidad. La introspección de Lupe Guardado en especial lleva al lector hasta la niñez de la mujer donde el ambiente inocente (y a veces idílico) choca violentamente con la brutalidad hostil del presente. Desde el momento en que se despierta, ella se refugia en el recuerdo como el único antídoto contra la realidad diaria.

Café y tortilla tostada con sal para el desayuno. Así es nuestra vida y no conocemos otra. Por eso dicen que somos felices. Yo no sé. En todo caso esa palabra 'feliz' no me cuadra nada. Ni siquiera sé lo que significa verdaderamente. Después de lo de mi hijo Justino prefiero encerrarme en mí misma. No es que me ponga triste. Es otra cosa inexplicable. (*Un día en la vida*, pág. 13)

Las alternativas que le ofrece la vida son pocas, especialmente ahora que su hijo Justino ha sido asesinado (como anteriormente su esposo y su otro hijo) por la Guardia Civil. Para ella, el futuro está poblado de fantasmas del presente y del pasado.

Otro rasgo significativo de la novela de Argueta es el de las voces narrativas. Desde el principio de la novela es posible observar que las voces narradoras son femeninas. Las mujeres tienen a su cargo dar testimonio tanto del pasado como del presente. Las razones de esta situación, más que de estilo, obedecen a la intención del autor de demostrar en la ficción una realidad grotesca que se da en el pueblo salvadoreño. Las voces femeninas son las de las esposas, las madres o hermanas de las víctimas silenciadas por la violencia o de todos aquellos hombres que han tenido que huir a las montañas y vivir en las cuevas para escapar la Guardia Civil. Estas voces son, pues, la alternativa al grotesco del silencio impuesto por la oligarquía patriarcal. Es como si Argueta le estuviera sugiriendo al lector que junto al discurso masculino de la dictadura existiera un río secreto o una corriente subterránea del discurso femenino oponiéndose a la historia "oficial" manipulada por los hombres.

Muy pocos son los autores masculinos en Latinoamérica que depositan totalmente el peso narrativo de sus ficciones en los personajes femeninos. De ahí la originalidad de *Un día en la vida* que refleja una visión más igualitaria (o más democrática, podría decirse también) de la historia al incorporar a los personajes femeninos con igual valor al de los personajes masculinos. Sin embargo, aunque las mujeres están a cargo de relatar los sucesos en la novela, éstas en absoluto funcionan como portavoces o "dobles" del autor cuyas estructuras mentales (por herencia y tradición) están

condicionadas por lo que Luce Irigaray y Jacques Derrida han denominado el pensamiento patriarcal: "Patriarchal thought models its criteria for what counts as 'positive' values on the central assumption of the Phallus and the Logos as transcendental signifiers of Western culture."<sup>10</sup>

Si no otra cosa y en abierta oposición al poder absoluto patriarcal, Argueta está consciente de que es la sociedad y no el determinismo biológico lo que ha determinado el lugar de las mujeres en la sociedad, y además su percepción total del mundo. De ahí la estructura de la novela que en momentos parece estar emparentada con la novela testimonial. Los diversos capítulos sugieren la idea de que el autor entrevistó a los personajes femeninos para que contaran con sus propias palabras los sucesos relatados. El resultado es un *collage* de realidades íntimas enlazadas con el mundo exterior. De esta manera, Argueta recobra para los lectores estas realidades que, de lo contrario, estarían condenadas a perderse debido a la falta de los medios de comunicación y al analfabetismo de las campesinas salvadoreñas.

Obviamente el recurso narrativo de la novela es artificial y *Un día en la vida* no es una novela testimonial propiamente dicha; tampoco es lo que Truman Capote denominaba "the nonfiction novel."<sup>11</sup> Sin embargo, a este punto de la realidad histórica centroamericana, donde las circunstancias cambian de un día a otro, *Un día en la vida* viene a llenar el vacío de la experiencia femenina contada ésta (en la medida de lo posible) desde un punto de vista lírico y apegado al tono vernacular salvadoreño.

Los capítulos de la abuela Lupe Guardado, en especial, funcionan como palimpsestos cuyos significados profundos se dejan entrever a lo largo del texto. El lector tiene que enfrentarse a descifrar (o tal vez a leer entre líneas) la agobiante realidad salvadoreña insinuándose entre anécdotas familiares.

Lo importante es que no se mueran nuestros hijos. Dejar morir a un hijo es el peor pecado que se puede cometer. Y al primer síntoma teníamos que ir a buscar al cura, pues además ya venían más seguido a Chalate. Le fuimos perdiendo miedo al cura. Antes nos daban miedo, creíamos que eran especies de magos, que con un gesto podían aniquilarnos. Además no nos daban confianza. Hablaban con una voz ronca, de otro mundo o de las profundidades de dios. (*Un día en la vida*, pág. 27)

Si el sistema patriarcal (en este caso el clero latinoamericano) genera sus propias estructuras ideológicas que abarcan todo tipo de manifestación humana, resulta bastante difícil imaginar cómo las mujeres pueden desarrollar o al menos mantener una conciencia femenina (y por ende un lenguaje femenino) libre de cualquier contaminación de las estructuras patriarcales.

¿Cuál es la alternativa a este fenómeno para que el mensaje femenino

no sea fútil y/o limitado? Manlio Argueta parece suscribirse a los postulados de Sandra M. Gilbert y Susan Gubar—o al menos coincide teóricamente con ellos—cuando éstas analizan la dependencia lingüística de las mujeres al escribir que: “Since his [the male’s] is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she ‘talk back’ to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint?”<sup>12</sup> Los personajes femeninos de la novela se ajustan a la segunda parte de la cita. No son ni ángeles (arquetipos del eterno femenino) ni monstruos despreciables que merecen el rechazo de todos.<sup>13</sup> Por el contrario, ellas son las mujeres que tienen una historia que contar antes de que termine el día y venga el ejército en su busca: “todo eso me lo dijo el corazón. No sé si hablando conmigo misma o con Adolfinia. Platicando quizás con las sombras. Y mi corazón hasta ahora, nunca me ha mentido” (*Un día en la vida*, pág. 220). Entonces, las mujeres en *Un día en la vida* reflejan el tipo de grandeza que Lukács describe en los personajes típicos de las novelas históricas cuando deben enfrentarse a las grandes crisis de la humanidad: “They [los personajes] show the human greatness that is always latent in the people, and is set free by great social crises.”<sup>14</sup>

Los capítulos donde hablan las mujeres aparecen interpolados entre aquellos dedicados a las horas del día.<sup>15</sup> Dichos capítulos aparecen en la novela bajo los subtítulos de “María Romelía,” “María Pía,” “Adolfinia,” etc. Cada capítulo es una historia que cuenta el destino de los hombres desaparecidos; son testimonios de soledad y brutalidad que arroja como saldo un país agobiado por las dictaduras. El ejemplo más iluminador quizá sea el de María Pía, que en forma detallada relata la desaparición de su esposo Helio Hernández.

Yo soy también de por acá de esta zona, esposa de Helio Hernández. Fue capturado por la Guardia Nacional. Cuando lo agarraron recibió torturas, es decir que le pegaban culatazos en la espalda, en la cabeza. El venía de dormir del monte y se encontró con ellos. Venía con Emilio Ramírez. Este cayó rápido. Helio logró correrse pero se manió en unos bejucos y se cayó al suelo. Ahí le cayeron, le cayeron cinco guardias dándole culatazos en todas partes. A manera de dejarlo inmóvil. ‘Asesinos déjenlo,’ gritaba. (*Un día en la vida*, pág. 69)

Como se puede apreciar en la cita anterior, Argueta no está interesado en los super-héroes de las épicas revolucionarias; su interés y sus alianzas están con los personajes medios (como diría Lukács) enfrentados a las “posibilidades concretas” centroamericanas de cambios revolucionarios. Él, junto con sus contemporáneos de la generación de los “novísimos,” se han impuesto la tarea de rescatar la historia para que ésta una vez más

vuelva a ser uno de los motores y fuente de inspiración para la literatura del continente latinoamericano. Pero para que esta configuración histórica sea completa, debe abarcar tanto lo urbano como la cultura campesina, lo documental y el testimonio. Sobre estos propósitos, dice Argueta en uno de sus artículos críticos: "No es que tuviera que romper con la novela urbana, era que para mostrar perfectamente a una mujer campesina de Chalatenango, analfabeta, paciente, tierna, pero perfecta en el camino de la liberación, tenía que proyectar esa realidad, esa experiencia a mi manera. A nuestra manera."<sup>16</sup>

Los personajes de *Un día en la vida* y en especial las mujeres analfabetas campesinas (como Lupe Guardado, María Romelía, etc.) son un claro ejemplo de esa "realidad" salvadoreña total que Argueta quiere rescatar. El realismo de la novela no sólo nos muestra la historia "secuestrada" sino que propone una reexaminación de este concepto mismo como una herramienta literaria para reflejar el proceso histórico.

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#### NOTAS

1. Françoise Perus, *Historia y crítica literaria: el realismo social y la crisis de la dominación oligárquica* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1982), pág. 165.

2. Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1972).

3. Carlos Fuentes, al referirse al despotismo de la historia, comenta: "Creo que la ambigüedad que compartían la historia y la literatura en la edad clásica en forma egalitaria, se ha perdido en los tiempos modernos porque la historia sólo es lo que nosotros pensamos que es . . . Quisiera ver a la historia tan relativizada como la literatura, y no ser un absoluto." Entrevista a Carlos Fuentes, *Diacritics*. La traducción es mía.

4. Kathleen Newman analiza cuidadosamente el caso de Vargas Llosa y Ricardo Piglia. Para Newman, "Both authors have had to confront the failures, in continental terms, of the Latin American left against state terror and dictatorship of the seventies—though Piglia has a better memory of the left's successes—and now in the eighties both recognize that the theories of history circulating among the left in the sixties and seventies were inadequate to account for the complexities of social and historical change." Kathleen Newman, "Historical Knowledge in the Post-Boom Novel," incluido en Daniel Balderston (ed.), *The Historical Novel in Latin America* (Gaithersburg, Md.: Hispamérica, 1986), pág. 218.

5. En otra parte he definido las novelas de Argueta y Skármeta como un nuevo tipo de *novela histórica hispanoamericana*, véase mi "Historia y ficción: *La insurrección y Un día en la vida* como representantes de la 'nueva novela histórica hispanoamericana.'" *Texto Crítico*, No. 36 (enero-abril 1987).

6. Angel Rama, *Novísimos narradores hispanoamericanos: 1964-1980* (México: Marcha, 1981), pág. 15.

7. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trad. Hannah y Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1978).

8. "En determinados períodos, por lo común cuando la férrea represión política cede definitivamente o, por un momento, alivia su compresión, irrumpe una nutrida producción que testimonia lo vivido e intenta una explicación coherente. El Brasil puede proponerse como un campo óptimo de este proceso, dado que los últimos años, los de la llamada 'apertura,' han visto esa irrupción de obras nuevas o reeditadas sin trabas junto con la acumulación de memorias y testimonios de los años de las dictaduras militares." Angel Rama, *Novísimos narradores . . .*, pág. 34.

9. Manlio Argueta, *Un día en la vida* (Costa Rica: EDUCA, 1985), pág. 7. Futuras referencias a la novela se darán dentro del texto.

10. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), págs. 66-67. Consúltese en especial la segunda parte del texto donde se discuten ampliamente los postulados teóricos del feminismo francés.

11. M.H. Abrams aclara el término: "This form uses a variety of novelistic techniques to render recent historical events, and is based not only on historical records, but often on personal interviews with the chief agents. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Normal Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (1979) are instances of this mode, sometimes called also the 'new journalism'." (M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* [New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981], 4th ed., pág. 121.)

12. Sandra M. Gilbert y Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pág. 46.

13. Como punto de contraste a los capítulos dedicados a las mujeres, Argueta incluye uno que difiere del resto. En el se ve reflejado el pensamiento machista de los militares. "Pues miren que todas estas mujeres son unas putas. Ser mujer es haber nacido puta, mientras que los hombres se dividen en dos clases: los maricones, y nosotros los machos, los que vestimos este uniforme: y de entre los machos habría que escoger los más, más machos." (*Un día en la vida*, pág. 135).

14. Ver G.H.R. Parkinson, *Georg Lukács* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pág. 95. Para una discusión más amplia del concepto de grandeza latente en las masas, véase en adición el subtítulo 2 del capítulo 1 de *La novela histórica: "The Classical Form of the Historical Novel."* En él, Lukács explica ampliamente la manera en que las revoluciones influyeron en la transformación de la mentalidad de los individuos y de las masas.

15. Este aspecto de las múltiples voces femeninas en la novela de Argueta recuerda la teoría de Mikhail Bakhtin sobre la "heteroglossia" o la "polifonía" en la obra narrativa de Dostoevsky. En su discusión sobre este rasgo fundamental del escritor ruso, Bakhtin desarrolla la importancia de la apertura de la obra literaria de un "plano monológico" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], ed. y trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature Series, vol. 8, pág. 5) a "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, pág. 6). La autonomía de estas "voces," en Dostoevsky y al parecer en Argueta, contribuye a la producción de un texto en donde cada personaje es el dueño (o la dueña) de su propio destino sin la intervención autoritaria del autor-creador.

16. Manlio Argueta, "No lo he visto una última vez," en Hugo Niño (ed.), *Queremos tanto a Julio: veinte autores para Cortázar* (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1984), pág. 145.