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# WHERE IS THE MERIDIAN? GUILLERMO DE TORRE AND AGUSTÍ CALVET “GAZIEL”: A FAILED DIALOGUE

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**Abstract** || On April 15, 1927 the publication of the manifesto “Madrid, meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica” in *La Gaceta Literaria* triggered one of the most significant cultural controversies to affect the Ibero-American context in the 20th century. While the importance of this controversy for Latin American literature has been frequently studied, the interpretation of the reception of Guillermo de Torre’s manifesto in the different Iberian literatures has not been similarly considered to date. This article recovers the intervention of one of the main Catalan writers, Agustí Calvet “Gaziel”, to account for the extent to which the said controversy also affected Catalan literature.

**Keywords** || Guillermo de Torre | Agustí Calvet “Gaziel” | Controversy over “Meridiano intelectual” | Cultural Iberism | Cultural capitals | Catalan literature

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On April 15, 1927, the publication of the manifesto “Madrid, meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica” in *La Gaceta Literaria* opened up one of the most important cultural polemics in the Ibero-American context of the twentieth century. In fact, this editorial, published anonymously but redacted by Guillermo de Torre (who later bluntly admitted authorship), advanced by Ernesto Giménez Caballero and inspired by José Ortega y Gasset, constitutes the starting point for a transatlantic debate that broached the subject of symbolic hegemony in the Spanish-language area and included issues of relevance to Europe as well.

The American reactions to that manifesto have been profusely documented (Alemany Bay, 1998) and commented on (Pérez Barchino, 1996; Manzoni, 1996; Falcón, 2010). Understandably, the Atlantic horizon was the one that burned immediately with resounding responses, some more brilliant than others, but consistently conscious of their position within the epilogue of a situation that belonged to the past, which they could not accept as part of the present—and even less of the future—of Spanish-language American literature. Consequently, this polemic must be understood within the series of debates put forth by Jorge Luis Borges in “El idioma de los argentinos” (1927), the controversy about the language of Argentines based on the propositions of Américo Castro and Amado Alonso, or the *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (1928) by Pedro Henríquez Ureña. Even “El escritor argentino y la tradición” (1951), by Borges himself, could be taken as a dissenting response and, perhaps, one that attempted to solve definitely the issue set on the table in 1927 by Guillermo de Torre, the man about to become his brother-in-law.

Nevertheless, the comments and responses to that polemic offered from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula have not yet been sufficiently documented, nor considered in their multiple implications, especially as regards the position of different languages and literatures. This appears particularly evident from the Catalan perspective, from which certain details of that polemic which are generally overlooked can be appreciated. However, the first words of that editorial are enough to remind us that they must not be left out:

Al mismo tiempo que en el “Diálogo de las lenguas” va precisándose nuestro criterio, con referencia a Cataluña y a las demás lenguas peninsulares, interesa especialmente a *La Gaceta Literaria* fijar y delimitar su actitud respecto al ángulo específicamente americano de nuestro objetivo triangular. (Anon., 1927a: 1)

The—at the moment—anonymous editor was referring to the fact that the journal—subtitled “*Ibérica, americana, internacional*”—attempted to publish articles in the different languages of this plural environment (Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Portuguese and even Basque), an attempt that was indeed achieved. In the Catalan

case, for example, an article by August Pi i Sunyer (signed A. Pi Suñer), "Scientistes o científics?" was published in the first number, and in the Portuguese case and on the very same page appeared "A esperança Lusíada e la fraternidade ibérica" by João de Castro Osório. Moreover, starting with number 49, from January 1929, the journal included a regular section, "Gaceta catalana," which dedicated space specifically for articles by Catalan, Valencian and Balearic collaborators (Mosquera, 1996). However, this initiative was not without controversy either. In March 1927, in an editorial entitled "El diálogo de las lenguas," Francesc Trabal was brought to task on the publication of texts in Catalan. Certainly, the *Grup de Sabadell's* mistrust regarding this dialogue stemmed from the role, shadowy but not hidden, of Francesc Cambó, as well as substantial ideological preparations during a time of rising fascism in Italy that Giménez Caballero, among others, attempted in Spain.<sup>1</sup> As regards the Iberian Peninsula, this was the context in which the manifesto was presented and the controversy ignited.

Thus, it is especially necessary to comment on the reaction that this *petite querelle* generated in Catalonia, a reaction that illuminates the debate from a different light. This is due to a triumvirate of motives: national, cosmopolitan and Iberian.

## 1. From Rusiñol to Casanova

Among the manifesto's principal arguments was a strong reaction against the postulation of Paris as the capital of *latinité*. The text emphatically declared: "¡Basta ya, por tanto, de ese latinismo ambiguo y exclusivista! ¡Basta ya de tolerar pasivamente esa merma de nuestro prestigio, esa desviación constante de los intereses intelectuales hispanoamericanos hacia Francia!" (Anon., 1927a: 1)—and aimed to stop this influence that, although on the ethnic level (to repeat Guillermo de Torre's term) *could* include Spain, in reality excluded Spain from cultural preponderance. Consequently, the Madrilenian's claim is:

Frente a los excesos y errores del latinismo, frente al monopolio galo, frente a la gran imantación que ejerce París cerca de los intelectuales hispanoparlantes tratemos de polarizar su atención, reafirmando la valía de España y el nuevo estado de espíritu que aquí empieza a cristalizar en un hispanoamericanismo extraoficial y eficaz. Frente a la imantación desviada de París, señalemos en nuestra geografía espiritual a Madrid como el más certero punto meridiano, como la más auténtica línea de intersección entre América y España. (Anon., 1927a: 1)

It cannot go unnoticed that this Parisian magnetism has an explanation of considerable import to Catalan literature and to the definitions of literature and contemporariness since the end of the

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1 | It should be remembered that *La Gaceta Literaria* was being published during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, whose attacks against cultural diversity in Spain were harsh. It contrasts, in this sense, with initiatives by Giménez Caballero, at least at that moment, such as the exhibition of Catalan books in Madrid in the same 1927, or the visit of Castilian writers to Catalonia in 1930, activities that motivated the book *Cataluña ante España*. It is also important the testimonial of Francesc Cambó about these initiatives: "No hay que decir que tanto la exposición como la revista fueron protegidos por mí, y, en gran parte, dirigidas por Estelrich". (Cambó, *Memorias*, Spanish trans. by H. Cambó, Madrid, Alianza, 1987, p. 375). Similarly, it is necessary to account for the evolution in Giménez Caballero's thinking in respect to Catalonia, in the last issues of *La Gaceta Literaria*, in *Trabalenguas sobre España* (1931), and particularly in *Amor a Cataluña* (c1942), among other texts and statements that force us to reconsider the sincerity of such initiatives.

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nineteenth century. Years before, some authors who were then central to Spanish literature, such as Juan Valera, had censured the cosmopolitanism of American writers, such as Rubén Darío; they had also censured the cosmopolitan nature of Catalans, particularly their tendency to situate themselves in line with Montmartre's modernity, an internationalism labelled as placeless or even typically Jewish, first by Valera and subsequently by Pío Baroja (Martí Monterde, 2014). These accusations, first leveled at both American and Catalan writers, were not completely erroneous, despite the exacerbated or high-pitched tone they took. Rather, they were the result of a difference in the artistic temporality that Darío himself had perceived in *España contemporánea*.

In fact, some years prior —shortly after the Greenwich meridian was established —, Santiago Rusiñol already warned in his chronicles from the *Moulin de la Galette*, published in 1890 in *La Vanguardia*:

El molino no solo es el centinela del barrio, sino el centinela del mundo. Por él pasa el meridiano. Por su cúspide atraviesa ese meridiano de París, que consultan a todas horas del día los geógrafos de la tierra, y a todas horas de la noche los astrónomos que estudian otros mundos. (Rusiñol, 1894: 10)

The description of the alleyways of Montmartre, with windows open at the same time towards the street and towards the interior of the workshops, allows him to glimpse how artistic glory escapes or is achieved every day in the work of these “obreros del arte.” Following the first walk, between the fatigue and the enthusiasm, the chronicler cannot fall asleep: “Quizás debido a esto no pudimos pegar los ojos, o quizás tuvo la culpa... ¡váyase a saber!... la influencia del meridiano que pasa y pesa sobre nosotros” (Rusiñol, 1894: 13).

Therefore, it wasn't necessary to wait for Pascale Casanova to determine that modernity, at that time, was regulated by whatever happened along the axis 2°20'14.025". Neither was Guillermo de Torre's meditation on this way of understanding the symbolic domination in geo-cultural terms the first one of its sort. Indeed, the metaphoric use of the meridian had almost been converted into a stereotype due to the geographic debates of 1884—the controversy over Greenwich or Paris—which lasted until 1914. Santiago Rusiñol does nothing more than take up this debate in his cultural projection, something recurrent in many other authors.

But beyond this common space, the alignment of Barcelona with Paris is the reason that everything that took place later in Catalan culture had a much closer relationship to French literature than to the Spanish variety. Despite this, the intellectual and especially political debates were undertaken with Spanish writers, insofar as it was an unavoidable and determinant, though not dominant, struggle.



The presence of the national issue in those debates barely affected the construction of the contemporary literary tradition—whether in Catalan or Spanish—in Catalonia, as it engaged in constant dialogue with French letters.

Meanwhile, Guillermo de Torre's preoccupation with the argument for Paris as the Latin capital was distilled into the following proposal:

¿Qué vale más, qué prefieren los jóvenes espíritus de Hispanoamérica?  
¿Ser absorbidos bajo el hechizo de una fácil captación francesa, que llega hasta anular y neutralizar sus mejores virtudes nativas, dejándoles al margen de la auténtica vida nacional, o sentirse identificados con la atmósfera vital de España, que no rebaja y anula su personalidad, sino que más bien la exalta y potencia en sus mejores expresiones? (Anon., 1927a:1)

In the case of Catalan literature, it is clear that the choice had been made many years before, due to the absence of a Hispanic alternative in the field of European modernity, among other equally important factors.

In the American case, the implications of such a proposal stem from the neglect of the demographic, political, economic and cultural realities that rendered Buenos Aires a significant alternative to the great European and even North American cities as a possible capital of the twentieth century. In the Catalan case, they stem from the rejection of a situation entirely lacking in prestige, which was considered by liberal Spanish nationalism to be an absolutely solid and coherent, undivided literary and political space.

nosotros siempre hemos tendido a considerar el área intelectual americana como una prolongación del área española. Y esto, no por un propósito anexionista reprobable, sino por el deseo de borrar fronteras, de no establecer distingos, de agrupar bajo un mismo común denominador de consideración idéntica toda la producción intelectual en la misma lengua; por el deseo de anular diferencias valoradoras, juzgando con el mismo espíritu personas y obras de aquende y allende el Atlántico. (Anon., 1927a: 1)

The question that the self-named “grandchildren of '98” could not accept at that moment was that discussions of works from both sides of the Atlantic were no longer dealing with the same literature. Therefore, Guillermo de Torre's cosmopolitanism has similar conceptual limitations as late-nineteenth century French cosmopolitanism, although they obviously stem from different situations and goals as well as from almost opposing definitions of what to expect from liberal thought, which was a solid tradition in France, as opposed to its role in Spain, where it would finally fail. In both cases, but especially in the Spanish one, authors like de Torre are not opposed to contradicting themselves. Despite purporting an

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apparent neutrality towards cosmopolitanism—a sort of all-inclusive space that would grant equal access to all individuals, languages and traditions—as soon as this neutrality is applied to their own perspective, it quickly fades, since they are not willing to renounce one shred of the centrality of this same international space. And yet, the bases for interpreting this international space prove themselves to be exceptionally national—even to the point of negating the very international nature of the issue.

From this view, the polemic over the meridian and Guillermo de Torre’s approach to it are one more manifestation of the literary struggles for what Pascale Casanova termed the Literary Greenwich Meridian in *République Mondiale des Lettres*. There is hardly any difference between Casanova’s “Paris, city of literature” and Guillermo de Torre’s “Madrid, intellectual meridian of Hispanic America.” In both cases, the meridian is bestowed upon modernity, the aesthetic temporality that would define the rest of international literary spaces; in both cases, this condition is only aesthetic in appearance, and its political basis creates notable contradictions. Nonetheless, these contradictions do nothing more than confirm the implicit, underlying hypothesis: the reality of a literary dispute for symbolic international power in order to control the consequences of this cultural domination more than culture or literature per se. To do so, continued appeals were made to a transatlantic cosmopolitanism that, through figures such as Valery Larbaud, makes perfectly clear that the proposal is nothing more than stereotypes repeated ad nauseam. Although these could appear to be an interesting contribution in the 1920s, at the end of the twentieth century, they merely confirm the normative capacity of misunderstandings that have been consolidated historically as classic references.

Both Guillermo de Torre in 1927 and Pascale Casanova in 1999 aim to establish and defend the criteria to denominate the capital of capitals, a meridian in which the network of literary cities can be administrated according to the symbolic capital accumulated in other times; transmitted and, most of all, used as an obvious and unquestionable argument against any other geoliterary organization possible in the present. In effect, we are dealing with the identity of an absolute literary moment, converted into an undeniable, teleological reference for literary internationality. For the French author:

De igual manera que la línea  *ficticia* , denominada también “meridiano de origen”, elegida arbitrariamente para la determinación de las longitudes, contribuye a organizar el mundo  *real*  y posibilita la medida de las distancias y la evaluación de las posiciones en la superficie del globo, así también lo que podríamos llamar el “meridiano de Greenwich literario” permite calcular la distancia hasta el centro de todos los que pertenecen al espacio literario. La distancia estética se mide, asimismo, en términos temporales: el meridiano de origen instituye el presente,

es decir, es el orden de la creación literaria, la modernidad. (Casanova, 1999[2001]: 122-123)

It is quite obvious that Casanova's play on space and time stems from a mystification that places in Du Bellay the still-radiant origin of Parisian centrality for European, firstly, and then Western literature, assuming of course French, which is not so obvious at least until the post-revolutionary Jacobin triumph. It is not that this was not the case, in another time; but nothing lasts forever, and Casanova's efforts to prolong this centrality, could appear to be a question of inertia, while in de Torre's case, they rather aim to seem like an impulse, which turns into the pulse of centrality and symbolic yet simultaneously effective domination of an entire literary space. Both for Casanova and de Torre, any alternative is taken as an aberration, a deviation that deforms the literary legitimacy, which is, without fail, sanctioned through the filter of their respective proposals. In this sense, both French as well as Spanish literature especially, demonstrates two ways of being *combative literatures*, in a different sense than that which Casanova herself (2011) points out while reflecting on the internationality of literary nationalisms—in a framework of structural inequalities and symbolic domination—, which must certainly include both Spanish and French varieties.

However, in contrast to Casanova's proposal, the Spanish preoccupation with the centrality of Paris contains, underneath, an even more important preoccupation with Madrid's centrality in the Spanish-language literary space. Thus, in Torres' case,

si nuestra idea prevalece, si al terminar con el dañino latinismo, hacemos a Madrid meridiano de Hispanoamérica y atraemos hacia España intereses legítimos que nos corresponden, hoy desviados, habremos dado un paso definitivo para hacer real y positivo el leal acercamiento de Hispanoamérica, de sus hombres y de sus libros. (Anon., 1927a: 1)

Curiously, although Torres' motivation is set out in the same terms as Casanova's, in fact denies his main hypothesis. The Madrilenian's goal is none other than to forget and to make others forget about Paris—a city, however, without which his own aesthetic evolution cannot be understood. But above all else, it attempts to prevent new cultural capitals—especially Spanish-speaking capitals—from emerging and contesting the capital of Spain. Any association, in this regard, would mean a lack of differentiation. In this sense, Torre's manifesto is the projection of the national needs exposed in *España invertebrada* onto the whole of the Latin American continent, much more than over competing reflections on cosmopolitanism or the American alternative to the spiritual crisis.

It is therefore not surprising that the second manifesto of the Meridian polemic, also anonymous but this time likely attributable to Giménez



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Caballero, in addition to reacting harshly to the responses that certain American literary circles began to publish, also discredited those writers as intellectuals and reduced them to participants in a *verbena* party, —note the Madrilenian reference implied—, the meridian dance party, in which everyone would participate united by the most Iberian trait: passion. It was an appeal, effectively, to the “enorme lazo de unión que significa una lucha. Cuerpo a cuerpo” (Anon., 1927b: 1). Thus, what aimed to be a debate was transformed into what truly underlay it: combat.

In these circumstance of combative literature and in combat, it becomes clear that Torre’s thought includes a monologic, uniform, almost ethnic definition of the essence of Spanish literature, the relationship that could be established with Spain from America, but not only from America—despite the differences that Rubén Darío had already espoused in 1899, which no one in that debate could leave out. This, then, tacitly excluded the diverse literatures that, at first, *La Gaceta Literaria* intended to include, as well as the diverse conceptions of Spanish-language literature, which, automatically needed to be erased. The combat was with another who did not recognize itself as different.

## 2. Perspective from Catalonia: Agustí Calvet *Gaziel*

In this sense, it is understandable that the opinions that arrived from Catalonia about the Meridian polemic were just as scarce as they were important. We are not thinking at this point, of course, in the only intervention by a Catalan writer in the pages of *La Gaceta Literaria*, since that role was reserved for Josep Maria de Sucre, who in a sort of choral response published September 1, 1927 and spearheaded by Giménez Caballero and Guillermo de Torre, added his voice to the collective opinion which included Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Benjamín Jarnés, Gerardo Diego, Ángel Sánchez Rivero, Melchor Fernández Almagro, Antonio Espina, Enrique Lafuente, Gabriel García Maroto, César M. Arconada, Francisco Ayala, Esteban Salazar and Chapela. Sucre merely adds a bland gloss, mediocre in tone and not well developed, although the beginning of his note deserves mention: “¿Conque bueyes cometas, amigos de Martín Fierro? ¿Cuándo peninsulares y transatlánticos habíamos espontáneamente convenido mostrarnos y ser *maruchos* ante el enemigo común, que es la beoacia analfabeta y mostrenca?” will always be preferable to the *incipit* in Arconada: “Están revueltos lo aborígenes”.<sup>2</sup> No. Certainly, divergent responses—Catalan or otherwise—should not be sought in the pages of *La Gaceta Literaria* characterized by Giménez Caballero and Guillermo de Torre. All the controversy in those pages maintains the same disparaging tone.

On one hand, in Catalonia it is understood that the issue at hand affects strictly Spanish literature, and that it is a controversy in which the similarity of the Argentine position to the Catalan view is insufficient to motivate any direct intervention. However, from an Iberian—or rather, Iberianist—perspective, such an intervention by Catalonia is imperative. This factor is what moves Agustí Calvet to intervene.

The specifically Iberian dimension of the polemic—remember the allusion to the dialogue of languages among the Peninsular languages—finds in *Gaziel*, a brilliant journalist in Spanish, a strong ally of Iberianism. Already in the 1850s, he authored the *Trilogia ibèrica*, and his work constitutes the most important Iberianist legacy after Maragall’s death. But Calvet understands Iberianism to be something quite different from what Giménez Caballero—and/or Ortega y Gasset—believed, especially as pertains to Castile. Therefore, *Gaziel*, who had lived while young in the city that he qualifies in his diaries as “aquel Madrid tibetano,” is also one of those authors that had been, in every way, *Un estudiante en París*, and who best represents the Parisian cultural magnetism and the cultural distance from the capital of Spain. However, he opened his arms frequently towards Madrid, albeit without renouncing the French dimension of his literary training. *Gaziel* represents, then, a second moment in the triangle drawn by Darío between Barcelona, Paris and Madrid; it was a regenerative triangle in which the Catalan capital could not be reduced to a mere equilateral without falsifying the historical and cultural reality. *Gaziel*, who became a regular contributor to the press in Madrid in the 1920s, always kept this double distance in mind.

Another apparently minor but still significant detail is the fact that *Gaziel* did not become known through *La Gaceta Literaria*—to which he was never a regular contributor, although he did manage to publish some important texts in its pages, specifically “Autobiografía de un pseudónimo”—but rather in the pages of *El Sol*, the Urgoiti y Ortega’s family newspaper. He eventually came to direct the paper, concretely in 1934, after Ortega y Gasset had abandoned the project due to internal discrepancies in the heart of Spanish socialism and liberalism. Things had changed so much that, by then, *El Sol* was the property of a group of Catalan businessmen and politicians linked to Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (González i Vilalta, 2006). In 1927 *Gaziel* considered that his columns “a pesar de ser tan estrechas, resultan, espiritualmente, las más amplias de España” (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1). And the future author of *Trilogia ibèrica* had no qualms about explaining that “la principal razón de mi presencia aquí, es la de decir cosas que no pueden verse desde Madrid mismo. Pero cosas que a veces chocan, no han de ser forzosamente malas, ni mucho menos malintencionadas” (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1). In fact, this mismatch, that characterizes *Gaziel*’s reception not only in Madrid

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2 | These opinions were gathered in the journal under the heading “Campeonato para un meridiano intelectual”, *La Gaceta Literaria* 17, September 1, 1927, 6.

but also, on occasions, in the very Barcelona, would form part of his entire trajectory.

*Gaziel's* intervention in the pages of *El Sol* took the form of two articles published at the end of the summer of 1927. By then, *Gaziel's* breadth of vision towards America was no longer new, though neither was it frequent, both in his articles in *El Sol* and in *La Vanguardia*, which then he directed. On the other hand, it should be noted that *El Sol* also published other little or unknown interventions in the debate, as for example, that made by Luis Araquistáin, who for some years had fomented another debate over the Hispanic American questions which was eclipsed by the Meridian polemic, but which it will nonetheless be necessary to review carefully.

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The first of *Gaziel's* articles, published August 31, 1927 under the name "Singular o plural. Los meridianos de Hispanoamérica," already reflects echoes of the controversy, in that the irritation felt in America, and especially by the group from the journal *Martín Fierro*, seems reasonable to him. A few days earlier, *El Sol* had published an informative note regarding the group's reaction, which *Gaziel* takes as a starting point for his reflections. In the face of the severe Argentine reaction, he asks: "¿Dónde está la causa? Esto es lo único esencial. Si el hombre se halla fuera de sí, ¿qué lo sacó de sus casillas?" (*Gaziel*, 1927a: 1). To *Gaziel*, the tension generated seems healthy because it demonstrates that the question of what Hispanic America will become is a pressing concern, one that even runs the risk of becoming a topic that will require a true awareness of its complexity. This complexity is shown, precisely, in the perspective:

*La Gaceta Literaria*, que como todos sabemos se publica en Madrid, lanzó a los cuatro vientos, con su juvenil desembarazo, el siguiente apotegma: "Madrid, meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica" ¡Y ya estuvo prendida la mecha! Porque si en la puerta del Sol y hasta en toda la inmensidad de las anchas Castillas y sus tierras de inmediato dominio espiritual, esa sentencia parece la cosa más clara y natural del mundo, en otras partes, no ya del vastísimo sistema hispanoamericano, sino de España misma, produce un efecto equívoco e inquietante, generador de una irreprimible reacción, cuyas vibraciones pueden ir desde la benévola sonrisa de tolerancia hasta el estallido de furiosa protesta. (*Gaziel*, 1927a: 1)

The Catalan contributor maintains that some people's susceptibility and other people's lack of awareness had ended up exploding into a conflict in which Americans—he points to the *Martín Fierro* group as pure gunpowder—displayed, by the force of their response, their weakness. In a similar way, the illusions of grandeur conjured up in Madrid and the general Spanish tendency to belittle everything concerning America, and even the Hispanic American or world-wide

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sphere, also reduced the Spanish position, thanks precisely to the contrast between the exaggerated grandiosity that it proclaimed for itself. Just remembering, for example, the journal *Mundial*, where beginning in 1925 César Vallejo published many of his chronicles from Europe and especially from Paris, is enough to realize that the former journal in which Guillermo de Torre had been head of redaction, *Cosmópolis*, was not an exception in the Spanish language. The operation proposed by *La Gaceta Literaria*, in many ways, signified a step backward for the set of debates over the place of Spanish-language literature in the wide context, in the way that *Weltliteratur* did so in the twenties.

In fact, *Gaziel* points to a double minimization derived from perspective; and at that point, rechannels the questions geographically:

Lo de menos es la manera como, ante la afirmación de que Madrid sea el meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica, ha reaccionado Buenos Aires, o una parte de Buenos Aires. Lo saludable es advertir que si se ofreciese la ocasión reaccionarían lo mismo (no en la forma ni en el fondo, sino en sentido de franca disconformidad), no solamente una parte de Montevideo, Santiago de Chile, Méjico, Bogotá, Caracas y Ríojaneiro, sino también Lisboa, Barcelona, Santiago de Galicia y Bilbao. Asignar a Madrid exclusivamente la función de meridiano intelectual de toda Hispanoamérica o Iberoamérica, una de dos: o es exagerar muchísimo la importancia, indudable o muy grande, que el meridiano de Madrid ha de tener en el conjunto de una armoniosa esfera, o es empequeñecer más todavía la grandeza de ésta. (*Gaziel*, 1927a: 1)

For *Gaziel*, the unitarianism of Torre's manifesto, which he considers an "apoteagma," but in the end "famoso e inofensivo," proved to be quite unsuitable to the reality that time had already clarified:

Un sistema de cultura hispano o iberoamericano, en el cual Madrid ejerciese, de una manera absorbente y exclusiva, el papel de meridiano único, se parecería demasiado al sistema político imperial, centralista y absolutista, que tuvo su cabeza en Madrid, para que pudiese aspirar nunca a ser una verdadera representación global de la cultura de Hispano o Iberoamérica. Esto aparte de que semejantes absorciones, en el orden intelectual, son tan vanas si las proclama el propio interesado como inútiles cuando se intentan por Real Decreto. París, por ejemplo, no ha aspirado a hacer pasar oficialmente por su cerebro y por su corazón el meridiano de los pueblos hispanoamericanos. Y, sin embargo, si hoy hubiésemos de designar, a pesar nuestro, el que rige el horario intelectual y sentimental; si a ellos mismos les preguntamos cuál es, de hecho el que regula sus días, ¿qué habríamos de confesar, qué nos contestarían?... Estas cosas han de hacerse, mejor que decirse. (*Gaziel*, 1927a: 1)

As it can be seen, the Catalan journalist's arguments not only diverge from *La Gaceta Literaria*'s proposal—although neither do they concur with those of *Martín Fierro*'s group—but they also open up a new path for *La Gaceta Literaria*'s objective. At any rate,

they certainly bring to an end an era of Spanish history and to the intellectual possibilities of the Spanish-speaking area, whose future emblem could be none other than plurality.

O Hispanoamérica no será nunca nada, o cuando esa inmensa esfera espiritual esté montada sobre una base sólida como un diamante, no sobre papel nada más, o en las nubes, como ahora, [...] no tendrá un meridiano, sino varios, como la Tierra misma, que regularán sobre ella el diverso y admirable juego de las luces y las sombras, con sus cambiantes matices. Tienen razón los argentinos en decir que uno de esos meridianos es Buenos Aires. También los portugueses podrían añadir que hay otro en Lisboa, y los catalanes que el suyo es Barcelona. No sabemos todavía si podremos acordarlos todos en el futuro. Pero lo indudable es que cuanto de ello se aparte es pasado, irremediabilmente ido para siempre jamás. (*Gaziel*, 1927a: 1)

But this would only occur if the principal actors in the literary, intellectual, political and academic fields were capable of admitting that they would never again be what they once were, and that any initiative that was advanced toward that end in America would necessarily lead to a cul-de-sac full of smoke and mirrors.

Finally, *Gaziel*, while prioritizing a brotherhood in which the priority should be filling all spaces crossed by any meridian with content and substance, posits an essential question: “De esos meridianos, ¿cuál será el más brillante y famoso?” (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1). This question, in reference to Hispanic or Ibero-America, holds one dimension; but in reference to the Iberian Peninsula, it holds many more implications. Is there room in Spain for two Spanish-language intellectual meridians?

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Ricardo Baeza, who authored one of the next articles to be published in the polemic—on September 3, also in *El Sol*—must have glimpsed something of all of this. He explicitly steers away from the geographies in his reflection, albeit for a moment, in order to make some strongly highlighted pronouncements from the pages a few days prior, in *Gaziel*’s statements. This was done in the article “¿Con Martín Fierro o con Don Quijote?,” in which the main translator of the journal *Prometeo*—who was born in Cuba in 1890 but developed his whole career in Madrid—affirms, echoing the words of Agustí Calvet:

“una parte de Montevideo, Santiago de Chile, Méjico, Ríojaneiro, etc., (esto es, el resto de la América latina), sino también Lisboa, Barcelona, Santiago de Galicia y Bilbao” [...] no se advierten claramente las razones de disconformidad que podrían asistir a Santiago de Galicia y Bilbao, que seguramente no incluyen en su ideario regionalista la separación del resto de España en punto a disciplinas intelectuales, y la superioridad de la literatura gallega y éuscara, respectivamente, sobre la castellana. Probablemente, convendría limitar esa reacción de disconformidad a



Barcelona, y quizá no fuera de exagerada suspicacia atribuir la implícita protesta del inteligente cronista a la condición de catalanidad. (Baeza, 1927: 1)

The reaction by Ricardo Baeza clearly shows the asymmetries in perception, in the Iberian Peninsula, of possibilities themselves. The writer not only considers that this is the first question to address in his intervention in the controversy, but also shows himself to be inflexible in only this aspect of his article: in Spain it is not possible to debate meridians or latitudes. The fact that Barcelona could present itself as an intellectual meridian—also in Spanish—is obvious for Calvet; for Baeza, it is almost a provocation.

Baeza, much less intelligent than the writers of the responses published in *La Gaceta Literaria*, does not get bogged down in subtleties as regards what America and Americans are:

Ellos serían los primeros en rechazar indignados el supuesto de su descendencia de aquellos pobres indios degenerados que constituirían la raza aborigen. “Autóctonos, puede ser; italianos, también; franceses, siempre; españoles, nunca!” reclaman en un arrebato de hispanofobia. Pero, ¡qué se le va a hacer! Autóctonos, es precisamente lo que no pueden ser; si muchos son italianos, y franceses unos pocos, la mayoría, quiéranlo o no, españoles de sangre son (y hasta españolísimos en esto de hablar mal de la propia casta) y españoles seguirán siéndolo. (Baeza, 1927: 1)

On one hand, in his comments to the responses by the *Martín Fierro* group, a sort of pre-Renanian national determinism can be appreciated, in which political will, expressed in the everyday plebiscite that is every modern nation, nothing is stronger than blood. On the other hand, it is surprising that he should reduce the perception of American writers as *French* to the demography of migratory movements—fairly insignificant in this case—, since this amounts essentially to an affirmation of cultural affiliation, resulting from the everyday plebiscite that every writer makes on his own when facing the creative and expressive possibilities of his time. And finally, the colonial situation must be noted, in that it remains unresolved, and tends to situate itself in the center of the definition of Hispanic America as synonymous of an imperial Spain that did not require any authorization.

Therefore, *Gaziel's* response, published on September 13 and entitled “Imperio o confederación,” is a clear unmasking of the idea of Empire that underpins all the argumentation in *La Gaceta Literaria* and its circle. It contains a suggestive short-, mid- and long-term alternative to the conflicts that were at that point difficult to maintain simultaneously, on both side of the Atlantic. The reflection on imperialism would therefore prove much more suitable in a situation such as the one that the Meridian polemic's proposal suggested, or

rather, imposed; but, of course, with some refinements:

Si yo sostengo, por ejemplo, que a mi juicio la actuación imperial de Castilla ha terminado para siempre, tanto política como culturalmente, no es porque crea que a Castilla no le queda otro porvenir que su entierro, sino todo lo contrario: porque, a mi ver, los que van camino directo de entregarla son aquellos que se empeñan en perpetuar de Castilla una modalidad caduca, impidiendo que su inmortal espíritu, dejando de estar encadenado a un pretérito que no volverá nunca, se adapte a las realidades presentes y se lance rejuvenecido hacia el porvenir. Nunca más Castilla podrá volver a ser, respecto de la España y de la Hispanoamérica futuras, lo que fue para las pasadas. [...] La acción imperial de Castilla, tanto dentro de España como de Hispanoamérica, ha terminado. Pero su acción confederada, la inmensa energía que es capaz de desarrollar en ese sentido nuevo y positivo, todavía está intacta. (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1)

It must be observed that *Gaziel* interprets the Meridian thesis from two angles —Spanish, Hispanic American. He had already done this, clearly if not explicitly, in the first of the articles. Baeza’s reaction forced him to clarify up to what point this double-approach is truly necessary. At the heart of it all is a tacit response to Ortega’s propositions on the necessity not only of a strong Castile, but also for accepting Castile’s role as the only intellectually-organizing perspective in Spain. It is not a question of thinking, simply, that *Gaziel* could propose an alternative to the idea that, if Castile had made and also unmade Spain, Castile should remake Spain once again. *Gaziel* does not even propose this; rather, he attempts for Castile to find a new way, in which it won’t be necessary to refer to a brilliant—but static—past in order to start along the road to regeneration.

*Gaziel*, native to Empordà but just as much in the orbit of Cambó, more concerned about the separators than the separatists, clearly identifies this formula in the Meridian polemic:

Tanto Martín Fierro como Don Quijote, en el fondo, aunque por modos distintos, son dos solemnes separatistas. Si el primero puso en práctica el separatismo, fue el segundo quien lo engendró previamente. (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1)

Between Martín Fierro and Don Quijote, what Baeza puts forward is, according to Calvet, a “falso dilema” that can be broken down in the following manner:

¡Ni con uno, ni con otro! Si Martín Fierro peca de localismo, Don Quijote peca de intolerancia. El primero está demasiado sujeto a la pampa; pero el segundo está incapacitado para reconocer que en el mundo hay otras Dulcineas, y, por lo tanto, otros amores tan santos como el suyo propio. A Hispanoamérica no le conviene ningún símbolo que descarte, con su sola presencia, los símbolos complementarios. Los Estados Unidos de América no pusieron en su bandera una sola estrella enorme que absorbiese todas las luces del firmamento federado, sino una multitud

de estrellitas distintas y diáfanos. (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1)

But it should be very carefully noted that the term *empire* is not, at this point, an anachronism or a casual use, rather on the contrary. The imperial circuit of Giménez Caballero is not *Gaziel's* immediate reference at this point, since he previously held the idea of Imperialism that Eugeni d'Ors had put into circulation at the outset of *Noucentisme*. However, at this moment, the ideas that sprang from *Xènius'* thought have been developed by the direct intervention of Francesc Cambó in Spanish politics, who in those years was writing *Per la concòrdia*, a book that would finally be edited in 1930 both in Catalan and in Spanish and that would be the center of Giménez Caballero's reflections regarding Catalonia. In fact, as Ucelay da Cal (2003: 828-871) has pointed out, all of Giménez Caballero's initiatives in the years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship can be considered a cumbersome preparation for the appearance of Cambo's proposal, although its consequences were so different than the ones he presumably foresaw. On the other hand, from Giménez Caballero's perspective, the idea of Empire has much more to do with the gaze towards Rome, where the fascist model that, in large part, renders *Gecé's* vanguardism comprehensible can be found; and also in the evolution of Ors himself. This trajectory culminates in the publication, first anonymously in 1936, of *El Imperio de España*, which was re-edited in 1941—in an extended version that includes conferences given...in Barcelona—and signed by its author, Antonio Tovar. This was logical because all of these considerations were not made in a vacuum as exceptional details, but rather, as Joan Ramon Resina has commented and documented profusely, they form part of a complete political and academic strategy designed to capitalize on the extensive geography and vast demography of the Spanish language. This strategy was described in a feigned universal language, in favor of a hegemonic postcolonial position and of a Francoist expectation, in the 40s and 50s, of ascribing this linguistic and cultural strength as accumulated cultural capital with which to present itself as mediator or, at least, make an appearance among the Western power of post-war Europe and the Cold War. This symbolic accumulation took the form of publications, conferences, debates, philological and historical works heavily financed by Franco's government, in many cases imbued with an ecumenical attitude advanced by liberal Catholicism; and in this way, the consolidated strategy and its elements allow for the recovery of some of the domination that was lost in 1898, insofar as "el Hispanismo surgió en el siglo XIX junto a las filologías nacionales como una estrategia de compensación de la colosal pérdida de los territorios de América" (Resina, 2009: 205). The self-perception as grandchildren of '98 is no *boutade*.

Aware that both definitions, or perceptions, of the idea of Empire—the Orsian version and that of the *Gaceta*—shared many aspects,

and also that they were separated by others that rendered them irreconcilable, Agustí Calvet seeks a third route—which, in part, means the continuation of the early-century Orsian alternative, more than its later developments—:

No es como imperio —y en este punto radicó el involuntario error de *La Gaceta Literaria*— como Castilla ha de considerar en adelante, a mi juicio, la admirable y diversa extensión intelectual de Hispanoamérica, en la que deben siempre incluirse, porque son partes suyas espirituales, Portugal y Brasil. No es como imperio, sino como confederación. Confederación imperial, si se quiere, pero cuyo imperialismo no consiste en la sumisión del todo a la voluntad de una parte, sino en la de cada una de las partes, por importantes que sean, a la armonía del todo. (*Gaziel*, 1927b: 1)

Faced with the false dilemma, *Gaziel* opts for the confederate solution, in Iberian and Hispanic American terms.

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And, in fact, this federal appeal would characterize the majority of interventions in the controversy—or considerations about the controversy, rather—that appeared in Catalan media. On September 6 in *La Vanguardia*—co-directed by *Gaziel*— appeared an article by *Andrenio*, “La disputa del Meridiano,” on which *Gaziel* bases himself, and in which Eduardo Gómez Baquero states that “el hispanismo tiende a constituir un cuerpo moral, una confederación espiritual entre los pueblos de habla hispana. (Una confederación política, en el estado actual, es quimérica)” (*Andrenio*, 1927: 3). For his part, in *Repertorio Americano*, the journal that Joaquín García Monge published in San José (Costa Rica), Josep Pijoan published on February 18, 1928 a brief note in which he opined, as though it were over, that “esta discusión del meridiano ha sido ridícula.” And, making explicit the intrapeninsular arguments, he added that “Madrid no es meridiano para Barcelona, ni para Lisboa, ni casi para Sevilla.” In view of the plural evolution of the events, Pijoan—then professor in California—stated that

la juventud de América tiene hoy la dicha de vivir en una época de renovación. Hay tiempos en que no hay nada que hacer. Pero casi cada tres generaciones hay que dar un salto. Y claro, es arriesgado. Un salto hacia el porvenir [...]. Y el mañana, si no del 1950, por lo menos el de 2000, es Federación de todas las naciones de América. (Pijoan, 1928: 99)

Perhaps precisely because the dilemma was not so false, in his time Guillermo de Torre did not even register the solution proposed by moderate Catalanism—very moderate, in fact, although to Ricardo Baeza, among others, it did not seem so—and out of place—Agustí Calvet in Madrid; Josep Pijoan in América—, nor did he pay much mind to the heterodoxy of *Andrenio*, —equally displaced to the pages

of the principal newspaper in Barcelona—. None of these proposals found their way into his arguments, in his time.

### 3. Epilogue in the 1950s

In light of following events, all the Catalan insistence on the federal or confederate idea, would not hold too much importance if it weren't because, now situated in the horizon foreseen by Pijoan, in the 1950s, Guillermo de Torre—who also moved definitively to America—takes the opportunity to make the arguments from 1927 current again, by incorporating this same important political subtlety in his proposal for Hispanic American literature: “quizá la única vía posible no sea otra que la de una Hispanoamérica federal,” he affirms categorically. He does so in a short but important book, *Claves de literatura hispanoamericana*, which at the same time was the outgrowth of the conference that Torre had given in the second international congress of the Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée / International Comparative Literature Association, celebrated in 1958 in Chapel Hill (University of North Carolina), under the significant title “Diálogo de literaturas.” At that moment, as earlier in his reading of *España invertebrada*, the dialogue is outlined as a corrective to what he considered “secesionismo insular,” in relation to this possible American federation, and following Salvador de Madariaga, he adds: “Si en otros órdenes tal supuesto parecerá —hasta el mismo momento en que se realice— una utopía, en el plano intelectual tal federación es lo único que puede quebrar distancias e ignorancias, favorecer conocimientos y aproximaciones” (1959b: 53). At this point, which has already been announced, following Wladimir Weidlé, in a more Kantian tone as regards European literatures in relationship to *Weltliteratur* (Torre, 1949); Torre, however, does not demonstrate more than a part of what this literary federalism implies.

Guillermo de Torre does not register the voice of *Gaziel* in the antecedents to his federal proposal throughout the whole book, since the Catalan *secesionismo* is one of the elements that, having been fundamental to the conception of *España invertebrada*, now does not seem pertinent to continue discussing. At least that is what clearly seeps from the page that he dedicates to the question in his book about Menéndez Pelayo, where it is confirmed that Torre removes himself entirely from an issue that, nonetheless, is revealed to be important by the tacit allusion to Ortega: “En España todo está dividido. Desde las regiones hasta los estamentos profesionales. El particularismo local rebasa el área permisible de los fueros políticos y adquiere violencias suicidas” (Torre, 1943: 87). But just when it would seem that Torre wants to rethink the third chapter of the third part of *España invertebrada*, in a footnote he limits himself to



attribute, as his only illustration of what he terms the “suicida espíritu separatist” (Torre, 1943: 87n), the case of the cantonalism in Jumilla (Murcia). Certainly, the problems of invertebration or separation that Ortega y Gasset detected indeed corresponded, in this manner, to reality and Torres’ reductionist parody is relatively worthless.

With all internal diversity in Spain wiped away, even where he could have found some ally, like *Gaziel*, Guillermo de Torre concentrates on the articulation of the extrapeninsular diversity, once again leaving out—among others—Agustí Calvet. He continues basing all his arguments on a contrast between the specificity of American literatures, which he associates to “escisionismo regional,” at the local, national, and even indigenist levels. Guillermo de Torre never lets go even for a moment of the political dimension of his literary criticism, despite how much he may have wanted to disassociate it from what he called “politicismo.” Both in the controversy of the meridian as well as in his comparativist proposals for Hispanic-America, Guillermo de Torre never ceases to hold a perspective marked profoundly by the priority of Spanish interests over American ones. Starting out from a previous and difficult universality, and making but a few concessions, at best interested ones, such as the federal proposal, which does not water down his theory of the meridian and its implicit supremacies by one drop, but continues to promulgate them as supremacies plain and simple, not as tacit symbolic domination.

Far from being a supranational or post-national critic, as his legacy has been presented, we could think of Torre as “sobreespañol” just as Miguel de Unamuno—to whose monologue Torre dedicated illuminating pages—pointed towards the “sobrecastellano” (Torre, 1958: 10), a detail that Torre remarks upon profusely as regards the unity of language, and that inspired a large part of his idea of the unity of Hispanic American literatures subject to an organizing center of Hispanic culture located in the Peninsula. He has no option other than to recognize his own change in (geographic) perspective, however: “el lugar desde donde imaginamos el encuentro [...] no es ningún espacio interplanetario; tiene una demarcación concreta y se halla situado en una ciudad de América del Sur, en Buenos Aires” (1959: 87). As in the case of federalism, the recognition of Buenos Aires comes late, sounds artificial and forced by long-denied evidence, which are only accepted when it is too late, and only as a resigned but still arrogant way of having the last word. Or, put another way: Giménez Caballero was right when he called Guillermo de Torre “Menéndez Pelayo del Vanguardismo” (Giménez Caballero, 1981: 68), but perhaps he was not only referring to his vast erudition. Certainly, for this journey, the ships were not necessary: the Manzanares River is not navigable.

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