

Sender and the Novel of Memory *Notes toward an Articulation*

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Empleando un modelo teórico elaborado por David Herzberger, el autor esboza un análisis de la «novela de la memoria» que se publica en España a partir de 1967. Herzberger ha afirmado que la novela del realismo social de los años 50 y 60, al intentar contrarrestar la versión mítica, oficialista y estática de la historia, era en sí estática. La «novela de la memoria», por otra parte, evoca el pasado a través de la rememoración subjetiva plasmada muchas veces en un texto narrado en primera persona. Herzberger la concibe como una manifestación de una destrucción creativa de la historia oficialista lograda mediante el acto narrativo, que, a su vez, se filtra por la memoria individual, subjetiva. El autor aplica brevemente el modelo al *Réquiem por un campesino español* de Sender, obra que ha estudiado provechosamente en dos artículos anteriores. El *Réquiem* es una obra en que la memoria y la rememoración son centrales; el autor las sitúa en el contexto de la experiencia del exilio. En esta novela el significado se engendra y se destruye simultáneamente, se ofrece y se pone en tela de juicio. El *Réquiem* codifica la visión de la realidad que ofrecen, como una especie de contramito, las obras producidas en el exilio.

In «Narrating the Past: History and the Novel of Memory in Postwar Spain», David Herzberger argues that the breaking point between the Spanish social realist novel of the Fifties and Sixties and the fiction produced in Spain in the wake of *Tiempo de silencio* (1962) is a difference in the literary texts' inscription of the historical. The social realist novel, in its attempts to counter what Herzberger construes as the mythic or static version of history proffered by the Franco regime, paradoxically offered a similarly static structure.¹

1 HERZBERGER discusses the dilemma faced by social realist novelists in Spain in some detail in his article in *Hispanic Review*.

Like historians of the regime, the social realists assume the linguistic existence is merely a copy of another existence outside of language, which we commonly call the real. Such thinking, of course, affirms that the pure and direct relation of facts is simply a matter of getting things straight. And getting things straight, in turn, is coequal to affirming the truth. Narration thus becomes for the social realists both sign and proof of reality, a mechanism enabling history to tell itself. (36)

And yet, allowing history to «tell itself» is precisely the strategy adopted in a certain group of novels that begin to appear in Spain about 1967, shortly after, and even still within the response to *Tiempo de silencio*. It is this mode of storytelling that Herzberger terms the novel of memory, which he characterizes as:

Those fictions that evoke the past time through subjective remembering, most often through first-person narration. The past that each examines (the external referent of the text) is the past largely eschewed or appropriated by historiography under Franco, the lived past of the Civil War and the strains of dissent that anticipated the conflict and persisted in its aftermath. (35)

The novel of memory encompasses works like Juan Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad* (1966), Juan Benet's *Volverás a Región* (1967), Miguel Delibes's *Cinco horas con Mario* (1966), Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), and many more. Such texts lay out history «as a series of disruptions —of time, of self, of narration, and most important, of the referential illusion of truth and wholeness—» (43). In this way, they offer an antidote to the referential illusion mentioned above by allowing the past to be «filtered through the consciousness of a remembering self at once in history and open to history» (43). The fact that the «selves» who narrate the past in these novels of memory are often, as Herzberger points out, alienated and adrift in postwar Spain, serves to establish a linkage with the social reality that precipitated their dilemma.

Herzberger's conceptualization of the novel of memory as the locus of a creative destruction of a history only apprehensible through the medium of narration —itself filtered through the subjective lens of individual memory— represents an important theoretical construct for assessing the trajectory of contemporary Spanish fiction. It affords a convincing delineation of the distinction between the social realist aesthetic and the narrative paradigms that follow it. Moreover, the novel of memory explains the structural complexity and self-consciousness of much important Spanish fiction of the last thirty years.

I would argue that a shadow is cast on the novels of memory studied by Herzberger, the shadow of an unnamed yet equally important «other» novel of memory. I refer to the novel written not by those crafting literature within the strictures of Franco's Spain, to which they do not belong, in a kind of inner exile Paul Ilie has astutely studied, but by those physically removed from Spain, members of the «España peregrina» of the long exile years.

No intellectual position is more deeply rooted in the practice of perceiving history as memory than that of the exile, and no one would be hard pressed to find a novelistic text where memory as generator of textual knowledge is more central than Ramón Sender's *Réquiem por un campesino español* (1953; 1960). By studying the relationship between Sender's text and the novel of memory as described by Herzberger one comes to a deeper appreciation of how closely related is Sender's manner of couching meaning in structure to that adopted by novelists of a subsequent generation bent on breaking out of the intellectual banishment to which the culture of Francoist Spain subjected them.

Moreover, the structure of Sender's text embodies a particular ideological stance regarding the historical circumstances that generated the novelists' condition of exile. Our goal in the present study is to articulate the Senderian novel of memory with memory-based narratives produced in Spain a decade or more later. This comparison allows the reader to reconsider the ideological posture implicit in the structure of novels in which history is apparently presented solely as memory.

All fiction produced by Spanish exiles is in some way a fiction of memory. Memory is all that the exiled writers had. Divorced from the Spanish audience they wished to influence, and now writing for a foreign public, perhaps only marginally interested in their thematic concerns, writers in exile faced problems compounded by the inexorable passage of time. Their remembered Spain was a futureless projection of the past, and thus they were destined to produce literary simulacra of the past's tragic impact on their present-time situation. Writing became their only avenue to superseding the triumphalist vision of recent history offered by their former enemies and to justify their own situations intellectually, psychologically and ethically. Yet in the back of their minds lingered the disturbing thought that spatial and political voids were capable of subverting the efficacy of their creative attempts at historical vindications.²

The static vision that necessarily characterizes the imagination of writers in exile with aspect to themes of the homeland can, as occurs in the narrative of social realism, easily fall into the trap of unconsciously reproducing the structural stasis of the historiography of the regime that these writers, through their acts of «remembrancing», to borrow a term from George Steiner, fought to counteract. Certain texts, like Sender's *Réquiem* and the stories in Ayala's *La cabeza del cordero* (1949)³, resolve this dilemma principally through their use of the same teleogenic structures of emplotment used by the novels of memory produced in Spain

2 AYALA's seminal essay on the problem of writing in exile, «¿Para quién escribimos nosotros?» is the basis for my reflections on this topic.

3 A full consideration of how AYALA's collection of stories accomplishes this is beyond the scope of this essay. At one level, all the stories in *La cabeza del cordero* can be read as studies in hermeneutic indeterminacy. This is especially true of the first story in the collection, «El mensaje». That the «message» of «El mensaje» should be that the message does not exist outside of the interpreter clearly places this text within the parameters of texts which question notions of history, like the ones HERZBERGER studies. The striking similarity of this particular story in Ayala's collection to Juan BENET's meditation on the process of hermeneutics in *En la penumbra* illustrates how two different generations of writers of memory eschew fixed meaning as part of their questioning of the underlying mythic assumption of official versions of truth.

from the late 1960s forward. This teleogenic emplotment works on two levels, as Herzberger explains:

(1) The fragmented composition compels the reader to reconfigure the design of storytelling through the evocation of a past that is not static but dynamic and ever changing (2) the external referent of the narrative, the history of Spain, is now an internal component of the self and thus open to re-formation as the individual claims authority *not over the truth but against myth* (38; emphasis mine).

Those familiar with Sender's *Réquiem* are aware of the conformity of its structure to the teleogenic ordering processes explained by Herzberger. Sender's novel, like those texts Herzberger examines, employs retrospective structuring of narrative discourse. Each interval of the passage through a relatively brief narrative present brings forth the narrative of ever longer periods of the past. In the case of the Sender novel, this dispositio allows for strategic juxtapositions and ellipses that help the reader to construe a meaning for the structure driven precisely by the unreliable memory of the text's protagonist, Mosén Millán, as he waits to celebrate the requiem mass for Paco el del Molino.

The teleogenic richness of the text, however, resides precisely in the way the filtering of history through memory blurs and obfuscates the remembered past, hence problematizing any attempt to reduce it to a static meaning. This subversion of a static vision allows *Réquiem* to partake in the same type of structural myth-debunking that Herzberger localizes in the important narrative texts produced in the 1960s. For at the same time that one level of structural organization in *Réquiem* enables the construction of neat homologies between text and mediating vision, the slippage between levels perceptible in the text makes problematic the very structural disposition that those levels support. The points at which the narrator's comments impinge upon both his level of narration and Mosén Millán's represent locations where the structure of transmission transgresses the norms the text sets for itself. At the same time,

the contradictory information that the reader is expected to process as the narrator inexorably distances himself from Mosén Millán also serves to place in doubt the transmitting structure the text establishes.

Simply put, the text's questioning of the signifying process, its placing under erasure the norms it apparently establishes, are, as in the novel of memory of the Sixties, the meaning of the text. Ideology is ingrained in *Réquiem's* contradictory fabric of construction precisely because such paradoxical situations were a constant in the nature of the exilic existence. Rather than statically presenting the paradoxical nature of living in exile, Sender's text is the location at which both the reality and the desire of exile converge and collide. *Réquiem* codifies the vision of reality that works produced in exile offer as counter-myth while it simultaneously resists being the vehicle for that process. Sender's novel employs the same teleogenic ordering processes used by Benet and others to undo the rhetoric of historical inaccuracy which characterized Francoist historiography by undermining that historiography's discursive logic and implicitly vindicating a counter-vision, even as those authors expose the false closure of the triumphalist vision.⁴

This attempt at textual vindication is something that the novel of memory of the Sixties shares with works written by writers forced to flee Spain some decades earlier. Both open the structures of thought to multiplicity. By so doing, they reveal the deleterious consequences for both writers of dissent and the broader society that the imposition of the Francoist regime promised to those who opposed it. For if Michael Ugarte characterizes Juan Goytisolo as an «unruly disciple of Américo Castro», the demythifying vision that Ayala and Sender hold out also finds an historical counterpart in Castro's work. Castro undoes the conversion of history into myth by opening the closed structure of *La España sagrada* to the multiplicity that characterized *La realidad histórica española*.

⁴ The ideas on structure advanced in the last several paragraphs are developed fully in COMPITELLO (1986 and 1987).

In the case of novelists like Ayala and Sender, writing from imposed exile, of Juan Goytisolo writing from the position of the self-banished Spaniard, and of authors like Benet, Luis Goytisolo and Martín Gaité literarily undermining the regime from within Spain, it is the ability to problematize textuality itself that provides the antidote to the historiography of the Francoist regime, and that allows their fictive works to conquer as text.

Historical vindication, of course, would have to wait for the inexorable passage of time to do in its enemies and to reduce them, like all of history, to ghosts. Quoting Hölderlin, Adelaida García Morales writes in *El sur* (1985), one of Spain's most engaging recent novels of memory: «¿A quién podemos amar que no sea una sombra?». The question is certainly applicable to novels of memory produced by exile whose evocation of their homeland was reduced to the flattened vision afforded by memory. Since direct access was precluded by the political outcome of the war, their vision of Spain was limited to shadows of the past and indirect, always incomplete, gleanings regarding the present. For these same writers, we might also paraphrase García Morales's rendition of Hölderlin and inquire, «¿Quién podemos odiar que no sea una sombra?». In this sense, their text become the locus of a reconstructed version of the past formed by memories of how their enemies' control of Spain made it impossible to forget that past, and inevitable that they would use one of the few recourses available to them —writing— to attempt to counteract that odious, triumphalist vision.

This «persistence of memory» is precisely what has driven my attempt to recover an implicit link at the levels of ideological projection and textual emplotment between the idea of a novel of memory born from the experience of exile on the one hand, and on the other, the «reinvented» novel of memory published in the Sixties. The practitioners of the latter body of texts, by writing against the grain, employed strategies decidedly similar to those of Sender in *Réquiem* for dealing with the representation of history within fiction. The novel of memory studied

by Herzberger simultaneously resists killing the enemy that it hates—the image of the Francoist regime as portrayed in official historiography—and undertakes such an assassination. The novel of memory shares with the Spanish exile novel this contingent vision a «betweenness». We must not forget, in our consideration of post-Civil War Spain narrative and its attempt to come to terms with the past, that other novel of memory scripted by those Spaniards forced to leave their homeland as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War. We must ensure that the efforts of these writers never become the «sombras» of which García Morales speaks.

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