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TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES OF THE FICTIONALIZED
MEMORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND FRANCOIST
DICTATORSHIP IN THE NARRATIVE OF THE EIGHTIES.
A CASE OF LITERARY MEMORY IN *HERRUMBROSAS
LANZAS*, BY JUAN BENET

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The present paper is an attempt at debating some basic ideas in Juan Benet's essays and literary contributions regarding the discussion between Memory/History in Spain after the death of Franco. Problematic concepts such as *lieux de mémoire*, historical memory y collective memory are discussed, taking as a starting point the relationship History/Novel and the configurations of the different semantic fields that are here analyzed, particularly, from the construction of the ideological condenser Región in the author's magnum opus: *Herrumbrosas lanzas* (1983-1986). We are going to start from: a. The transnational strategies that narrate frontiers not only geographic but cultural, such as the argentinian case; b. The strategies referring to the construction of the deconstructive rhetoric of the 'State myth' and the National-Catholicism ideology; finally, c. The discussion revolving the usefulness of the method, expressed in the function of the historical novel that breaks the canonical epistemological paradigm of representation of the eighties.

The problem of truth in historic-literary writings is, perhaps, the center of the debate as it is linked to the bigger issue of the relativity of representation as a concept. In principle, the notion of truth is articulated by the traditional view of history. Based in a mirroring of

the past, it made the narrator a transparent link between writing and the past reality as an *indisputable* event. In that respect, we agree with H. White (2003) on the fact that there is not a single way to plot texts, hence the interpretations and ways to make them intelligible are dependant on a material reason: their context of production and the meaning they plot in agreement with it.

The responsibility in narrative does not become relativized; rather, it is the narrative itself that is dependant not only on factual utterances (were it the case, they would be limited to mere annals or chronicles) but their articulations (and here, even the use of connectors indicates figurativeness) stemming from rhetoric utterances. This is why a narrative about the same event can be told both as a tragedy and as a farce¹ and, thus, it is understandable that a factual truth is only at stake when it comes to the meaning constructed and unfolded by the plot. *Truth* would be the factual adaptation that would allow us to judge a narrative as acceptable or not; by verisimilitude, we refer to the very constitution of the historic narrative that is no longer false, but amoral. In this sense, the value will not be defined as that which is stable and univocal. It will not be bound to the doctrines of epistemological justification; it will be bound to the necessary critique that allows for the rejection and signaling of these modernist events that have led to the trauma of historicism. In light of this, the new philosophy of History, in words of Hans Kellner², strives for resisting and impugning the «authoritarian discourse of reality, exhibiting the interpretative and subjective streaks of reading historic events. Thus, the discursive possibilities of translating reality into narrative are accounted for, and, along with this, the many interpretative forms of the so called *social* totality gain importance since epic representational models are no longer erected; rather, those operations are questioned, precisely because they are analyzed as representations.

The concept of «imaginative reason» becomes operational in order to ponder on the historical discourse in terms of the possibilities that arise from it in terms of breaking with the reason/imagination binary and hence, objectivity/subjectivity, addressing the idea of

¹ In this respect, White resorts to Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and, based on this, we can see how the historical constructions of the past are always dependant on a certain point of view that constructs them.

² Kellner, 1989, p. 24.

representation as opposed to reconstruction. Here, the metaphor regarding arguments on Hayden White's tropology has already been proposed and is no longer an old rhetoric ornament that develops knowledge. In this sense, the imaginative or representative part would be opening new semantic fields that carry the implicit idea of an action with them, since the reflections would create interpretative actions that would make the historic discourse a meaning creation device, instead of a mere replicator of alleged truths or copies.

Herrumbrosas lanzas (1983, 1985, 1986), deals with recreating and analyzing the Spanish Civil War. History (understood as a tragedy) begins with civil war and is set against the time of prehistory (the republican utopia). Here, these chronotopical webs referring to the field of war as opposed to the peace-utopia stage the republican discursive memory that allows us to analyze the identity constructions of the fictional and historical subjects, but also of the subject of enunciation, the narrator who, although masked or taking an explicit stance, faces the narrative project in an ideological plane. This way, as Arthur Danto states, in *Narración y conocimiento*, the historical knowledge does not coincide with a temporal conscience of the phenomena. From a cognitive perspective, and following the guidelines of Patrick Charaudeau (2003), the relationships between representations and identity imply a system of values, beliefs and norms that structure texts and whose perception resides always in a present *hic et nunc*. The important thing is, according to the thesis of Iury Lotman (2000), that memory is not that passive inventory of official history but the scattered emergence of testimonies and the narratives of those dialects of memory. That is why the testimony, as a narrative framed within the novel, allows for the shifting of the private to the public and the acknowledging of identity bonds and a semantic intentionality in that shifting that has two clear programmatic goals: collective memory is fragmentary and must be reconstructed through the multiplicity of uneven voices that define it; that fragmentation is reconstructed through the intervention of the discursive universe of the commented world's *hic et nunc*; there, the perspective of the enunciation's subject plays a central role. As Paolo Virno (2003) points out, the function of *Región* for memory is not so much its *temporalized* physiognomy as its *temporalizing* function. The characters' origins, in the narratives of their prehistory, lie in their everyday life and their characteristic feature is essentiality. The *Regionatos* are not characters

constructed by inheritance and military prehistory³. The first character that stresses this dialect of memory and the ideological world view of the tactical exercise of truth is general Arderius, historical character *par excellence*, representing, in social memory, the generation of '27. The exemplified microhistory needs to analyze and explain the changes operating in the shift from prehistory to history through cause and effect relationships. Like many intellectuals, Arderius switches to a stage of commitment. It is no coincidence that his narrative opens the novel. In this narrated world, the moment of prehistory needs characters defined by their vocation, who do not oscillate in choosing between contemplative and active life. They are guided by a sense of duty that will stem from an individual motivation that will become a collective obligation. This way, if prehistory means the narrative of the family's places, these will be represented mainly by the home. Following this logic, Eugenio Mazón clearly identifies with the argument since he is the character that will mark the novel's outcome for he is the face of failure, the face of the warrior and the face of the more constant protagonist⁴. With the narrative of his life, all narratives of the prehistory are summarized. Eugenio Mazón is a man that fulfills the spear metaphor; his behavior, throughout the novel, consists of moving forwards; not backwards, not even conquering; he does not have a plan other than arriving at Macerta striking from the sides. The heroes of Región, Mazón being one of them, hold the lesson of destiny, which is the keyword and lexeme that outlines the search for a future. Each space plays an essential role in memory. This is why Mazón remembers episodes at Mesquida's house, his mother's affection and the primary condition of woman as an essential pivot of action. There he finds the memory of childhood and the juxtaposition with the memory of his mother. Thus, the entire book VII characterizes, through Eugenio Mazón, the republican pocket of Región. But there, two fundamental elements are at work: vengeance and discourse (the

³ The *Regionatos*, unlike the practical and contemporarily war—related character of the *Nacionales*, have a prehistory linked to manual labor of the land or writing and intellectual labor.

⁴ Here, the title's impression that picks up Miguel Hernández's verse can be clearly seen: «[...] Atraviesa la muerte con herrumbrosas lanzas, y en traje de cañón, / las parameras donde cultiva el hombre raíces y esperanzas, / y llueve sal, y esparce calaveras», Hernández, «Elegía Primera», *Vientos de pueblo* (1937), 1998.

legends of the Santo Bobio, the mysterious killer, the legendary Sicilian vendettas and counter-vendettas). Prehistory begins with the marriage of Ricardo Mazón and Laura Albanesi in Argentina and continues with the dispute for the legacy of the next generation. The interesting thing here is the background painted by the first generation's prehistory, finished with the last Carlist war, and the relationship with the second generation in the beginning of the Civil War. Eugenio Mazón is the character that articulates the passage of individual life to the commitment of collective actions. Prehistory wears the mark of the firm, foreseeable and longed-for space of prehistory, as can be seen in the image of Mazón's amulet. War, however, as an outbreak, always comes from the outside and if the foreseeable place is that of prehistory, the place of self and family ties, then history will be the collective. If history begins with the Civil War, this war is, for Región, an irruption of modernity in the realm of anachronism. If the verbal process is key, the nominalization that will represent Región as an active space will be even more crucial. The appealing character of Comité Popular is different from Macerta's strategies since Región's army comprises common people mainly. This polyphonic choir can be observed, especially, in the dialogue between Arderius and in the last letter that Mazón writes to his mother⁵. As we have previously explained, in the narratives of prehistory, individual microhistory takes precedence, while history offers, in principle, the perspective of collective commitment. The dialogue with the greatest importance in terms of outlining the republican discursive memory is the one that takes place between captain Arderius and Uncle Ricardo:

«No es justo» confesó el tío Ricardo al capitán Arderius una vez que quedaron solos. «Aún admitiendo que todas las guerras modernas, y aún las antiguas lo sean. No he acertado nunca a entender ese concepto de guerra justa. Va siendo hora de pensar en una movilización del pensa-

⁵ It is also interesting to note how memory is at work in the construction of Baldur, where polyphonic use of republican discursive memory through art is key. The tellability needs requires the construction of typical elements that build intertextuality in order to stress the liberal memory of Región. One of those characters is represented by Baldur, whom, in his prehistory, had been an artist. This discursive use is escorted by the explanatory footnotes and their uses in order to paralyze the enemy. The same thing happens with songs and choruses that allow for the recognition these everyday forms of the trench.

miento social en dirección distinta a la decidida desde el poder y no me refiero al revolucionario [...] El único hombre-libre es transversal, ortogonal al eje de la conducta social a la que debe tocar en algún punto nada más [...]» (II, p. 45)

This kind of dialogue is important because it stages the very center of ideological production. The concept of fair war is criticized in this passage because the main element of monstrosity and evil is war itself. War becomes anthropomorphic and inverts the cycle of the natural world, contributing to a metaphor of evil, of certain forces where violence and murder become a moral obligation. Lastly, Eugenio Mazón's last letter to his mother is key because the leader is the only one that visualizes the defeat and his character matches the construction of those metaphors of destruction that are materialized in the last book. In the text, this letter is situated after a declaration by the *nacionales* dated April 20th of 1938, where the positions that were won are identified. The letter is written on the same date, situated in La Mesquida, and can be understood as the republican vision of defeat⁶. In this sense, space is constructed as an excuse to look into the memory of the subjects, the nature of knowledge and, above all, the nature of language. The character of bastion of the specialized memory of prehistory is settled on in this final sense of the trench with the double meaning of opening and closure. There, the return to the space of play (verbal play of songs and rhymes, identity games, masks and parties in spite of the prohibition in those two Spains) and interiority shape the return to the memory of the spaces of origin. If the construction of a territory like Región refers more to the processes of construction of memory rather than constructing a geography, the public space relates directly to the construction of enunciation spaces. The labyrinth that Región imposes is more a mode of signifying rather than a space. That narrator is in charge of analyzing the implicit connections between those circumstances of social

⁶ «Parece que corren malos vientos para la Republica y que nuestra campaña no puede cambiar el signo de la guerra [...] He decidido detener el ataque a Macerta y mantenerme aquí [...] Otra cosa sería si me fiara de nuestros enemigos. Pero por lo que sabemos de ellos, rezan demasiado. Y eso lo he aprendido de ti: que una persona que hace demasiadas plegarias no es de fiar» (III, p. 278). The construction of the ontological metaphor is conducted though the Republic in the emphasis given to the bad winds. Going back to the familial core, represented by the mother, reflects the necessity of that instance prior to war.

memory in the narrative. Benet's tactic consists of creating a zone through the proceeding of removing the center of the event in order to darken it and openly narrate what occurs around it instead. The *locus horribilus* is a part of this facet of the outside. This impossibility of defining the center of Región as a sacred, positive place, or as a hellish place is what reaffirms the strong component of chance as opposed to destiny. After Mazón's letter to his mother, the metaphors of disaster begin:

Pero desde la hora en que Macerta les cerró sus puertas —que ni por la fuerza ni por el fuego podrían abrir— se puede decir que no les quedó expedita otra salida que la desbandada. Frente a aquella ciudad que siempre ocultó su rostro tras una aureola de polvo o una nube de humo, la aventura común había de conocer su fin para prolongarse en la peripecia personal de cada cual que —despojado de un destino compartido— con sus propios medios buscaría el sendero opuesto al de la guerra, la vuelta a casa o la capitulación (III, p. 298)

The collective ideals of the republican ideology have been left behind, in that blurry Región. We do not know what has happened to Julián Fernández's people, blocked in Socéanos, for example. But the same structure assumes, as Benet states, that «el tronco de ese árbol (la novela) es la guerra civil, pero las ramificaciones pueden ser infinitas». Like a rhizome, it is not about a complex, coherent hero, like in the classical novel; rather, the plot is weaved through voices that juxtapose times and spaces. And the narrator device is the main element in building this palimpsest city or these juxtaposed narratives.

Lastly, this novel, as a text of the culture, puts to work not only the selection of a relevant event, but also the paradigmatic relationships of that event in the personal memory and in its character of perspective of a broader collective memory as well. The trajectories and itineraries in the narratives are built upon two pillars: first, the social memory that needs to be rebuilt; in this sense, the social memory is time regained, that goes back to the *place of origin*, to the bonds of sociability present in a prehistory. Second, the space of time regained. Here, Región and the figure of the labyrinth, that are not mythical spaces in Spain, but ideological condensations conceived as a collective memory, that act in the enunciation present towards the future perspective, not only towards the past and that, because of

being a ruin from the past, a part of history, it needs to be exorcized and walked upon. Memory is, thus, the necessary point but also an exercise, a practice, and the narrator is the one who organizes the search for a Spanish identity, even if it does not have a spine yet.

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