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CRITICAL TESTIMONIES

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Abstract || These Critical Testimonies bring together contributions by distinguished authors of literary theory in the Hispanic context. Enric Sullà (Barcelona, 1950), lecturer of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature since 1988 and professor of the same area at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona since 2008, recalls and puts in perspective the “arribada desitjada” (“desired arrival”) of French structuralism to Catalonia and Spain in the late sixties and early seventies. Nora Catelli (Rosario, 1946), exiled in Barcelona in 1976 and lecturer of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the Universitat de Barcelona since 1997, reflects in her text—a conference from 1987—about “los límites teóricos del discurso crítico en la reflexión actual” (“the theoretical limits of critical discourse in contemporary thought”). The section closes with a text by Beatriz Sarlo (Buenos Aires, 1942), a member of *Los libros* (1969-1976) and director of *Punto de vista* (1978-2008), in addition to serving as one of the main promoters of the theoretical renovation of Argentinean criticism since the late 1970s. In “Barthesianos de por vida,” originally written in 2005 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Roland Barthes’ death and republished in this issue of 452°F to commemorate the centennial of his birth, Sarlo sketches a portrait of “un escritor que tomaba sus argumentos de la literatura o los convertía a la literatura” (“a writer who took his arguments from literature or turned them into literature”) and vindicates the reading of Barthes.

Keywords || Literary Theory | Testimonies | Structuralism | Deconstruction | Roland Barthes

WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS

Enric Sullà

¿Què esperen a la plaça tanta gent reunida?
Diu que els bàrbars avui seran aquí.
C. Cavafis, «Esperant els bàrbars» (trans. C. Riba)

With the “barbarians” of the title and quote, I would like to refer to the structuralists and all French (and foreign, in general) thinkers that were awaited in an exhausted, closed-down country, under the imposed idea that it needed nothing from the outside world; where the most restless people paradoxically expected foreigners to solve the problems of which they were not aware or were not able to address. If in Cavafis’ poem, the barbarians that would sort out the problem of decadence do not show up, they did arrive to Spain and Catalonia in the late sixties, perhaps in an indirect and oblique way, but still they contributed to clear the stagnant waters of the university, thought, and culture. A disguised but effective arrival, a desired, long-awaited and necessary arrival that catalyzed repressed cultural energies and confirmed sprouting blooms. What follows is only a succinct bibliographical review of the reception of structuralism in Catalonia and Spain, with the hope that it will contribute to the history of Spanish and Catalan theoretical and critical thought (Díaz, 1974; Martínez Romero, 1989; Pozuelo Yvancos, 2011).

In a useful synthesis of the evolution of philosophy in Catalonia in the 20th century, Pere Lluís Font notes the rapid succession in the reception and assimilation of movements in the university of the second half of the sixties, coinciding with the loss of prestige of the neo-Thomism that dominated the field until that moment. Font comments that the year 1964-1965 was ruled by Heidegger; 1965-1966 by Hegel, and 1966-1967 by Marx; that 1967-1968 was a neopositivist year, 1968-1969 a structuralist one, and later on, “aniran arribant als medis filosòfics del país el freudisme, el freudomarxisme, la fascinació per l’Orient, el postestructuralisme, la filosofia de la ment, etc.. A partir del començament de la dècada dels setanta, trobem ja un pluralisme més o menys estabilitzat” (Font 2001: 50-51). Even though Font describes these different waves as “onades successives d’entusiasme” which often reinvented the wheel, I am positive that they contributed to amplify the intellectual possibilities of the academic world. What most caught my eye was Font’s note about 1968-1969 being the structuralist year. I entered the UAB [Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona] that year, and I would say Font is right, although structuralism shared the air with Marxism (or marxisms) which were less and less constrained by the reigning political and cultural censorship. With structuralism also arrived

semiology, as evinced in the works of Roland Barthes or, a bit later, under the name of semiotics, by Umberto Eco's works.

So, it is possible that in 1968-1969 structuralism was a trend (in current jargon) in the Catalan universities (which, at the time, still amounted to Barcelona), but I think that its reception in the, at that moment, small space of culture in Catalonia in fact began a bit earlier, in 1967. It became a presence in 1968, it expanded in 1969 and it reached 1973 with great pains, as evinced by the references I will mention shortly.¹ We are not talking about the original texts, about the *annus mirabilis* (*l'année lumière*) of 1966 (Dosse, 1991, vol. I: 384-420),² but about the publication in France of books that contributed to the spread a movement that had become a fad; and also, about the appearance in Spain of articles and translations related to structuralism, in a mix of original texts and divulgation manuals. Let's note two facts: first, the number of translations, since hardly ever before there were so many translations of a single topic in the sleepy Spain of Franco; and second, the temporal proximity of the translations to the publication of the originals. Translation evinced an interest in Parisian novelty and fashion (Paris as a cultural and political reference), but also became a symptom of emerging changes in the intellectual and editorial landscape of Spain, with an effort on the part of the most energetic publishing houses to update their practices (Seix Barral and Edicions 62, in Barcelona) and the apparition of new editorial groups (Alberto Corazón or Akal, in Madrid, for instance) that would focus on fashionable topics. These publishing houses found a readership made up of students and professors, mostly young people who wanted to know what happened abroad, especially in France. The diffusion of affordable paperback editions (Alianza Editorial in Madrid, and "Breve Biblioteca de Bolsillo", in Barcelona) starting approximately in 1966 also contributed to bring books closer to a growing number of readers, which ran parallel to an increase in the number of university students that would continue along the seventies.

And yet, it would be wrong to think that readers only accessed what happened abroad through translations. A (it is true, small) group of readers accessed French books directly. It was not necessary to take the costly trip to France, because in cases where books passed through the censor, they could be found in Barcelona at the French Bookshop, or in more or less militant bookshops like Cinc d'Oros, Les Punxes or the extraordinary bookshop Leteradura (in business between 1969 and 1979), almost all of which have now disappeared. These bookshops also held copies of translations published in South America, especially in Mexico (Fondo de Cultura Económica) and Argentina (Losada in literature, and Nueva Visión for structuralism). In addition, editors, journalists, critics, writers and professors of

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1 | If we were to consider the academic and cultural sphere of Spain, we might extend the period of reception, as a great number of translations appeared between 1970 and 1972. But a detailed bibliography would need to wait a future publication.

2 | See Max Hidalgo, *El problema de la escritura en el campo intelectual francés (1945-1975)*, doctoral dissertation, Universitat de Barcelona, 2013.

different disciplines kept up with the current literary and theoretical developments, spread the news, and imported relevant authors, ideas and methods. In a way, as with the original movement, the reception of structuralism was not limited to a single discipline. At the time, the sphere of culture was particularly limited even in a city like Barcelona, which facilitated contact between people and ideas.

I have found an early Catalan publication related to structuralism in the cultural journal *Inquietud*, from the city of Vic. In its last issue, 36 (September de 1966), Lluís Solà translated “L’estructuralisme genètic en la història de la literatura”, by Lucien Goldmann (Quintana, 2000: 269) one year prior to its publication in translation by Ciencia Nueva (Madrid) as part of a compilation entitled *Para una sociología de la novela* (1967, originally published 1964), but almost simultaneous to the publication by Edicions 62 *Ciències humanes i filosofia* (1966, original edition: 1952). Neither this 1966 release by the Catalan publisher, nor the 1966 translation and publication by Península (the Spanish section of Edicions 62) of another of Goldman’s works, *Le Dieu caché* (1954), his seminal study of Pascal and Racine that attempted to explain the complex relationship between individual, ideology, and social structure—known to Spanish readers as *El hombre y lo absoluto*, reached the levels of readership of the compilation first noted.

The journal *Serra d’Or*, published by the Abbey of Montserrat, became a major cultural referent between 1967 and 1970. The August 1967 issue published a lengthy interview by Víctor Mora (novelist, script writer of the comic book series *Capitán Trueno*, militant of the PSUC [Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia] and at the time exile in Paris) of Claude Lévi-Strauss,³ that included a question on the nature of structuralism (Mora, 1967). My father was a reader of *Serra d’Or*, and I believe it was in those pages that I first learned about that thing called structuralism. In the February issue, Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, a dynamic and informed art critic (though sometimes prone to superficiality and name-dropping) published a symptomatic article titled “Una visió estructuralista” (Cirici, 1967a), and another in March, in which he noted the debates that were taking place in the Eina School of Design (he had participated in its foundation in 1967), with the Italian avantgarde group 63, of which Umberto Eco was a member (Cirici, 1967b).⁴ Cirici also published, again in *Serra d’Or*, “Converses amb Lucien Goldmann” (1968), and—even more interestingly for the reception of structuralism—“Converses amb Barthes” in 1969, the same year when Arnau Puig (1969) published a review of the Catalan translation of Barthes’ *Critique et vérité*, certainly an unusual translation in Catalan.⁵ Barthes had already been published in Spanish by Seix Barral: his *Essais critiques* (1964), published in 1967, included “La actividad estructuralista” (1962). By publishing an article on “Crítica i lectura”, in *Serra d’Or* in 1967,

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3 | Víctor Mora transcribes the name as “Lévy-Strauss”.

4 | Seix Barral had published Umberto Eco’s *Obra abierta* (1965), but *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) did not appear until Lumen translated it in 1968 with amazing success.

5 | Curiously, Jaume Vidal Alcover’s translation, in general terms very accurate, turned *discours* into *raonament* [argument], which strays very far from the terminology that would finally be normalized.

Josep Iborra—a writer and critic who has fallen into oblivion—made evident that he had Barthes in mind. The small size of the Catalan publishing market explains that only one other book by Barthes was published in 1973, *El grau zero de l'escriptura. Nous assaigs crítics*, by Edicions 62.⁶

The efforts of Edicions 62 reveal the ambitions and limitations of the Catalan editorial market, always targeting a small readership that also always had the option of choosing from a wider range of texts and translations available in Spanish.⁷ The same publishing house, making texts available in Spanish as Península, had greater possibilities. Even so, they dared to publish two translations of Claude Lévi-Strauss in Catalan: the tract *Race and histoire* (1952), in 1969 in the collection “L'escorpi” (which published great essays in paperback), and in 1971 *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), in the collection “Biblioteca bàsica de cultura contemporània” of reference texts. For its part, Anagrama published in Catalan in the short-lived collection “Textos”, including Sartre, Pavese, and Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristos tròpics* (originally from 1955) in 1969.

Back to Edicions 62, the 1969 translation of *L'estructuralisme* (1968) by Jean Piaget, in its most well-known collection of essays, “Llibres a l'abast”, became an index of the reception of Parisian fashion, of the speed in translating, of a wise choice (a rigorous essay in clarifying the sense of the term “structure”) but also, of limited sales.⁸ A witness to the dialogue, or clash, between Marxism (so strong in the European thought during the sixties) and the emerging structuralism that displaced it (aided by political events like the crushing of the Prague Spring or the thwarted development of the Parisian May), was the 1970 translation of *Marxisme i estructuralisme* by Lucien Sebag (a pupil of Claude Lévi-Strauss and patient of Lacan) in “Llibres a l'abast”, a contribution that did not get the attention that Louis Althusser obtained.⁹ As I said at the start, the barbarians had arrived. We were waiting for them.

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6 | In a “Pròleg” to the 1971 edition of Prudenci Bertrana’s *Josafat*, I myself used—and I am afraid, wrongly—Barthes’ *Le degré zero de l’écriture*.

7 | In discussing the final ten years under the dictatorship, we might bear in mind that from 1939 onwards, the Catalan language had been banished from public life, and as a consequence, the possible readers, educated only in Spanish, had difficulties reading in their mother language.

8 | The translation of Piaget compete with divulgation sources like Jean-Marie Auzias, *El estructuralismo* (Alianza, 1969), *Las estructuras y los hombres* (Ariel, 1970) and *El estructuralismo como método*, by Louis Millet and Madeleine Varin d’Ainville (Cuadernos para el Diálogo, 1972), among the Spanish editions.

9 | In this sense, it is interesting the collective volume *Estructuralismo y marxismo* (1969, original edition from 1967), with a prologue by Eugenio Trías, “Luz roja al humanism” (9-21), published after his book *La filosofía y su sombra*, unabashedly structuralist (with many references to Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, somewhat fewer to Althusser), as the three published in 1970: *Teoría de las ideologías, Filosofía y carnaval* and *Metodología del pensamiento mágico*, with the constant concern of finding a place for philosophy.

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RHETORIC AND JARGON IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM* (1987)

Nora Catelli

The umbrella title for these talks is, as you know, *The Limits of Criticism*. There are two ways to undertake the exegesis of the rich and interesting ambiguity posited by the terms. If we focus on a first interpretation, as refers to the present situation of criticism in Spain, we must conclude that those limits are, here, the limits of the critics. To discuss it, to provide examples and, most of all, a historical overview, we must do away for a moment with all concerns of a broader scope. The second interpretation of the title is indeed ambitious: it reads an inquiry in the title, an invitation for a specific search about the theoretical limits of critical discourse in contemporary thinking. This interpretation is synchronic with respect to the first interpretation and does not include it. That is, between the two interpretations and their scope there is a hiatus, a true void.

Thus, only from that voice and by acknowledging the vast distance and total heterogeneity between the notions, concepts and facts that they posit, it is possible to reflect and reflect on them because we are part of this tension, of this imbalance, this disagreement; to a certain extent, we are its agents and we produce it. We will not ignore the analysis and description of criticism in Spain, because it is our starting point and our habitat; but we will also maintain the demand for a reading of theory in contemporary criticism that does not presume a relationship—of degree, of substance, nor even temporal—with the limits of Spanish criticism.

An example: in January 1987, the Asociación Colegial de Escritores [Writers Professional Association] published a monograph of over a hundred pages on “Literary Criticism”, which included opinions from eighteen critics (a good sample of them, mostly journalists and/or university professors) plus surveys of newspapers and writers. Now, if for some reason—remoteness, inability to access other publications—an interested reader were to obtain an idea of the general situation of Spanish literary criticism from that book, he or she would gather that literary criticism is a minor branch of editorial marketing; that its theoretical instruments are, linguistically, pre-Saussurean; that from the perspective of the study of meaning and the dimensions of the subject, pre-Freudian; and finally, that from the perspective of impressionist criticism, it is naïve.

* The conference, read in 1987, was published in *Curs En els límits de la crítica* (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa de Pensions, 1988). Thanks to the author for the permission to publish and translate it to Catalan, Basque, and English.

Using enormously diverse sources, including the two Menéndez, Pidal and Pelayo, Blanchot, Eliot, Eugenio de Nora, Bousoño or Juvenal (and even Corrales Egea, a critic who invented a sub-species of the Spanish professional character consisting of a sort of friendly raging bull), the different contributions reached a phantasmagorically identical conclusion—and, if we consider the diversity of conceptions about literature noted above, we should say unbelievable conclusion: that is, one that maintains the suspicion that we have not developed a natural good sense and a similarly natural and proper good taste on literary matters due to the “bad uses” of foreign theories. It is true that this conclusion comes with a caveat: foreign theories are not bad in their “natural” environment, but once they travel, they become terrorist jargon: starting with the “actants” in semiology to the “horizon of expectations” of the aesthetics of reception of H.R. Jauss and the Constance School, these terms are, in a way, *perversions*, that is, *deviant variations* that divert away from the uncontaminated nucleus of our natural tendency towards liking and appreciating literature properly.

To account for this bleak panorama while avoiding a tirade, we must situate this utterly disappointing peninsular landscape historically, with respect to a, shall we say “international” pattern.. We know that there are four ways to practice literary criticism:

- 1) The practical criticism in reviews, literary and cultural journalism: its role is to mediate;
- 2) Academic literary historiography, stemming from 19th century disciplines such as the study of the classics, philology and the history of culture: it aims at the formation of the body of a tradition;
- 3) Literary evaluation and interpretation—mainly but not only, academic—, that which is transmitted when you are taught how to read a poem (previously literary history will have determined which poem) or how to enjoy the complexity of a concept or how to conceive literature, a figurative language with unique characteristics and, at the same time, not reducible to a moral, ideological or political message: this version is about education and the consolidation of a literary essence, a literary being
- 4) Literary theory, a relatively new discipline with its pioneers (Walter Benjamin, Georgy Lukacs) and its main tendencies: the formalisms stemming from Russian Formalism of the 20s, semiotics, deconstruction, new hermeneutics, narratology, new rhetoric, a kind of new stylistics as represented by Jean Starobinski, and feminist criticism. Here we do not find

mediation, tradition, nor literary essences, but an inquiry or reflection about the limits and scope of literature in all discourses. Not all tendencies and schools mentioned above would accept this definition or approach, but I would like to isolate, within each of them, a common proposal: that literary theory must account, first and foremost, for the conditions of production and enunciation of its own discourse. If I may, I would say that literary theory always thinks about itself: it posits—whether to negate or to dive deep into—the problem of self-reference. As this is the area of the second interpretation of the title of these talks, I will come back to this later, but I return now to our limits, the limits of the critics, and the limits of our critics.

Of these four ways—which I have borrowed, with some modifications, from the first article in Edwards Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983)—, our field energetically practices the first two: the mediating role (reviews and cultural journalism) and the literary history and philology that inherited the legacy of the beginning of the 20th century, which show a vitality only surpassed by the inertia in its contents. Philology is far from negligible, the problem is that philology demands a series of operations on the text that guarantee a general conciliation of all possible tensions. When I use “text” I use the word in its strict sense: the place where meaning is produced or where we can read the meaning of a culture. I know that this is only one of the many possible definitions of a text, but it is one that might encompass the definitions of Barthes (a text is an statement in process, an indefinite approach, the site where the workings of language occurs, that is, a reading); Julia Kristeva's definition in *Semiotique* (1969) (the text as a significant practice, as the center where ideological and aesthetic codes cross, the place that designates the limits of the conceptual system and of all intelligibility because it constraints them to their specific practice, the significant one); Umberto Eco's (the expansion of a seme or unity of signification, or a machine of assumptions, or a chain of expressive artifices that demands a cooperative effort / reading because it is reluctant, or an economic chain energized by the surplus value of the recipient, or the product whose interpretation depends on its very generative mechanism); Derrida's (the text as a thread of signs—Derrida ironically paraphrases the classical philological metaphor enshrined by Quintilian, to distinguish *text* from *book* and state that the destruction of the book, as announced in *De la grammatologie* in 1967, reveals the “surface” of the text, that which is with respect to something that does not exist, that is beyond the text, because nothing is outside the text, and it is in the surface of the text where the play of meanings resides, a play of meaning that the very text destroys).

This little digression, then, is indicative of the philological assuredness

of the academic knowledge of our critics: a discourse that, in its moments of critical genius, produces knowledge in its search for truth—as in the case of our great critics, like Dámaso Alonso—but that in its reiteration, disconnected from the intent for a new metaphorization of the “text” (an old worn-out metaphor that does not pertain any more to philology) only reproduces the authority of those who, after Menéndez Pidal, established the center of literary value, and of those who, respectfully, repeat and adjust a great conciliatory discourse. In our field, the function of philology is to demonstrate, by means of a smoothing out of the edges, that everything can be read when common sense reigns, that there are no perverse “versions” of a text but only a temporary distance from the canon, and that the function of the canon, against common wisdom, is not to condemn but to integrate.

In Spanish literary criticism, in its limits and in the sense in which we opened this talk, the third and fourth ways of criticism are more problematic: the former, hardly practiced and the latter, virtually non-existent. The third interpretation and evaluation in order to establish the essence of literature, has had little relevance and real practice in our contemporary criticism. Thus, the way in which reading a poem is taught (after literary history has determined which poem should be read) or how to enjoy a concept (after the Academy has formulated its coherent network) do not constitute a construction able to transform philology, but a gloss of philology and a reverential esteem for its authorities.

On the other hand, essay writing, in its open and incomplete character, as a transmission belt of novelties, actually devotes itself, in the Peninsula, to consecrating the old, or to reenergizing it. An interesting example of this is the reappearance in contemporary essays—I am thinking principally of Rubert de Ventós and Racionero—of the issue of Hispanicity (consecrated in literature by the positivist philology of Menéndez, and ideologically banished from the discourse of non-official culture after the Civil War) to reinforce the corpus of definitions of “hispanicity” in criticism since its initial establishment by philologists.

How, then, can we move from a reflection on the limits of criticism in Spain to a discussion about the theoretical limits of critical discourse? By putting ourselves in an extreme position, in the place where it is posited that all discourses—also, the discourse of criticism—perform, show or exhibit something that has already been taken into account; the order, characteristic of literary discourse, which rules all other orders: the order of rhetoric. That is, the order that imposes itself as a model of reading a distribution of *figures* that, when they reveal themselves, only refer to themselves, while at the same time negate their content, at least any explicit content.

This kind of criticism only postulates legibility. In this sense, which I will expand upon next, there exist today two hermeneutical trends that try to account for the possibility (or lack) of a *certain* reading in relation to a *certain* truth, and that from that possibility, account for the relation of critical discourse—in its borders—with literary discourse. The first has a philosophical root and is represented in literary studies by the disciples and followers of Gadamer, finding its great figure in H.R. Jauss. The second hermeneutical tendency (also called deconstruction, and which would not probably accept the term “hermeneutics”) maintains that the very inquiry for truth is, in itself, a mystification, and that discourse (the discourse of criticism, but also any other discourse) must dissolve meaning, must accept that it is disseminated in a network of relationships, from which only a double figurativity can be predicated, neither logical nor semantical, but rhetorical.

Text, logics, semantics and rhetoric: this is the field in which we should establish ourselves now to try to discover the contours of this theoretical limit. To do so, we should follow the argument posited by Paul de Man in the introductory chapter of his likely most important book, published in 1979, three years before his death. In “Semiology and Rhetoric”, the introductory chapter of *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man takes a disjunction to the limit: he postulates a deep and radical separation of rhetoric, of the semantical structure of the text as well as the interpretative activity of the text. For Paul de Man, the diverse formalisms—from the Russian variety to narratology as well as the theory of narration and structuralism which were all based upon the premise that the synchronic description of a text promised scientificity from the point of view of the analysis—had, in effect, reduced the issue of reading, and with it, the issue of interpretation, to a zero point.

On the other hand, the school of reception, appropriating the scientist basis of structuralism and semiology, added (as a sort of compromise) the historical sequence of different readings—the history of readings and its modifications—to try to account for the historical variation in interpretations and their relativity, and thus, to regulate the intervention of the reader in the process and insert it, next to the semiotics at its base, as the unlawful owner of a regulatory order.

Jauss’ solution is thus a compromise. His master, Gadamer, placed all emphasis in the “creative” capacity and the production of “truth” in the process of interpretation. In the other extreme, Hirsch, in *Validity in Interpretation*, attributed the order of “truth” to the author’s will. To do so in a “scientific” manner, Hirsch distinguishes between meaning and significance of a text: meaning is its unchangeable semantic base, whereas significance changes with different interpretations.

In both cases, but for opposite reasons, in both Gadamer and Hirsch we find the idea that there is a correspondence between semantics, the logics of grammar, and historicity. The difference lies in the role of mobility and permanence that Hirsch and Gadamer attribute to each of these elements. The extreme scientism of semiology and the extreme nihilism of the followers of Gadamer—an exception can be made for the accommodating spirit of Jauss—reveal, however, a common theme for the discourse of criticism: that truth can be accounted for by negating the scientism of semiotics, in Gadamer, or contrarily, that truth can be accounted for in the scientism of semiotics by invalidating the changeability and subjectivity of the interpreter.

The work of Paul de Man is located in another place, where there is no possible accord between those extremes. There, the discourse of criticism can only account for the literary by showing that rhetoric is insurmountable, divergent and disparate with respect to logic and semiology and with respect to interpretative paraphrases. Let's see how he reaches this point and the consequences it holds for our initial inquiry.

Paul de Man starts from the assessment that the general code of the literary has become unusually complex and illustrious, that is, self-evident: to work, this code attracts a notable number of efforts and energies that must become manifest, that must incarnate in a series of methods. Just such a thing happened when poetry, the novel, or criticism fed on formalism, and one found himself or herself in that privileged moment (which now has passed) when a technical apparatus was constituted to work on literary texts, when even the texts themselves constituted an apparatus of experimentation: these are the years of New Criticism, stylistics and Russian formalism.

This is a fundamental moment and it produced a highly significant conceptual change. Starting with formalism, our notions about the polarity between the intrinsic and extrinsic changed radically: form, traditionally seen as a cover, a lining, or an ornament, becomes intrinsic, while meaning, content, and the reference—traditionally seen as the nucleus, the center, root, and heart—become extrinsic, the form of immanence.

Paul de Man tells us that this huge and opaque literary code, alongside the inversion of the intrinsic and extrinsic in literature, produces a sort of claustrophobia, an inertia in criticism, a depletion in the formulae that Adorno had proposed as “aesthetics of negativity”, and a return to certain conciliatory tone. Thus, as the school of reception states, the discourse of criticism should not practice or gloss the total separation between the text and the reference—the world—but try to reconcile the distressing and claustrophobic orthodoxy of the vanguards with a certain nuanced historical relativism. To overcome that unbreathable

atmosphere (the symptoms of which are the silence of the artist, the white canvas, the empty space, the infinite interval between two notes), a model appears that de Man terms “false,” a recurrent model that charges ahead once again with the old notion that there must exist an *inside* and an *outside* of a text: that is an immanence that has already been accepted, and an exteriority, that insidiously insinuates itself again so that the discourse of criticism can take responsibility for it. Must we remind ourselves that the *inside* and the *outside* are metaphors that aim to provide the text with a figurative model for representation, for the physical and concrete world? This false critical model (remember Umberto Eco in *Apocalittici e integrati*, for instance, and all the efforts to write a criticism of “indulgent culture”) is supported by a double reasoning: “Well,” reasons (contradictorily) the critic, “if the great prestigious code of Western literature is already established, why not return now to the much nicer field of the relations between the verbal and non-verbal, the verbal and the referential?”

Why not take a rest from the self-referential trap and mumbo-jumbo and write about hybrid texts, popular forms directed to gratification, conventionality and massive identification, or pure biographical and autobiographical forms? In these forms, surely we can take for granted that we have the big problems of the literary form under control and we can devote ourselves to “external politics.” Let’s abandon the hard rhetoric and hard writing of its criticism and throw ourselves into the backwaters of history, biography, context, in which that which we once knew as *valid interpretations* can reemerge: sociological and historical interpretations, or, in the field of semiotics, the reduction of the text’s rhetorical design to its pure semiotic structure or organization.

What de Man posits is that the critique of deconstruction must, at least, try to avoid this binary play between formalism and “context”, the seductive power of which lies in hermeneutics, in the game of interpretation. It is true that Paul de Man accepts that semiotics refreshed criticism, as it brought about an acceptance of the arbitrariness of the sign and of the teleological character of the poetic message, and, at the same time, freed the critical discourse of the dead weight of paraphrase, that is, the current supposition that criticism is discourse that must say *the same* in other words, or what’s more more, that only by doing so does it become criticism.

But de Man notes that the myth of semantic correspondence between sign and reference, which is underpinned by the idea of a Nature that lends meaning to the natural, to the “human,” reappears in the crudest ideological analyses. Here is where Spanish criticism can be encompassed, as it relies on the belief in a natural order, in an all-inclusive tradition and in a “logical” or sensible sense of things.

We reach the conclusion then, along with de Man, who paraphrases Marx in *The German Ideology*, the conviction that one can be a formalist by daytime and still paraphrase the substance of meaning by nighttime.

Thus, for de Man, critics as different as Barthes, Genette and especially Greimas use grammatical structures along with rhetorical structures, and sustain a theory of figures without apparently being aware of the discrepancies between the two, as in Genette's *Figures III* (1972), for example. Actually, alongside grammatical structures, as has been refined in contemporary studies of generative and transformational grammar, rhetoric is posited as an extension of the logics of grammatical studies.

That is, rhetorical structures would provide a logical substructure (just below the very syntactic structure of the text) to the order of tropes and figures, the order in which the text dictates how it must be read: thus, there would be no logical tension in the move from semiotics to rhetoric. For de Man, conversely, the rhetoric order is an atmosphere in which tropes remain suspended in the air, and the text's syntax, that is, its organization for adjoining unities, is just another trope, another rhetorical proposal of the text. Syntax thus becomes a figurative unfurling, and as such, it challenges and contradicts the explicit rhetoric of the same text.

Let us observe an example. Paul de Man analyzes the ending of a fragment by Proust, "Dans le torride [heat] mon repos... supportait, pareil au repos d'une main immobile au milieu d'une eau courante, le choc et l'animation d'un torrent d'activité" (1954: 83) in the following manner: 1) the persuasive power of the passage depends on the verb "supporter", meaning "to tolerate" as well as "sustain" and "hold". This confers upon the repose a foundational role in relation with the outside activity (in relation to the action); and it justifies the narrator's flee from the world, because he manages to embrace, in calmness, the movement of life in its totality. This constitutes a strategy to get rid of guilt ("the central motive in Proust"), "always centered" in the actions of "writing and reading" and a recurrent issue in auto-biography; 2) the transferences and crossings between the two incompatible chains mentioned above are established in the field of a simple sentence, or more precisely, in a cliché, "torrent d'activité", which in French, as in Spanish, has lost its "literal connotations" in favor of its figurative sense ("accumulation" or "buildup of things"); 3) the literal sense reappears in the similarity of the significant "torride" and "torrent", so that heat reinscribes secretly in the chain and cancels the incompatibility of the two previous series; 4) the closeness of "eau courante" revives metonymically the latent metaphor in "torrent" by providing its former literality, but at the same time, invests it with the property of coldness in "eau courante". With

this, “torrent” unites, against all logic, two historical phases of its figurative process (metaphor-cliché-metaphor) and two properties that have been marked as contradictory; 5) “the rhetorical structure of this part of the sentence is, then, doubly metonymic,” because the union of the two terms in the cliché is not ruled by links of analogic necessity, or canceled by a common root, and because the refashioning of the cliché as metaphor is due to the closeness of other terms (“eau courante”), the existence of which is, in Genette’s terms, narrative and diegetic; and 6) finally, because the property that gets revived in the passage “is not precisely the one that coined the original metaphor, because the figure of “torrent d’activité” is based in wideness, in accumulation, and not in coldness”.

The key words are persuasion and fraud (or trick): for de Man, the text persuades with a rhetoric that deceives in successive aporias. It is not that Proust’s text achieves extraordinary metaphors, awarding itself a metonymical license to exist: that would be the compromise solution of narratology. Rather, it is a matter of accepting that the necessary figures (the analogical links) are undermined and polluted by the metonymical order. Ultimately, it is a question the impossibility of establishing an order of figures with a substrate or base that is logical and linguistic. The order of figuration tends toward fragmentation and openness; synthesis (often called “the deep unity of the text”) is yet another figure of our desire for compromise: “As a writer, Proust is the one who knows that the hour of truth, like the hour of death, never arrives on time, since what we call time is precisely truth’s inability to coincide with itself” (de Man, 1979: 78).

Contradictory composition, open and even degraded: there is no possible overflowing of the rhetoric by means of syntax; there are lacks, tears, cuts, sudden drops in a sort of grazing fly-over. It must be so, because Proust’s text “expresses the impossibility of a close and complete reading able to satisfy the need of an ethics of action with more efficiency than a real action”. There is, then, a disjunction between the (aesthetic) answer and the (rhetorical) consciousness of the text. And as this disjunction is an oxymoron, and this oxymoron denounces a “logical rather than a representational” incompatibility, this oxymoron is in truth an *aporia*: “Can we thus conclude that this aporia is the allegorical narrative of its own deconstruction?” If this conclusion is possible, “we will leave behind all commentary, all paraphrase, all referentiality.”

It occurs to me that you might ask a series of question regarding the aforementioned: Which specific zones do allegory occupy within the literary text, within any text? What is the space that remains, if not between the inside and the outside, between the aesthetic answer and the rhetorical consciousness?

For the second question, I can think of at least two solutions: that space is the space of the readings generated by the very literary text (and then pertinence, aberration and interpretation would invalidate the relevance that Paul de Man confers to the textual dimension as the only reality, in favor of a discursive and imaginary realm much more permeable to the non-textual); and second, that this space is occupied by a parodic instance, understood as a potentiality of the literary discourse, as a parodic consciousness with no subject, rather than as a delimited and generic historical product.

This last note would suppose, perhaps, that the literary text is a self-sufficient Moloch. Maybe, but it is undeniable that the work on figuration and rhetoric is the narrow door through which critical discourses must pass. The usual charges against deconstruction (monotonous rigor, obsessive circularity, use of jargon) are always the symptoms of a growing consciousness about rhetoric in *all* discourses. Furthermore, the circularity of deconstruction is not perfect; we can describe its asymmetries, and in them, the figures that it constructs to problematize the dominant notions and the current values within criticism. The proposal to read culture as an uninterrupted series of tropes irreducible to any non-textual order only leads, as of now, to the emergence of an “imaginary” that in the critical sequence repeats that of literature. However, even in that case, the critics’ suspicion of their own discourse will not vanish. Rather, they will be compelled to accept that there is not, as of now, another canon or another way to read.

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BARTHESIANS FOR LIFE* (2005)

Beatriz Sarlo

In 1958, Barthes started a study about fashion. He had not yet written his PhD dissertation, as he had drifted from one topic to another without reaching the terrible genre of the dissertation. Then he considered Lévi-Strauss as his thesis advisor. He was naturally rejected, but he obtained the suggestion to focus on written fashion, an advice that Barthes followed to the letter. André Martinet also received a visit from Barthes regarding his thesis. Over lunch, Barthes convinced Martinet (who at the time was a star in linguistics). However, the thesis topic was never registered in the Sorbonne and Barthes preferred to write a book, his most heavily semiological book, *Système de la mode*. After that, he did not insist on the fantasy of obtaining a doctorate, which he always lacked.

When Lévi-Strauss rejected him, he was not wrong: for him, Barthes was “too literary”. Almost half a century later, Barthes continued to be “too literary”, that is, a writer who took his topics from literature or turned them into literature after sieving them through his will and caprice. The system of Barthes is arborescent but never encyclopedic, it is constituted by strategic choices in the field of French language and other territories, like *haiku* poetry and Japan, Goethe’s *Werther* or Ignacio de Loyola’s spiritual exercises.

From literature, his work obtained the power of enchantment. Barthes makes his readers *barthesian*, in the same vein as Proust makes them *proustian*. It is not a matter of taste, not even of ideas or style. It is rather a matter of discovering a sensibility and its reflections, discovering where does he put the stress, the details he cares about. Those of us who continue reading Barthes are barthesians for life. It is, simply put, a conversion.

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